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Simultaneous poll bills unlikely to be passed in Parliament: Digvijaya

Sanjay Kumar

New Delhi, Dec. 22: Congress Rajya Sabha member Digvijaya Singh has said he is doubtful that the 'one nation, one election' bills will be passed in Parliament.

lowing the BJP's complaint, accusing him of physical assault and incitement after MPs Pratap Chandra Sarangi and Mukesh Rajput were injured. The Congress has strongly rejected the claim, alleging that BJP MPs pushed Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge and "physically manhandled" Gandhi.

Doorstep registration for women, elderly welfare schemes to begin on Monday: Kejriwal

Simmi Kaur Babbar

New Delhi, Dec 22: AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal announced that registration for the Delhi government scheme under which women will be provided a monthly assistance will begin on Monday.

your home and complete the registration." "There are many daughters whose college education is interrupted after class 12 due to financial constraints. With this



Rs 2,100, they will be able to continue their studies and also help them pursue higher education," he added. The beneficiaries will need to show their voter identity cards, and all eligible women voters in Delhi will receive the benefits, he said.

to your doorstep. Across every area of Delhi, AAP has created thousands of teams. These teams will come to your home and will do registration of all the women of the house and give them a registration card (Kejriwal Kavach Card), an official statement said. Kejriwal also announced that registration for the Sanjeevani Yojana will start on Monday, and elderly people will be registered at their homes by AAP volunteers.

Tejashwi meets protesters, writes to Nitish for BPS exam cancellation

ST Correspondent

Patna, Dec. 22: RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Sunday wrote to Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, seeking the cancellation of competitive exams conducted recently, under controversial circumstances, by the state's Public Service Commission.



locality where he was told by the protesters that they were opposed to the decision of the Bihar Public Service Commission to order re-exam only at Babu Pariksha Parisar, one of the over 900 centres where, on December 13, the combined competitive exams were held.

INX Media case: Delhi court allows Congress MP Karti Chidambaram to travel abroad

New Delhi, Dec 22: A Delhi court has granted permission to Congress MP Karti Chidambaram, an accused in the INX Media case, to travel to Austria and the UK between January 4 and 12, noting that he had never abused the liberty granted to him in the past.

PM Modi leaves for home after concluding Kuwait visit

Navdeep Singh Sahni

New Delhi, Dec.22: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday left for home after wrapping up his two-day "successful" visit to Kuwait during which the two countries elevated their relationship to a strategic partnership, marking a new era of bilateral cooperation and growth.



for New Delhi," Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in a post on X. During his visit, Modi held extensive talks with the country's

top leadership, including Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, with whom he discussed boosting ties in information technology, pharmaceuticals, fintech, infrastructure and security. "In line with the close ties between our

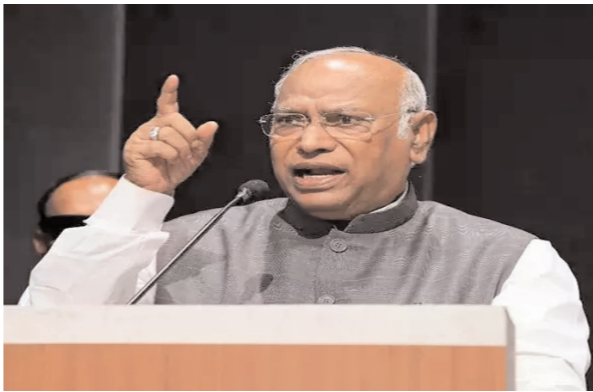
nations, we have elevated our partnership to a strategic one and I am optimistic that our friendship will flourish even more in the times to come." Modi said in a post on X. Modi held wide-ranging talks with Kuwaiti Prime Minister Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Crown Prince Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah with a focus on giving new momentum to the overall bilateral ties.

Modi govt's 'calibrated erosion' of EC's integrity: Kharge

Tejinder Kaur Babbar

New Delhi, Dec. 22: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday hit out at the government for tweaking an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents, alleging it is part of the Modi government's "systematic conspiracy" to destroy the institutional integrity of the Election Commission.

restrict the type of "papers" or documents open to public inspection. Reacting to the development, Kharge said, "Modi government's audacious amendment in the Conduct of Election



Rules is another assault in its systematic conspiracy to destroy the institutional integrity of the Election Commission of India." "Earlier, they had removed the Chief Justice of India from the Selection

panel which appoints Election Commissioners, and now they have resorted to stonewall electoral information, even after a High Court order," he said in a post on X. Everytime the Congress party wrote to the ECI, regarding specific poll irregularities such as voter deletions and lack of transparency in EVMS, the ECI has responded in a condescending tone and chosen not to even acknowledge certain serious complaints, Kharge said. "This again proves that the ECI, even though it is a quasi-judicial body, is not behaving independently," he said. "The Modi government's calibrated erosion of ECI's integrity is a frontal attack on the Constitution and Democracy and we will take every step to safeguard them," Kharge said. Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh had said the party would legally

challenge the amendment. Lok Sabha MP and Congress general secretary (organisation) KC Venugopal said the poll panel had chosen opacity and a pro-government attitude in its dealings thus far. According to Rule 93, all "papers" related to elections shall be open to public inspection. The amendment inserts "as specified in these rules" after "papers". Law ministry and ECI officials separately explained that a court case was the "trigger" behind the amendment. While documents such as nomination forms, appointment of election agents, results and election account statements are mentioned in the Conduct of Election Rules, electronic documents such as CCTV camera footage, webcasting footage and video recording of candidates during the Model Code of Conduct period are not covered. "CCTV coverage, webcasting of polling stations are not carried out under Conduct of Election Rules but are the result of steps taken by the ECI to ensure a level playing field," a former ECI official explained.

Akhilesh Yadav calls for PDA unity to secure political power, protect constitution

Naresh Malhotra

Lucknow, Dec. 22: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday underscored the need for unity among backward classes, Dalits, and minorities to secure political power and form a government committed to protecting the Constitution. He asserted that those disrespecting Dr B.R. Ambedkar and his ideals must be ousted from power permanently. Amid nationwide protests against Union Home Minister Amit Shah's alleged derogatory remarks about Dr. Ambedkar, Yadav shared a pamphlet on a post on X, titled 'Discuss Baba Saheb's Dignity, Now PDA's message should reach every household.'

for equality, emphasising that the Constitution he crafted dismantled exploitative and regressive ideologies. "The dominant classes have never accepted Babasaheb's principles of equality because as it challenged their monopoly over power and wealth," he added. The SP



leader accused the dominant classes of opposing reservation policies that empowered marginalized communities and gave them a sense of dignity. "Baba Saheb not only fought for the oppressed but also provided them with a pro-

tection shield in the form of the Constitution," Yadav said. He further alleged that these forces labelled the Constitution as "abhartiya" (un-Indian) and "against civilization" because it challenged their traditional hegemony and uplifted the 90 per cent oppressed population. Yadav said, "The reservation system united PDA communities by addressing centuries of exploitation and injustice. However, the dominant classes and their allies have consistently opposed it and hatched conspiracies to undermine it under the guise of reviewing the Constitution." Yadav expressed confidence that the PDA community's unity would pave the way for a fair caste census, equitable distribution of resources and an inclusive society. "This will ensure financial independence for everyone, restore dignity to all, and bring smiles to the faces of those who have long been subjected to humiliation and suffering," he said. Yadav urged the PDA communities to come together to defend the Constitution by upholding Dr. Ambedkar's legacy to secure a brighter future. "Let's unite to save the Constitution, protect reservations, and build a new, prosperous tomorrow for all," he appealed.

Ajit Pawar highlights high number of ministers; 'obviously, some are unhappy'

Mumbai, Dec. 22: Acknowledging the high number of ministers and the restrictions in assigning portfolios to each of them, Maharashtra Deputy CM Ajit Pawar said on Sunday that some members are obviously

not happy. A day after portfolios were allocated by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Pawar said the work on pending projects would begin soon. The NCP chief led a road show in his constituency, Baramati, and attended felicitation programmes. "As the number of ministers is high, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis had to give each minis-



ter a portfolio. Obviously, some are happy and some are not," Pawar said at an event. He pointed out that the state Cabinet includes only six ministers of state, while the rest 36 are cabinet ministers. Pawar, who retained the Finance ministry, said he would take charge of the office on Monday. The Deputy CM further said the work on multiple projects had to be stopped temporarily after the model code of conduct kicked in for the November 20 Maharashtra assembly elections. The results of the elections were declared on November 23. "We had received various letters regarding pending projects. Give us some time, every work will be completed," Pawar added. Pointing out that several ministers are visiting their respective constituencies after portfolios were allocated to them, Pawar said pending works will begin soon after they take charge of ministries. He said the budget session of the Maharashtra legislature will commence in Mumbai on March 3. "I want to take CM Fadnavis and Deputy CM Eknath Shinde into confidence and prepare the budget," he added.

NEWS BOX

Search ongoing for leopard which killed 24-year-old in Vellore

VELLORE. Carcasses of goats left unburied may have lured the leopard, which killed 24-year-old S Anjali, into Drhuvam village near Veerichitpalli reserved forest area, said forest officials. They added that a search is ongoing to capture the leopard. Speaking to TNIE, the Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF) S Manivannan said that more drone cameras are being deployed and neighbouring areas are being thoroughly inspected. "In the course of the search, we found that villagers had left the carcasses of goats exposed, without burying them. This might have attracted the leopard to the village. We have informed the villagers that they must properly bury the goats," the ACF said. Once the leopard is captured, higher officials will determine



where it should be released, he added. Meanwhile, District Collector V R Subbulakshmi, in an official press release on Friday, urged the public not to panic while the forest department continues its search for the leopard. Anjali, the daughter of farmer Sivalingam, was a B Com graduate. Officials confirmed that a boy from the village had witnessed the leopard dragging Anjali into the forest on Wednesday.

DPR for tunnel road to solve Bandipur night traffic ban

BENGALURU. Issues pertaining to the night traffic ban on the 24.7 km stretch passing through the Bandipur Tiger Reserve (BTR) have resurfaced again. The ministry of road transport recently sought a Detailed Project Report (DPR) for constructing a tunnel road passing through BTR to ensure there is unhindered, round-the-clock traffic from Wayanad to Mysuru on the National Highway -212 (now called National Highway-766). The directions were issued after Union Minister for Road Transport Nitin Gadkari's meeting with John Brittas, a Member of Parliament from Kerala.

This has started a debate among conservationists and others on prioritising development over environment. National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) sources said they heard of the work, but are waiting for an official communication to start work on preparing the Detailed Project Report. A senior forest official, wishing anonymity, said, "The proposal to construct a tunnel road is not new. It was discussed two years ago after the idea of constructing an elevated road on the stretch was shelved due to environmental and financial reasons." He said there is a need to find a permanent solution as it is regularly raised by the Kerala government. "Traffic volume has increased, but there is already a well-developed alternative route," the official said. In 2019, the Supreme Court issued orders banning the movement of traffic from 9 pm to 6 am on the 24.7 km stretch. The Karnataka High Court and SC acknowledged.

Golden Chariot chugs with slim crowd after six years

BENGALURU. After a gap of six years, the state's own luxury express train - Golden Chariot - chugged off from the Yeshwanthpur Railway Station's Platform-6 to Kochi on Saturday. The trip - Jewel of the South - was flagged off by Karnataka Tourism Minister HK Patil with 38 international tourists on board, while the train has 80-bed capacity. It is operated by the Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation (KSTDC) along with the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) and Indian Railways. IRCTC, which is marketing the train, has priced the ticket at Rs 67,961.79 (\$800). The five-night-six-day circuit will cover Bengaluru, Mysuru, Kanchipuram, Mahabalipuram, Thanjavur, Chettinad/ Karaikudi, Kochi and Chertala/ Mararikulam in Kerala and back to Bengaluru. Patil told the media that Golden Chariot is a special train for South India as it showcases the culture, tourism, history, nature, wildlife and heritage of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. "The train's operations had been stopped from 2018 due to financial reasons. Now it has been started in cooperation with agencies from the central government. We have entered into a partnership with the Railways and hope to make profits," he said. An IRCTC official said three special customised trips were made in 2020 and 2021, but the occupancy was very poor. "As a new feature, we have introduced a provision for people/

Parcel bomb explosion injures three in Gujarat's Sabarmati

AHMEDABAD. Three men suffered injuries when a parcel delivered to the house of a Gujarat high court lawyer's clerk in the Sabarmati area on Saturday morning exploded at the time of delivery. Police said a personal dispute is the reason behind the blast at the house of Baldev Sukhadia in the Shivam Row House Society on the IOC Road. He worked with Hetal Barot, the wife of the prime suspect, Rupen Barot, also a resident of Sabarmati. Additional commissioner of police, Sector-1, Neeraj Badgajar, said Gaurav Gadhavi, the person who delivered the parcel, was also injured in the blast and was arrested. "As Gadhavi wanted to hand over the parcel to Sukhadia, the receiver noticed smoke coming out of the packet. Soon, the parcel exploded, leaving Gadhavi, Sukhadia and his cousin, Kirit Sukhadia, with injuries," Badgajar said. DCP, Zone-2, Bharat Rathod, said that the incident took place between 10.30am and 10.45am on Saturday. "Gadhavi said that his friend Rohan told him to deliver the parcel that he had received from Rupen Barot," said Rathod. In his complaint with Sabarmati police, Baldev Sukhadia, 56, said that a man last night came to his house to deliver a parcel, but as Sukhadia was not present, the delivery boy returned. "My wife informed me about this, and today, around 10.45am, a delivery boy came to my house and told me he had a parcel for me. Since I hadn't ordered anything, I was suspicious and didn't accept the parcel. The delivery boy said that someone named Suresh had sent the parcel, but as I didn't know any Suresh, I asked for his and Suresh's phone numbers so I could verify. He said his phone was with someone in a rickshaw outside. While we were talking, smoke started



coming out of the bag," said Baldev Sukhadia in the FIR. Sukhadia told him to step back and talk, and at that moment, the bag exploded. "That blast blinded both me and my wife temporarily. After a while, I saw the man still standing there, and I caught him. He was injured in the hands due to the blast, and my cousin, Kirit, who was outside his house, also suffered injuries on his face. I received a minor injury on my left leg," said Baldev Sukhadia. People soon gathered on the spot. "Pieces of the bag, white clay fragments, razor blade pieces, cardboard pieces, and wires from a blue battery were found at the place," said a police official.

Sukhadia further said in the FIR, "I have been working for Hetal, an advocate at the Gujarat high court, for six years. Hetal married Rupen Barot, who lives in Godavari Apartments in D-Cabin, about 12 years ago. Rupen suspects an extramarital relationship between Hetal and me, leading to frequent arguments with her and

threats to me over the phone." Since March 2024, Hetal has been living with her father at Padmaprabhu Society on the IOC Road, Chandkheda, and has filed for divorce against her husband in a family court. This has made Rupen angry with Baldev Sukhadia, stated the FIR. Sabarmati police registered a case of attempt to murder, causing grievous hurt, criminal conspiracy, and criminal intimidation under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita along with charges of the explosives act against Rupen and Gadhavi. After the blast took place, a team from the city crime branch searched the prime accused, Rupen Barot's house in Godavari Apartments, D Cabin locality. They found weapons, including explosive materials, blades, nails, two country-made pistols, and an ignition switch for the blast. A senior police officer said that one country-made pistol was in the making, and cops found a small manufacturing unit in Barot's house. Sources also said that Barot was there at the time of the incident, and he was sitting in an autorickshaw from where he might have ignited the remotely operated bomb.

A team of forensic experts was also called to Barot's house. The parcel blast in Sabarmati gave a chilling reminder of a similar blast that took place in Sabarkantha in May this year. In that case, a man named Jayanti Vanzara, 34, also a photographer and a farm labourer from Karunda village in Sabarkantha's Khedbrahma taluka, killed 32-year-old Jitendra Vanzara and his 12-year-old daughter Bhumika over suspicion that Jitendra was having an affair with his wife. In that case, an autorickshaw driver dropped a parcel at Jitendra's house, which contained a bluetooth speaker.

Lack of facilities, 'public resistance' land Kerala in grip of medical-waste crisis

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM. Kerala is grappling with a medical-waste crisis as incidents of illegal dumping in neighbouring states become a major concern. The dumping of medical waste in Tamil Nadu has landed the state under the scanner of the National Green Tribunal (NGT), which has reiterated its call for urgent measures to address the critical issue. According to sources, only 70 tonnes of medical waste generated daily in the state are being handled scientifically. And the fact that the health department and the state government have no clue as to the actual number of medical-waste generators is exacerbating the situation, they add. Currently, Kerala Enviro Infrastructure Ltd (KEIL) and Indian Medical Association's Image are the two agencies in the state processing medical waste. According to the IMA, only 60% of the total medical waste generated in the state is being managed scientifically, as per rules and regulations stipulated under the Biomedical Waste Management Rules 2016.

The state requires more medical waste management facilities, Image chairman Dr Abraham Varghese pointed out. "As per rules mandated by the National Pollution Control Board (PCB) and state PCB, Kerala has only two accredited agencies for managing biomedical waste. And 30-40% of medical-waste generators are managing their refuse illegally through unauthorised service providers," Dr Abraham told TNIE. According to available information, only 28,000 establishments avail the services of KEIL and Image.

In an effort to ensure the scientific handling of medical waste, the state government, jointly with the IMA, has moved to set up another plant in Adoor with the capacity to treat around 15 tonnes of medical waste daily. "The process for execution of the project has been completed, including public hearings.

Owing to public resistance the government has put the project on hold. We just need the go-ahead from the government to implement the project," he said.

Errors in Wayanad landslide rehab list trigger outrage

KALPETTA. Significant errors have been found in the beneficiary list for the Wayanad landslide rehabilitation project, including the exclusion of many affected families and duplication of names, triggering protests by survivors. According to the Disaster Victims' Strike Committee, which is leading the protest, many genuine victims said they were left out of the list. The committee members alleged that the district administration data showed no survivors from 17 affected families, which is not the case. The errors and lapses have raised concerns about the integrity of the process, they said. Prepared by the sub-collector and published on Friday, the draft list of beneficiaries for the first phase of the rehabilitation project comprised 388 families. "We lost everything to the landslides - our home, land, and peace. And now we find our names missing from the list. It feels like we are invisible to the authorities," said Ahamed Koya from Mundakkai, who lost his house and



property in the July 30 landslide. "In one ward, the same names appear twice, while our family's name doesn't appear at all. Is this what we deserve after surviving such a tragedy? They say they will fix the errors within 15 days. But how can we trust them when such big mistakes were made in the first place? We need justice, not just promises," he said. "We've been protesting for days now, but it feels like no one truly understands our pain. We need our voices heard, not ignored," Koya

said. Kalpetta MLA T Siddique said: "These discrepancies stem from action process, for which various sources such as ration card details, information from local government departments, and rapid assessment surveys were used." The landslides' impact extends to families in Mundakkai, Attamala, and Chooralmala. Residents allege that the draft list falls short of reflecting the disaster's full extent. Many families which suffered a total loss of their homes or substantial property damage have been omitted, while others who seemingly don't qualify have been incorrectly included, they alleged.

Meanwhile, Revenue Minister K Rajan clarified that the draft beneficiary list is only a preliminary document, and the government's primary objective is to provide relief to all affected individuals, with eligibility being the sole criterion for determining beneficiaries. He said the citizens have a 15-day window to submit objections or suggestions.

Greater Chennai Corporation floats bids for upkeep of 595 parks

CHENNAI. The Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) has floated tenders for the maintenance of 595 parks across the city. The contracts, divided into three packages, cover 122 parks in the northern, 215 in central and 258 in southern regions. The estimated cost for maintenance over next three years is Rs 46 crore. The move comes after the earlier contracts expired some months ago. The initiative aims at elevating the parks by integrating advanced technology, eco-friendly practices and proper maintenance. The agency bagging the contract will be responsible for works like cleaning, gardening, sanitation and security arrangements. The bidder will develop an AI-integrated web-based mobile app to enhance monitoring and transparency. The app will feature pre and post-cleaning status updates with images and videos uploaded every day. It will also alert the personnel deployed about deficiencies in



services. Security service will operate 24/7, ensuring safety, regulating access and preventing unauthorised activities. Biometric attendance for staff and QR codes at park entrance for visitor feedback will be established. Eco-friendly practices such as composting garden waste and using biodegradable materials will be prioritised. As many as 3,461 personnel, including sweepers, gardeners, security staff and electricians, will be deployed across the parks.

No more benefit shows at night, no ticket price hikes: Min Venkat Reddy

KOCHI. Pennine Istaayo, the short film debut by popular TV actor Achu Sugandh, has turned out to be a runaway hit with over 3.7 million views in just a month. The engaging drama revolving around the traditional 'pennu kaanal' ceremony stars Sajin and Gopika Anil, familiar as Sivan and Anjali from the popular Malayalam soap opera Santhwanam. The story is about a chance encounter between a short-tempered traffic police constable, Prasad, and his bride-to-be Veena, that sparks a riveting ego clash. We knew that casting Santhwanam's hit pair in such a plot would work out well. We wanted to utilise their on-screen chemistry.

I had ideas, but I did not want to write the script because it is a painful procedure while working on a film. However, I am now motivated to write more. Now, I believe that writing the script makes direction easier. Our limited budget led to significant financial constraints. I was not satisfied with the initial output, but later music and effects made my film sweet.

Also, the entire crew and other well-wishers backed me. Initially, I thought people would have forgotten us. However, I was elated when my short film reached a million views within a day. I have been receiving several positive comments as well as criticisms. I appreciate both. Currently, I am focused on direction. I



am working on a feature film project. We are discussing scripts and ideas. I love acting, and may return after this adventure. My goal is to build a production company to help newcomers. HYDERABAD: M Sri Tej, the eight-year old Sandhya Theatre stampede victim, is showing signs of improvement and has been taken off ventilator support, according to a medical bulletin released by the doctors at KIMS. Dr Chetan R

Mundada and Dr Vishnu Tej Pudi say in the bulletin: "Sri Tej is maintaining his vital parameters well on his own without any external support of oxygen or intropes.

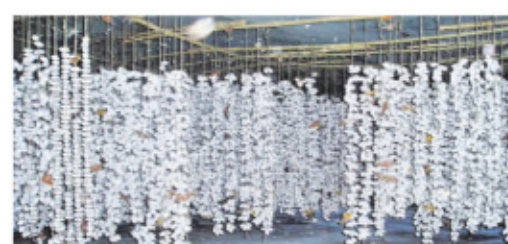
e continues to tolerate nasogastric feeds well. He had recurrence of intermittent fever spikes for which some investigations have been sent. His neurological condition is static". The boy will continue to remain under observation at KIMS.

Tasar silk brings hope to tribal farmers in Mancherial

ADILABAD. Once a forgotten craft, Tasar silk cultivation is now experiencing a remarkable revival in Mancherial district. This ancient art is not only empowering local communities but also attracting significant attention from across the country, with demand for this silk soaring. In the erstwhile Adilabad district, the government is actively encouraging landless farmers, particularly tribals who depend on forest resources, to take up Tasar silkworm rearing as a sustainable livelihood. Mancherial district has emerged as the leader in Tasar cocoon production in Telangana, with its natural flora spread across 2,100 hectares, providing the perfect environment for rearing silkworms.

Tasar silk is gaining recognition for its natural colour and lustre, making it a sought-after and eco-friendly fabric. For landless tribal farmers living on the fringes of forests, Tasar cultivation offers a lifeline.

With no investment required, these farmers are earning between Rs 30,000 and Rs 40,000 annually from silkworm rearing. The district supports 575 farming families, with Kotapally mandal leading the way at 1,100 hectares involving 325 families. Other notable contributions come from Vemanpally (400 hectares, 80 families), Chennur (589 hectares, 125 families), Nennel (10 hectares, five families) and Kannepally (100 hectares, 40



families). Sericulture Assistant Director Parvathi Rathod tells TNIE that tribal farmers in Mancherial have set new benchmarks in Tasar production. In the 2022-23 period, the achievements surpassed expectations: while there was no initial target for Tasar Disease-Free Laying

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News box

SUV crashes into eway divider after track rams it; 1 held

Gurgaon. A truck bearing a Rewari registration number crashed into an SUV on Dwarka Expressway on Saturday. The accident occurred near Sector 37D, where the truck driver, while attempting to overtake other vehicles, collided with the black SUV.

Although the SUV's occupants escaped with minor injuries, their vehicle suffered significant damage after hitting the divider. A police official said the truck, which was traveling from Hayatpur, was cruising at over 80kmph. Police launched an immediate search and intercepted the runaway truck on the Delhi-Jaipur highway. Both the vehicle and its driver were taken to Kherki Daula police station for further investigation.

According to police, several other vehicles had to swerve sharply to avoid a collision with the truck, the screamed to a halt after the collision. Police said they had initiated legal proceedings against the truck driver. "Charges are being filed for reckless driving, endangering public safety, and causing damage to property," an official said.

Staffer arrested for stealing Rs 3.5L from DLF Mall's outlet

Noida. A 19-year-old employee of an outlet in DLF Mall was arrested for allegedly stealing Rs 3.5 lakh on Saturday. In a complaint, the shop's owner Amit Kumar claimed he found money missing around 6.30 pm on Friday while checking a locker where cash is usually kept. Police registered a case under BNS Section 305A (theft in a dwelling house, place of worship, or means of transportation) at Sector 20 police station after a complaint was filed and checked surveillance footage that showed a man, allegedly one of the employees, Anish, using a key to open the shop's shutter and taking the money. The police traced Anish to Khoda Colony in Ghaziabad and arrested him. "The suspect was identified after a thorough analysis of CCTV footage," said additional DCP (Noida) Manish Kumar Mishra. The stolen amount, Rs 3,53,740, was recovered from Anish.

E-comm delivery exec held for mobile thefts after gunbattle

Noida. A 23-year-old man, allegedly behind a series of mobile thefts in the city, was arrested following a gunfight near Sector 83 metro station on Saturday.

The suspect, Sumit Gupta, who suffered a leg injury during an exchange of fire with police, works as an e-commerce delivery executive. Police recovered a .32 bore unlicensed pistol with ammunition, three stolen mobile phones, and a black Splendor Plus motorcycle without registration plates, allegedly used in the crimes. According to police, a team from Phase 2 police station, conducting vehicle checks near Yakubpur red light, had flagged down Gupta as he was riding an unregistered motorcycle. The accused allegedly tried to dodge the cops. When cops chased him to Sector 83 metro station road, he abandoned the bike and fled on foot. "The suspect fired at the police in an attempt to escape. Officers responded in self-defence, injuring him in the leg. Gupta is originally from Badaun district and is at present residing in Bhangel," DCP (central Noida) Shakti Mohan Awasthi said. Preliminary investigations also revealed Gupta worked as a delivery agent for a quick-commerce company. Police believe Gupta's arrest could help solve several recent mobile theft cases in the area. Two stolen Vivo smartphones were among the recovered devices, potentially resolving recent complaints of theft under similar circumstances.

DCP Awasthi confirmed Gupta's history of criminal activities, including two prior cases registered at Phase 2 police station under BNS Section 303(2). "We are investigating his potential links to a larger mobile theft network in the region," Awasthi added.

Forest Cover Down, But City Bit Greener

New Delhi. A marginal increase of 4.9 sq km has taken Delhi's green cover to 371.3 sq km, according to India State Forest Report 2023, released on Saturday. The forest cover reduced by a tiny fraction but tree cover improved, leading the report to state that 25% of Delhi's total geographical area of 1,483 sq km was under green cover in 2023. The biennial report by the Forest Survey of India was released by Bhopender Yadav, Union minister for environment, forest and climate change. The report found that the city's forest cover saw a slight reduction in 2023 by 0.1 sq km compared with 2021, going down to 195.28 sq km in 2023 from 195.36 sq km two years earlier. However, the city's tree cover rose from 171.1 sq km in 2021 to 176 sq km in 2023, thus putting around 11.9% of the geographical area of Delhi under tree cover. Forest cover has been defined as all areas having tree cover with canopy density more than or equal to 10% and above, and area more than or equal to one hectare. Tree cover is the area covered by trees outside the recorded forest areas. The report changed its methodology this year and revised data for 2021 too, so while tree cover and forest cover in the report released in 2021 showed forest and tree cover at 147 sq km and 195 sq km, respectively, the 2023 report modified the data.

In Sept, the Supreme Court pulled up Delhi govt's forest department for not appraising it of any comprehensive measures taken to enhance the capital's green cover. According to the report, Maharashtra has the maximum tree cover (14,524.9 sq km) followed by Rajasthan (10,841.1 sq km) and Uttar Pradesh (8,950.9 sq km). However, in terms of percentage of geographical area, Chandigarh had the maximum tree cover (18.6%) followed by Delhi (11.9%) and Kerala (7.5%). Of Delhi's forest cover of 195.3 sq km, very dense forest comprised 6.5 sq km, moderately dense 53.6 sq km and open forest, 135.3 sq km in 2023. Among the 11 districts, New Delhi, with a forest cover of 48.6 sq km in 2023, reported the highest reduction by 0.9 sq km from 2021. A very dense forest is one with a canopy density of 70% or more. Moderately dense forests have a canopy density between 40 and 70%, while open forests have a canopy density between 10 and 40%. A forest official said, "the green cover in Delhi has increased to 25% of the geographical area. Efforts, including plantation drives and compensatory plantation, have borne fruit." Experts, however, expressed concerns about the methodology.

As SC scraps toll for good, will DND upkeep take a further hit

Noida. The 9.2km DND Flyway — connecting Noida with Delhi's Maharani Bagh — has shown visible signs of deterioration since 2016 — when collection of toll was scrapped through an Allahabad high court order. The roadway exhibits rough and uneven patches on both Delhi and Noida sides — with non-functional streetlights at multiple locations and overgrown trees requiring immediate attention. The absence of a patrolling squad has further compromised security measures. If not for G20 — when the mandate to give global leaders a proper welcome and a smooth ride overrode arguments about how to fund the flyway's maintenance — DND might have been much worse off today. But even though the concessionaire — Noida Toll Bridge Company Ltd (NTBCL) — invested around Rs 6 crore in repair and maintenance in May last year, the flyway's current condition falls short of its original operational standards.

The responsibility of maintaining the road lies

with NTBCL. But since it was barred from collecting toll in 2016, the company has only done patchwork repair of the key connector, citing lack of funds needed for a recarpeting. After the Supreme Court upheld the Allahabad HC's order on toll collection on Friday, the onus now is on the state govt, and Noida Authority to ensure the road's upkeep. The DND project dates back to the 1980s, when UP govt initiated plans to improve Delhi-Noida connectivity. Due to financial constraints, a public private partnership was established in 1992 through an agreement between the Noida Authority, Delhi govt, and Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services Limited (IL&FS). IL&FS subsequently formed NTBCL in 1996 to execute the project, signing a concession agreement with Noida in 1997. The agreement stipulated a 30-year toll collection period to recover the project cost, with provisions for a two-year extension if needed. The toll since Feb 6, 2001, faced

legal challenges when the Federation of Noida Resident Welfare Association (FONRWA) filed a petition in 2014. KK Jain, the FONRWA general secretary, argued that NTBCL's cost recovery calculations would perpetually delay the project's return to the Noida Authority. "We argued that NTBCL's project cost recovery — which includes maintenance, shortfall in recovery — would make it impossible for the company to return the asset to Noida even after a century," Jain said. Finally — in Oct 2016 — the HC barred the collection of toll, but allowed NTBCL to continue with its job of maintaining the flyway because of constitutional validity. The company then moved a petition in the SC, challenging the HC verdict. IL&FS expressed disappointment with the SC judgment, saying they would review the detailed order to explore their future course of action. The company referred to

its 23-year track record of infrastructure maintenance and suggested the ruling could impact future PPP projects.

"We completely respect the decision of the apex court in the DND Flyway case pronounced on Friday while sharing our disappointment on the unexpected verdict. Despite numerous challenges, the company has diligently fulfilled its obligations and ensured the upkeep and smooth operation of this critical infra-

structure for the last over 23 years and will continue in its endeavour to do so," it said in a statement. A Noida Authority official said there were plans to dismantle the toll plaza to ensure smooth traffic flow. "Noida Authority is responsible for maintaining different projects in Noida. We will study the SC order and take a decision on handover of the maintenance from NTBCL. The toll plaza will also be dismantled," an official said.

Upset with physical classes, 12-yr-old sends bomb threat mail to school

Gurgaon. Police have identified a 12-year-old student who allegedly sent a bomb threat to his own school in Sector 65, hoping it would switch to online classes.

The threat, sent via email on Dec 18, prompted immediate police action and investigation. ACP (cyber) Priyanshu Diwan said after they traced the email's IP address, it led them to house of the student. Asked why he had sent the threat mail, the boy apparently told the cops he was upset about physical classes and wanted them to be switched to the online mode. After the mail last week, the school authorities informed the Cyber Crime police station (south), prompting an immediate search of the compound. Since no trace of a bomb was found on the campus, the mail was declared a hoax. "We are treating the matter seriously, given the age of the sender. We are trying to understand the circumstances that led the boy to send the threat and planning a course of action so that such incidents are not repeated in the future," an officer said.

The school has maintained regular operations following security protocols. Parents and staff members have been asked to stay vigilant.

Over the past few days, multiple schools across Delhi-NCR have received bomb threat mails, all of which were found to be hoax. The series of threats began on Dec 9, when 44 schools received such emails. Similar incidents occurred on Dec 13, affecting 30 schools, and Dec 14, targeting eight institutions. Notably, one mail on Dec 14 mentioned the use of "bomb vests".

In Sector 126 of Noida, a private school was forced to shut on Friday following a bomb threat email received late on Thursday night. Administrators at Lotus Valley International School discovered the threatening message an hour before classes were to start at 8am. The mail claimed that at least 20 explosive devices were planted on the Lotus Valley premises and would go off in 48 hours. School officials immediately recalled buses that had already left to pick students up and notified parents about the emergency closure.

Scholarship For Dalits In City To Study Abroad

New Delhi. As part of his series of "guarantees" being announced ahead of the assembly elections in the capital, AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday announced 'Dr Ambedkar Samman Scholarship Yojana', promising to cover the entire cost of travel, accommodation and tuition fees, besides other costs, for Dalit students from Delhi pursuing higher education at top international universities. Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal said the scholarship will be a comprehensive initiative. "I don't want any child from the Dalit community to be deprived of higher education because of shortage of funds... Delhi govt will cover all their expenses, including tuition fees, travel and other costs," the AAP chief said. This is Kejriwal's fourth guarantee ahead of the assembly polls, which are likely to be held in Feb. The former Delhi CM has already promised insurance and other financial assistance for auto-rickshaw drivers, Rs 2100 for women and free treatment for Delhi voters aged above 60 in private and state-run hospitals if AAP forms govt again. Kejriwal said the scheme will also be applicable to Dalit children of govt employees, who cannot afford to send their children abroad for education without a scholarship. He added that despite financial constraints, Ambedkar earned two doctorates from foreign universities where it is extremely tough to get admission even today. Referring to a statement by Union home minister Amit Shah in Parliament earlier this week, the AAP chief alleged that the BJP leader had "insulted and made fun" of Babasaheb Dr Ambedkar. "Crores of people who love Ambedkar were deeply pained... This is our way of empowering the Dalit community and honouring Babasaheb Ambedkar's legacy," Kejriwal said, speaking to reporters at the AAP headquarters.

Applauding the scheme, chief minister Atishi said Kejriwal had consistently allocated 25% of Delhi's budget to education in the past 10 years. "He made govt schools better than private schools, gave children from poor families an opportunity to clear competitive exams such as JEE and NEET and enabled students in Delhi govt schools to go abroad to study and learn French," she said. Senior AAP functionary and former education minister Manish Sisodia posted on X that Dr Ambedkar Samman Scholarship was "not just a scheme but a historic step, laying the

KIND ATTENTION RAIL PASSENGERS! KUMBH MELA SPECIAL TRAINS

For the convenience of Rail Passengers during forthcoming KUMBH MELA-2025, Railways have decided to run the following Special trains as per the details given below:-

| 02417/02418 Subedarganj - Delhi Jn. - Subedarganj SF Kumbh Special Train (Bi-Weekly) | | 34 Trips |
|--|-------------|-----------------|
| Train No. 02417 | STATIONS | Train No. 02418 |
| ARR. DEP. | | ARR. DEP. |
| --- | Subedarganj | 19:40 --- |
| 08:55 --- | Delhi Jn. | --- 09:30 |

Days of run : 02417 Ex. Subedarganj on every Friday & Saturday from 03.01.2025 to 28.02.2025 and 02418 Delhi Jn. on every Saturday & Sunday from 04.01.2025 to 01.03.2025
Composition: 1st AC cum 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC Economy, Sleeper & General.
Stoppages: Fatehpur, Govindpuri, Etawah, Tundla, & Aligarh Stations.

| 04145/04146 Subedarganj - Delhi Jn. - Subedarganj SF Kumbh Special Train (Weekly) | | 18 Trips |
|---|-------------|-----------------|
| Train No. 04145 | STATIONS | Train No. 04146 |
| ARR. DEP. | | ARR. DEP. |
| --- | Subedarganj | 19:40 --- |
| 08:55 --- | Delhi Jn. | --- 09:30 |

Days of run : 04145 Ex. Subedarganj on every Thursday from 02.01.2025 to 27.02.2025 and 04146 Delhi Jn. on every Friday from 03.01.2025 to 28.02.2025
Composition: 1st AC, 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC Economy, Sleeper & General.
Stoppages: Fatehpur, Govindpuri, Etawah, Tundla, & Aligarh Stations.

| 04111/04112 Prayagraj Jn. - Prayagraj Jn. Unreserved Kumbh Special Ring Rail | | 94 Trips |
|--|---------------|-----------------|
| Train No. 04111 | STATIONS | Train No. 04112 |
| ARR. DEP. | | ARR. DEP. |
| --- | Prayagraj Jn. | 21:00 --- |
| 11:15 11:20 | Jaunpur | 13:50 13:55 |
| 18:50 --- | Prayagraj Jn. | --- 06:30 |

Days of run : 04111/04112 Ex. Prayagraj Jn. from 10.01.2025 to 28.02.2025 (except 28, 29 & 30.01.2025)
Stoppages: Prayagraj Rambag, Jhusi, Handia Khas, Gyanpur Road, Madhosingh, Banaras, Bhadohi, Janghai Jn., Mariahu, Zafarabad Jn., Shahganj Jn., Akbarpur, Gosainganj, Ayodhya, Ayodhya Cantt., Sultanpur, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratargharh Jn., Mau Aikka, Phaphamau Jn. & Prayag Stations.

| 04113/04114 Prayagraj Jn.-Prayagraj Jn. Unreserved Kumbh Special Ring Rail | | 94 Trips |
|--|---------------|-----------------|
| Train No. 04113 | STATIONS | Train No. 04114 |
| ARR. DEP. | | ARR. DEP. |
| --- | Prayagraj Jn. | 08:00 --- |
| 22:55 23:00 | Jaunpur | 01:05 01:10 |
| 07:45 --- | Prayagraj Jn. | --- 17:45 |

Days of run : 04113/04114 Ex. Prayagraj Jn. from 10.01.2025 to 28.02.2025 (except 28, 29 & 30.01.2025)
Stoppages: Prayagraj Rambag, Jhusi, Handia Khas, Gyanpur Road, Madhosingh, Banaras, Bhadohi, Janghai Jn., Mariahu, Zafarabad Jn., Shahganj Jn., Akbarpur, Gosainganj, Ayodhya, Ayodhya Cantt., Sultanpur, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratargharh Jn., Mau Aikka, Phaphamau Jn. & Prayag Stations.

| 04210/04209 Prayagraj Sangam-Jaunpur-Prayagraj Sangam Unreserved Kumbh Special Ring Rail | | 66 Trips |
|--|------------------|-----------------|
| Train No. 04210 | STATIONS | Train No. 04209 |
| ARR. DEP. | | ARR. DEP. |
| --- | Prayagraj Sangam | 17:15 --- |
| 14:00 --- | Jaunpur | --- 14:15 |

Days of run : 04210 Ex. Prayagraj Sangam and 04209 Ex. Jaunpur from 01.01.2025 to 10.01.2025, 17.01.2025 to 26.01.2025, 06.02.2025 to 09.02.2025 & 15.02.2025 to 23.02.2025
Stoppages: Prayag, Phaphamau, Phulpur, Janghai & Mariahu Stations.

| 08251/08252 Raigarh Jn.-Varanasi-Raigarh Jn. Kumbh Special Train | | 02 Trips |
|--|-------------|-----------------|
| Train No. 08251 | STATIONS | Train No. 08252 |
| ARR. DEP. | | ARR. DEP. |
| --- | Raigarh Jn. | 05:25 --- |
| 10:00 --- | Varanasi | --- 10:50 |

Days of run : 08251 Ex. Raigarh Jn. on 25.01.2025 (Saturday) and 08252 Ex. Varanasi on 27.01.2025 (Monday)
Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper and General
Stoppages: Champa Jn., Bilaspur Jn.,endra Road, Anuppur Jn., Shahdol Jn., Umaria, Katni Jn., Maihar, Satna Jn., Manikpur Jn., Prayagraj Chheoki, Mirzapur and Chunar Jn. Stations.

| 09031/09032 Udhna - Ghazipur City - Udhna Kumbh Special Train | | 04 Trips |
|---|---------------|-----------------|
| Train No. 09031 | STATIONS | Train No. 09032 |
| ARR. DEP. | | ARR. DEP. |
| --- | Udhna | 12:45 --- |
| 14:05 14:15 | Varanasi Jn. | 06:00 06:10 |
| 18:05 --- | Ghazipur City | --- 00:30 |

Days of run : 09031 Ex. Udhna on 17.01.2025 & 16.02.2025 and 09032 Ex. Ghazipur City on 19.01.2025 & 18.02.2025
Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General.

Stoppages: Bharuch, Vishvamitri, Vadodara, Godhra, Dahod, Ratlam, Nagda, Ujjain, Shujalpur, Sant Hirdaram Nagar, Vidisha, Ganj Basoda, Bina, Lalitpur, Virangana Lakshmbai Jhansi, Orai, Govindpuri, Fatehpur, Prayagraj, Mirzapur, Chunar, Jaunpur & Aunrihar Stations.

| 09403/09404 Ahmedabad Jn. - Janghai - Ahmedabad Jn. Kumbh Special Train | | 18 Trips |
|---|---------------|-----------------|
| Train No. 09403 | STATIONS | Train No. 09404 |
| ARR. DEP. | | ARR. DEP. |
| --- | Ahmedabad Jn. | 18:00 --- |
| 03:00 --- | Janghai | --- 08:30 |

Days of run : 09403 Ex. Ahmedabad Jn. on 09, 16, 21.01.2025 & 05, 14, 15, 18, 19, 26.02.2025 and 09404 Ex. Janghai on 11, 18, 23.01.2025 & 07, 16, 17, 20, 21, 28.02.2025.

Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General.
Stoppages: Anand, Chhayapuri, Godhra, Dahod, Ratlam, Nagda, Bhawani Mandi, Ramgarh Mandi, Kota, Sawai Madhopur, Gangapur City, Bayana, Agra Fort, Tundla, Etawah, Govindpuri, Fatehpur & Prayagraj Stations.

| 01455/01456 Pune-Mau Jn.-Pune Kumbh Special Train | | 12 Trips |
|---|----------|-----------------|
| Train No. 01455 | STATIONS | Train No. 01456 |
| ARR. DEP. | | ARR. DEP. |
| --- | Pune | 15:45 --- |
| 17:10 17:20 | Varanasi | 05:25 05:35 |
| 22:00 --- | Mau Jn. | --- 23:50 |

Days of run : 01455 Ex. Pune on 08, 16, 24.01.2025 & 06, 08, 21.02.2025 and 01456 Ex. Mau Jn. on 09, 17, 25.01.2025 & 07, 09, 22.02.2025.

Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
Stoppages: Daund Chord Line, Ahmednagar, Belapur, Manmad Jn., Jalgaon Jn., Bhusaval Jn., Khandwa Jn., Talvadiya, Chhanera, Khirkiya, Harda, Banapura, Itarsi Jn., Pipariya, Narsinghpur, Jabalpur Jn., Katni Jn., Maihar, Satna Jn., Manikpur Jn., Prayagraj Chheoki, Mirzapur, Chunar Jn., Shahganj Jn. & Azamgarh Stations.

| 09371/09372 Dr. Ambedkar Nagar-Ballia-Dr. Ambedkar Nagar Kumbh Special Train | | 08 Trips |
|--|--------------------|-----------------|
| Train No. 09371 | STATIONS | Train No. 09372 |
| ARR. DEP. | | ARR. DEP. |
| --- | Dr. Ambedkar Nagar | 05:30 --- |
| 14:05 14:15 | Varanasi | 06:00 06:10 |
| 19:15 --- | Ballia | --- 23:45 |

Days of run : 09371 Ex. Dr. Ambedkar Nagar on 22.01.2025, 25.01.2025, 08.02.2025 & 22.02.2025 and 09372 Ex. Ballia on 23.01.2025, 26.01.2025, 09.02.2025 & 23.02.2025

Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC & Sleeper & General
Stoppages: Indore Jn., Ujjain Jn., Shujalpur, Sant Hirdaram Nagar, Vidisha, Ganj Basoda, Bina, Lalitpur, Virangana Lakshmbai Jhansi, Orai, Govindpuri, Fatehpur, Prayagraj Jn., Mirzapur, Chunar Jn., Jaunpur Jn., Aunrihar Jn. & Ghazipur City Stations.

| 01033/01034 Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (T) - Mau Jn.- Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (T) Kumbh Special Train | | 14 Trips |
|--|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Train No. 01033 | STATIONS | Train No. 01034 |
| ARR. DEP. | | ARR. DEP. |
| --- | Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (T) | 14:30 --- |
| 17:10 17:20 | Varanasi | 05:25 05:35 |
| 22:00 --- | Mau Jn. | --- 23:50 |

Days of run : 01033 Ex. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (T) on 09, 17, 22, 25.01.2025 & 05, 22, 26.02.2025 and 01034 Ex. Mau Jn. on 10, 18, 23, 26.01.2025 & 06, 23, 27.02.2025.

Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General
Stoppages: Dadar, Thane, Kalyan Jn., Igatpuri, Nasik Road, Manmad Jn., Jalgaon Jn., Bhusaval Jn., Khandwa Jn., Talvadiya, Chhanera, Khirkiya, Harda, Banapura, Itarsi Jn., Pipariya, Narsinghpur, Jabalpur Jn., Katni Jn., Maihar, Satna Jn., Manikpur Jn., Prayagraj Chheoki, Mirzapur, Chunar Jn., Shahganj Jn. & Azamgarh Stations.

| 09029/09030 Vishvamitri-Ballia-Vishvamitri Kumbh Special Train | | 02 Trips |
|--|-------------|-----------------|
| Train No. 09029 | STATIONS | Train No. 09030 |
| ARR. DEP. | | ARR. DEP. |
| --- | Vishvamitri | 10:05 --- |
| 14:05 14:15 | Varanasi | 06:00 06:10 |
| 19:00 --- | Ballia | --- 23:30 |

Days of run : 09029 Ex. Vishvamitri on 17.02.2025 (Monday) and 09030 Ex. Ballia on 18.02.2025 (Tuesday)

Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC & Sleeper & General
Stoppages: Vadodra Jn., Godhra Jn., Dahod, Ratlam Jn., Nagda Jn., Ujjain Jn., Shujalpur, Sant Hirdaram Nagar, Vidisha, Ganj Basoda, Bina, Lalitpur, Virangana Lakshmbai Jhansi, Orai, Govindpuri, Fatehpur, Prayagraj Jn., Mirzapur, Chunar Jn., Jaunpur Jn., Aunrihar Jn. & Ghazipur City Stations.

| 03409/03410 Malda Town-Prayagraj Rambag-Malda Town Kumbh Special Train (Bi-Weekly) | | Trips |
|--|------------------|-----------------|
| Train No. 03409 | STATIONS | Train No. 03410 |
| ARR. DEP. | | ARR. DEP. |
| --- | Malda Town | 14:30 --- |
| 13:45 13:50 | Varanasi | 22:00 22:10 |
| 17:15 --- | Prayagraj Rambag | --- 19:15 |

Days of run : 03409 Ex. Malda Town on every Thursday & Saturday from 02.01.2025 to 22.02.2025 and 03410 Ex. Prayagraj Rambag on every Friday & Sunday from 03.01.2025 to 23.02.2025

Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC & Sleeper & General
Stoppages: New Farakka Jn., Barharwa Jn., Sahibganj Jn., Kahalgaon, Bhagalpur, Sultanganj, Jamalpur Jn., Abhaipur, Ktiul Jn., Mokameh, Barh, Bakhtiyarpur, Rajendra Nagar, Patna Jn., Danapur, Ara, Buxar, Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn. & Banaras Stations

| 08791/08792 Durg-Varanasi-Durg Kumbh Special Train | | 02 Trips |
|--|----------|-----------------|
| Train No. 08791 | STATIONS | Train No. 08792 |
| ARR. DEP. | | ARR. DEP. |
| --- | Durg | 05:30 --- |
| 10:00 --- | Varanasi | --- 10:50 |

Days of run : 08791 Ex. Durg on 08.02.2025 (Saturday) and 08792 Ex. Varanasi on 10.02.2025 (Monday)

Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper and General
Stoppages: Raipur Jn., Bhatapara, Usapur,endra Road, Anuppur Jn., Shahdol Jn., Umaria, Katni Jn., Maihar, Satna Jn., Manikpur Jn., Prayagraj Chheoki, Mirzapur and Chunar Jn. Stations.

| 08253/08254 Bilaspur -Varanasi-Bilaspur Kumbh Special Train | | 02 Trips |
|---|--|----------|
|---|--|----------|

NEWS BOX

Seven Indians injured in German Christmas market attack

World. Seven Indians have been injured in the deadly car-ramping attack in the eastern German city of Magdeburg and the Indian embassy in Berlin is providing them all possible assistance, official sources said on Saturday night. A 50-year-old man drove his car into crowds at a Christmas market on Friday evening in Saxony-Anhalt state's Magdeburg, leaving at least five people, including a nine-year-old, dead and nearly 200 injured, according to German authorities. Three out of seven injured Indians have been discharged from hospital, the sources cited above said. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), condemning the "horrific and senseless" attack, said the Indian mission in Germany is in contact with Indians injured.

It, however, did not specify the number of injured Indians. The Indian embassy in Berlin said it is maintaining close contact with Indians who have been injured. In a statement, the MEA condemned the attack and said the Indian mission is rendering all possible assistance to the Indians injured in the incident. "We condemn the horrific and senseless attack at a Christmas market in Magdeburg, Germany," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. "Several precious lives have been lost and many have been injured. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims." "Our Mission is in contact with Indians who are injured, as well as their families, and rendering all possible assistance," the MEA said.

Two US pilots shot down over Red Sea in 'friendly fire' incident: military

WASHINGTON. Two US Navy pilots were shot down over the Red Sea early Sunday in "an apparent case of friendly fire," the American military said.

Both pilots were recovered alive but "initial assessments indicate that one of the crew members sustained minor injuries," the United States Central Command said late Saturday local Florida time -- where CENTCOM is headquartered. "This incident was not the result of hostile fire, and a full investigation is underway." CENTCOM said the guided missile cruiser USS Gettysburg "mistakenly fired on and hit the F/A-18" fighter aircraft, which was flown by the Navy pilots off another ship, the USS Harry S. Truman. The potentially disastrous mistake underscores the dangers of a mission the



United States has been involved in for more than a year as Yemen's Houthi rebels have repeatedly targeted merchant vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden that they say are Israeli-linked. On Saturday the United States said it struck targets in Yemen's rebel-held capital, hours after a Houthi rebel missile wounded people in Israel's commercial hub Tel Aviv. American forces also shot down multiple Houthi drones and an anti-ship cruise missile over the Red Sea, it said.

At Least 10 Killed In Church Stampede In Nigeria's Capital

Abuja. At least 10 people, including four children, were killed in a stampede during a relief item distribution at a local church in the Maitama district of Abuja, the Nigerian capital.

Josephine Adoh, spokesperson for the police in the Federal Capital Territory, said in a statement that eight others sustained varying degrees of injuries when the distribution of relief items, including food and clothing ahead of Christmas celebrations, turned chaotic Saturday at the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Maitama. "Four of the injured had been treated and discharged, while the remaining victims are currently receiving medical care," Adoh said, noting the police



successfully evacuated "a crowd, numbering over a thousand." Padre Mike Nsikak Umoh, spokesperson for the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, earlier told reporters that the event attracted more than 3,000 people from nearby villages and low-income suburbs. Following the "tragic incident," the "palliative distribution" was suspended, he said. According to witnesses, many attendees arrived as early as 4 a.m. local time, despite the event being scheduled to start between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m. Saturday, Xinhua news agency reported. In a separate statement, Nigerian President Bola Tinubu confirmed another stampede Saturday morning in Okija, a town in the southeastern state of Anambra, where a philanthropic initiative to distribute rice to locals also turned fatal. "The two tragedies claimed many lives and left many others injured," Tinubu said, canceling his official duties for the day in honor of the victims. Highlighting an earlier stampede in the southwestern city of Ibadan on Wednesday, which claimed at least 35 lives and left six critically injured, the Nigerian leader called on states and local authorities to implement strict crowd control measures nationwide.

Bangladesh commission finds India's 'involvement in enforced disappearances'

DHAKA. An inquiry commission formed by Bangladesh's interim government has said that it has found India's 'involvement' in incidents of 'enforced disappearances' during deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's regime, the state-run news agency BSS reported on Saturday.

The Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS), quoting the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearance, said that the Indian involvement in Bangladesh's system of enforced disappearances is a matter of public record. The news report said that according to the five-member commission headed by retired Supreme Court judge Mainul Islam Chowdhury, there was a 'persistent suggestion in law enforcement circles' that some prisoners might still be languishing in Indian jails.

"We recommend the Ministries of Foreign and Home to extend their best efforts to identify any Bangladeshi citizens who may still remain incarcerated in India. It is beyond the jurisdiction of the commission to follow this trail outside Bangladesh," the commission said. The commission said it found intelligence information about the

practice of captive exchanges between India and Bangladesh and the possible subsequent fate of detainees. The commission cited two highly publicised cases that provide valuable insights into how such operations were carried out.

"One was the case of Shukhranjan Bali, who was abducted from the Bangladesh Supreme Court premises and resurfaced subsequently in an Indian jail, and the other was of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Salahuddin Ahmed," the commission said. The commission said BNP leader Ahmed's case exemplifies certain practices of the Bangladesh-India rendition system. It said that while hiding at a house in Dhaka's Uttara area in 2015, he recounted being imprisoned in a barren cell, where a hole in the ground served as a toilet. "The blanket provided to him bore the letters 'TFI', indicative of 'Task Force for Interrogation,'" it added. During that period, the commission said the only operational TFI centre that they knew of was managed by Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) Intelligence Wing working under the aegis of RAB Headquarters.



The commission said that since then, they visited this location and confirmed that RAB Intelligence Wing still controls access to it. "However, the interior of the facility was thoroughly decimated some time ago," the news report said quoting the commission. Last week, the five-member commission submitted an interim report titled "Unfolding The Truth" to Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus. The commission estimated that there would be more than 3,500 enforced disappearances. Besides the chairman, the commission comprises Justice Farid Ahmed Shibli, rights activist Nur Khan, private BRAC University teacher Nabila Idris and rights activist Sajjad

Hossain. Hasina, 77, fled to India on August 5 after unprecedented anti-government protests. The student-led Monsoon Revolution under the banner of 'Students Against Discrimination' succeeded in toppling Hasina's 16-year regime, propelled by fervent demands for change and accountability. The chief adviser's press wing had claimed the commission also found the involvement of the deposed prime minister's now absconding defence adviser, retired major general Tarique Ahmed Siddique, a now sacked major general and two senior police officers and several other senior officials in the cases of enforced disappearance. The news report said that the police's elite anti-crime Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), which draws men from army, navy, air force and regular police and other law enforcement agencies had collaborated with each other to pick up, torture and keep victims in detention.

The commission simultaneously proposed the abolition of the RAB alongside scrapping or thoroughly amending the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009. Commission member and rights activist Sajjad

Russia's Tatarstan Declares Emergency After Ukrainian Drone Attacks

Moscow. Russia's Tatarstan Republic declared a state of emergency for government bodies and emergency response units to manage the aftermath of Ukrainian drone attacks. "The head of Tatarstan has signed an order imposing a special emergency mode for government agencies and the Ministry of Emergency Situations. This status is necessary to swiftly handle the consequences of the attacks in accordance with the law," the press service of Tatarstan President Rustam Minnikhanov said on Saturday. "The order applies exclusively to those involved in the response efforts and does not affect the general population." On Saturday, eight drone strikes were reported in Tatarstan's capital city of Kazan, six of which targeted residential buildings. Preliminary reports indicated there were no injuries,

Xinhua news agency reported. Tatarstan's governor, Rustam Minnikhanov, confirmed six drones



struck residential buildings, one hit an industrial site, and another was shot down over a river.

The attacks, which Ukraine didn't acknowledge in keeping with its security policy, come after a Ukrainian

attack on Friday on a town in Russia's Kursk border region using US-supplied missiles killed six people, including a child.

Moscow sent 113 drones into Ukraine overnight into Saturday, Ukrainian officials said. According to Ukraine's Air Force, 57 drones were shot down during the attacks. A further 56 drones were "lost," likely having been electronically jammed.

Following the attack, operations at Izhevsk Airport near Kazan were temporarily restricted. The restrictions were lifted by 15:00 local time (1100 GMT) on Saturday, Russia's TASS news agency quoted Alexander Sineelnikov, general director of Izhevsk-based aviation company Izhavia, as saying.

Pakistan Jails 25 Imran Khan Supporters Over Violent Protests

Islamabad, Pakistan. Pakistan military courts have convicted and sentenced 25 people for involvement in pro-Imran Khan unrest last year, the armed forces said Saturday, with the majority handed decade-long prison terms. Ex-prime minister Khan was arrested in May last year after being ousted from office and mounting an unprecedented campaign of defiance against the nation's powerful military leaders. His detention over graft allegations sparked nationwide unrest, some targeting armed forces installations, and prompting rare prosecutions of civilians in military courts. Amnesty International called the move "an intimidation tactic, designed to crack down on dissent" and said it was "contrary to international law".

Military courts are largely opaque, but after months of confidentiality the military public relations wing named 25 people who have been prosecuted. All of the convicted are men and 14 have been sentenced to a decade of "rigorous imprisonment", the military said with the remaining 11 set to serve lesser prison terms. "All sentences announced by the military courts are disproportionate and excessive," said a spokesman for Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. "These sentences are rejected."

The verdicts were announced just three weeks after the capital Islamabad was gripped by fresh unrest, as tens of thousands of Khan supporters flooded in to demand his release.

The government said at least five security personnel were killed whilst PTI allege at least 10 of their own were shot dead by security forces before crowds retreated.

'Political terrorism'

A military statement did not make clear what crime each person had been convicted of or when, listing only the location of their offence. The shortest sentence meted out was two years.

During the May 2023 unrest Pakistan "witnessed tragic incidents of politically provoked violence and arson at multiple places," the military statement said. "These blatant acts of violence not only shocked the nation but also underscored necessity of checking this unacceptable attempt of political terrorism." The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said "no civilian should be tried in a military court under any circumstances". "This contravenes the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Pakistan as well as the international human rights obligations to which Pakistan is a state party," the organisation said in a statement on

social media platform X.

Former cricket star Khan served as prime minister from 2018 to 2022, when he was ousted by parliament in a no-confidence vote. He blamed the then-head of the powerful military establishment for his downfall. Pakistan's generals are considered the country's political kingmakers and have directly ruled the nation for decades at a time. Khan's May 2023 detention lasted a matter of days but he was re-arrested three months later and has remained imprisoned since, facing a parade of court cases he claims are politically motivated.

Meanwhile, PTI was targeted by a sweeping crackdown following the unrest, with thousands of grassroots supporters and senior officials arrested. The 72-year-old was barred from running in February elections, which were marred by rigging allegations.

PTI defied the crackdown to win more seats than any other party, but a coalition of parties considered more pliable to military influence formed a government and shut them out of power. A United Nations panel of experts found in September that Khan's detention "had no legal basis and appears to have been intended to disqualify him from running for political office".

France Jails 8 Accused Who Beheaded Teacher For Showing Prophet's Caricature

Paris. A French court sentenced eight people to prison terms ranging from one to 16 years for their roles in a hate campaign that culminated in the murder of a teacher who had shown caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad in class, local media reported.

Days after Samuel Paty, 47, showed his pupils the caricatures in October 2020, an 18-year-old Chechen assailant stabbed and beheaded him outside his school in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, near Paris. The assailant was shot dead by police moments after.

Among those convicted on Friday was the father of a student whose false account of Paty's use of the caricatures triggered a wave of social media posts targeting the middle-school teacher. The court sentenced Brahim Chnina to 13 years in prison for criminal terrorist association, according to broadcaster Franceinfo. Chnina had published videos



falsely accusing the teacher of disciplining his daughter for complaining about the class, naming Paty and identifying his school. Abdelhakim Sefrioui, the founder of a headline Islamist organization, received a 15-year sentence. Both Sefrioui and Chnina were found guilty of inciting hatred against Paty.

Many Muslims consider any depiction of the Prophet Mohammad to be blasphemous. Sefrioui's lawyer said his client would appeal the decision, according to French media. Two associates of Paty's killer, Abdullak Anzorov, were also convicted. Naim Boudaoud and Azim Epsirhanov were sentenced to 16 years in prison for complicity in a terrorist killing. Both had denied wrongdoing, according to Franceinfo. Last year, a court found Chnina's daughter and five other adolescents guilty of participating in a premeditated conspiracy and helping prepare an ambush. Chnina's daughter, who was not in Paty's class when the caricatures were shown, was convicted of making false accusations and slanderous comments. French media reported that the 13-year-old made the allegations after her parents questioned why she had been suspended from school for two days.

Bangladesh Receives 1.16 Bn USD World Bank Financing For Inclusive, Climate-Resilient Development

The World Bank approved 1.16 billion USD to help Bangladesh improve health services, water and sanitation services and achieve greener and climate-resilient development.

Dhaka. The World Bank approved three operations totaling 1.16 billion USD to help Bangladesh improve health services, water and sanitation services and achieve greener and climate-resilient development.

"These new financing will bring to the people of Bangladesh essential services such as health and water and sanitation while laying the foundation for clean, climate resilient and sustainable development," Abdoulaye Seck, World Bank country director for Bangladesh and Bhutan, said in a statement received here Friday, as Bangladesh is among the most vulnerable countries to climate change and faces the greatest pollution challenges. According to the Washington-based lender, the 500-



million-dollar Second Bangladesh Green and Climate Resilient Development Credit will support reforms to help the country's transition to green and climate-resilient development, Xinhua news agency reported. The 379-million-dollar Health,

Nutrition, and Population Sector Development Program-For-Results will help improve access to quality health and nutrition services and build resilient health systems in Sylhet and Chattogram divisions. The 280-million-dollar

Chattogram Water Supply Improvement Project will provide safe water through new and rehabilitated piped water connections to over 1 million people in Chattogram. It will build about 200,000 new household water connections and provide improved sanitation services to about 100,000 people in low-income communities. This project is part of a World Bank South Asia regional initiative or program of programs to provide Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services to about 100 million people across the region by 2035. The project will also help the Chattogram Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (CWASA) improve operational efficiency and financial sustainability and address issues related to water loss such as high levels of leakage, metering inaccuracies, and illegal connections. It will help reduce water losses by installing new water meters and operationalising 46 Smart District Metered Areas (DMAs) for reliable water supply, leakage detection, and real-time tracking of water consumption.

NEWS BOX

Woman kills son by slitting throat, attempts suicide in Chennai

CHENNAI. A 31-year-old woman allegedly slit the throats of her two sons aged four and one-and-a-half, before attempting to die by suicide in Kilpauk on Saturday. While the younger son, Punith Kumar, succumbed to his injury, Divya and Lakshan Kumar are receiving treatment at Kilpauk Medical College (KMC). According to the police, Divya married Ramkumar, an employee of a private courier firm, in September 2019. They had some differences and the woman along with their two sons, moved out from their house in Perungalathur two months ago. They had since been living with Divya's parents in Kilpauk.

Divya took her sons and locked themselves up in a room on Saturday immediately after



a phone conversation with Ramkumar, a police source said. Sensing something amiss, her aunt Padmavathi tried to open the door forcefully.

She managed to open it after some time and saw the trio battling for their lives. Padmavathi alerted her neighbours, who rushed them to a hospital. Kilpauk police have registered a case.

Incessant downpour affects paddy crops, Odisha Government seeks report

BHUBANESWAR. Even as paddy procurement is underway in many districts, the low-pressure induced incessant rains have caused widespread damage to standing paddy and vegetable crops in large parts of the state. Maximum rain-related loss is apprehended from coastal pockets where vast stretches of farmlands with harvest-ready paddy crops are waterlogged.

While reports on crop situation from the districts are still awaited, principal secretary of Agriculture and Farmers' Empowerment department Arabinda Padhee took stock of the situation on Saturday and asked district officials of the department to send in their report by Sunday, official sources said. The meeting was informed that rainfall warning was issued to Ganjam, Gajapati, Kendrapara and Jagatsinghpur with an advisory to farmers on measures to be undertaken to protect the crops and their harvest.

Khurda district which received the maximum rainfall of 75 mm in the last 24 hours reported maximum crop damage followed by Ganjam, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Puri and Cuttack districts. The unseasonal rains also damaged vegetable crops particularly cauliflower and recently planted potato seeds. However, the showers will help groundnut crops the most, sources in the department said.

Meanwhile, the state government has assured that compensation will be paid to farmers whose paddy got damaged at the mandis during the procurement process.

Kerala officials transport waste from Tamil Nadu villages back to their state

TIRUNELVELI. In a historic move, Kerala officials, including those from the Kerala State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) and Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, visited six sites in Tirunelveli villages where Kerala's biomedical, plastic, food, and other wastes had been illegally dumped. The officials began moving the waste with 16 Kerala-based trucks to transport it back to their state, following directives from the Southern Bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT), which took suo motu case based on TNIE's report. This marks the first time in history that the waste dumped in Tamil Nadu by Kerala is being sent back to its original state. The Kerala team, led by Dr Gopukumar, Public Health Officer of Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, arrived at the Government Girls' High School in Nadu Kallur at 8.55 am for discussions with Tamil Nadu officials, including Cheranmahadevi Sub-Collector Arpit Jain, Tirunelveli Assistant Collector (Training) Ambica Jain, tahsildars, block development officers, and police inspectors. Officials from both states formed six teams to visit the sites where the waste was dumped. At 9.50 am, excavators began loading the waste onto trucks. The illegally dumped waste was discovered in Kodaganallur, Palavoor, two sites in Kondanagaram, Sivaniyapuram.

Two teens, thousands of books, mission to rewrite futures

MADURAI. In the urban jungle of Chennai, where childhood dreams often wither under the scorching sun of inequality, two teenagers rose to defy the odds. Aditi Srivatsan and Neha Govindarajan knew the stakes were high. Failure was not an option. Their weapon of choice: books, each page a seed of hope, ready to blossom in the most barren of landscapes.

In 2023, Aditi and Neha, both 17 years old and residents of Chennai, set out to bridge the educational divide for underprivileged children. This passion culminated in the Blue Lilac Foundation, a movement devoted to collecting and distributing books to schools that lacked resources. Collaborating with local organisations and homeowners' associations, they managed to collect and donate around 4,700 books. Heed for this initiative had been planted years ago in Neha's heart. "My grandmother was forced to abandon her education after the fifth grade due to societal pressures," Neha recalled.

"She would often share her unfulfilled thirst for learning. That stuck with me, making me realise how many children still lack access to basic resources." It was from these reflections that the idea of the Blue Lilac Foundation was born. When Aditi proposed collecting books for underprivileged children, Neha initially hesitated. "But Aditi reminded me that one doesn't need to wait until their thirties to engage in social service. So, we decided to act," Neha explained. Their first step took them to Lanco Apartments in Sholinganallur, a posh housing complex. Nervous at first, they nevertheless approached residents to collect books, explaining their vision. To their delight the residents responded enthusiastically, donating



generously. By June 2023, they had amassed 350 books, ranging from textbooks to fiction, which they donated to Sarojini Varadappan Girls School in Chennai. For Aditi, the inspiration came from her grandfather, AR Sridhar, a retired officer from the Reserve Bank of India, who instilled in her a lifelong commitment to giving back. One day, while sorting through old books on his bookshelf, Aditi realised that over 100 of her schoolbooks were gathering dust. That's when she knew they had to do something bigger.

The duo's efforts didn't stop at one book drive. Their next milestone was a visit to the New Hope New Life Orphanage, home to girls from marginalised communities, including daughters of farmers and daily wage workers.

Aditi recalled one moment that left a lasting impression. A young girl, barely seven, eagerly asked them a flurry of questions. "Who invented the telephone?" "Why do elephants

weigh so much?" "Who made the first light bulb?" "Her curiosity was boundless," Aditi said. "It reminded us why we started this journey." The impact of their work didn't stop with books. Recognising the need for more, Aditi and Neha decided to tackle two critical issues: English proficiency and financial literacy. "Many students in government-aided schools struggle with English," Neha explained. "But it's not just about knowing the language — it's about building confidence. These girls often hesitate to speak for fear of making mistakes."

We want to change that." They are working with educators to develop an English curriculum that emphasises conversational skills and practical usage. Financial literacy became another area of focus. "The ability to manage money wisely can change lives," Aditi said. "We're teaching them how to budget, save, and identify scams. These lessons can protect them from exploitation and empower them to secure their futures." This initiative has inspired many students from local schools to organise their own book drives, creating a ripple effect that promises to reach even more children.

"It's incredible to see how one idea can spark so much action," Neha said. The response from the community has been overwhelming. In the weeks following their initial book drive, local schools and apartment complexes began reaching out to Aditi and Neha, eager to get involved. As Aditi and Neha continue their journey, they are not just turning pages in books but also rewriting the stories of countless lives. Each book becomes a doorway to new opportunities, and every child represents a spark of potential waiting to ignite.

Private suppliers set to double tanker water prices in Kochi from January 1

KOCHI. Apartment complexes and establishments relying on tanker services for potable water in Kochi could be in for a difficult start to the new year, if the decision of the suppliers is anything to go by. The water transporters, who currently charge 10 paise per litre, are set to increase the tariffs for water tankers having a capacity of more than 18,000 litres by a whopping 100% from January 1. "It has been 11 years since we increased the rates. Even as all our operational expenses have skyrocketed, we are forced to go to distant places to collect water," R Ramachandran, secretary of the Ernakulam District Drinking Water Transporters' Welfare Association, told TNIE. There are at least 450 tankers supplying potable water to apartments, restaurants, hotels, hospitals, hostels, corporate establishments, Coast Guard, Indian Navy, and even to the collectorate. The tankers --



with capacities ranging from 2,000, 6,000, 12,000, 18,000, 23,000, 25,000, 30,000 and 35,000 litres -- make at least five trips a day. Going by the proposed rate, an establishment using the services of an 18,000-litre tanker will have to shell out Rs 3,600 per trip. Five such trips could raise the cost of water to Rs 18,000 per day, besides service charge. Eloor and

Choomikkara panchayats had recently slapped stop memos to suppliers, preventing them from drawing water from wells near the Periyar.

This is another reason for the hike in rates. We are now solely depending on the Kerala Water Authority and a few wells on the outskirts of the city to source water," said V A Zakir Husain, president of the association. Besides the shortage of drinking water, the increase in expenses such as fuel charge, vehicle insurance, road tax, spare parts price, wages and allowances for employees, and maintenance cost pose challenges to their profession.

Meanwhile, the president of the Ernakulam District Residents' Association Apex Council, Ranganaatha Prabhu, said the Kerala Water Authority and the corporation have the responsibility to supply free water to all citizens in the city.

Puthuvype Beach Race: Sun, Sand & Speed

KOCHI. Among the slew of programmes that make up the Vypeen Tourism Mela, perhaps nothing is as exhilarating as the Puthuvype Beach Race. Held every year on December 26, the event sees the beach turn into a festival ground as riders and riding enthusiasts descend from all corners of Kerala and nearby states. This year will be no different. "It will be akin to Thrissur Pooram here, as is the case every year," says Emmanuel Abin, one of the organisers. "But this year," he adds, "it's extra



special as it is our 25th year." Indeed, since its inception in 2000, the Beach Race has evolved into a mainstay event not just of the Mela, but in the national racing scene. "For many years now, we have had teams from various bike companies taking part in the festival, from TVS, Hero, KTM, etc. National racing champions too have featured."

We expect even more riders to join this year," says Sachin Joseph, another organiser. To cater to them and other enthusiasts, the team behind the race has opened two new categories - the ladies and the scooter class. "This will be the first time a racing event for women will be held on the beach," Sachin adds.

Odisha's forest size grows but tribal districts lose green sheen

BHUBANESWAR. Odisha is among the handful of states to have achieved an overall growth in forest size but the positive news fails to betray the fact that a number of tribal districts have lost green cover. The India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023, which was released on Saturday, reveals that Odisha's forest size, excluding the tree cover, increased to 52,433.56 sq km in 2023 from 52,281.67 sq km in 2021, registering a growth of 151.89 sq km during the period.

As per the report, the state's forest and tree cover that stood at 58,038.44 sq km in 2021 increased to 58,597.01 sq km in 2023, posting a growth of 558.57 sq km over the previous assessment. With this increase, Odisha's current forest and tree cover stands at 37.63 per cent of its total geographical area of 1,55,707 sq km. A total 33,040.47 sq km forest cover falls under recorded forest area, while the remaining 19,393.09 sq km is outside the recorded forest area of the state, the report stated.

However, a comparison drawn between two biennial reports, ISFR 2021 and 2023 shows that at least 12 districts, mostly the tribal-dominated, have recorded a decline in their forest cover. Kalahandi reported the highest 61.94 sq km drop in its forest cover over the previous assessment. From 2,438.96 sq km in 2021, the western Odisha district's

forest cover reduced to 2,376.91 sq km in 2023. Its medium dense forest cover came down to 713.87 sq km in 2023 from 732.04 sq km in 2021, while open



Kalahandi reported the highest 61.94 sq km drop in its forest cover over the previous assessment.

forest cover fell from 1,348.04 sq km to 1,294.94 sq km during the period. Keonjhar, another tribal dominated district, recorded a drop in its forest cover by 30.92 sq km over the two years.

The district has been robbed off around 29.84 sq km forest cover between 2021 and 2023, with open forest bearing a loss of 24.48 sq km. Other key tribal districts

Golden Chariot chugs with slim crowd after six years

BENGALURU. After a gap of six years, the state's own luxury express train - Golden Chariot - chugged off from the Yeshwanthpur Railway Station's Platform-6 to Kochi on Saturday.

The trip - Jewel of the South - was flagged off by Karnataka Tourism Minister HK Patil with 38 international tourists on board, while the train has 80-bed capacity. It is operated by the Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation (KSTDC) along with the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) and Indian Railways. IRCTC, which is marketing the train, has priced the ticket at Rs 67,961.79 (\$800). The five-night-six-day circuit will cover Bengaluru, Mysuru, Kanchipuram, Mahabalipuram, Thanjavur, Chettinad/ Karaiikudi, Kochi and Chertala/ Mararikulam in Kerala and back to Bengaluru.

Patil told the media that Golden Chariot is a special train for South India as it showcases the culture, tourism, history, nature, wildlife and heritage of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. "The train's operations had been stopped from 2018 due to financial reasons. Now it has been started in cooperation with agencies from the central government. We have entered into a partnership with the Railways and hope to make profits," he said.

An IRCTC official said three special customised trips were made in 2020 and 2021, but the occupancy was very poor. "As a new feature, we have introduced a provision for people/ companies to book the entire train and it can be taken on the routes (chosen from the itineraries already prepared by KSTDC and IRCTC). This chartered train service option has been availed by two private companies who have made bookings to take the train for trips on December 29 and February 13, 2025." KSTDC officials, who were present on the occasion, said that for February 2025, bookings have been made to run the train on the Pride of Karnataka circuit, which is a five-night-six-day trip, covering Bengaluru, Nanjangud, Mysuru, Halebidu, Chikkamagaluru, Hospet and Goa. KSTDC sources said the operations had stopped not just because of poor bookings and the corporation was unable to break even.

Security confiscates books from readers of 'Cubbon Reads'

BENGALURU. Security guards of Cubbon Park confiscated books from individual part of 'Cubbon Reads', a quiet reading community, leading to uproar by netizens condemning the A video of the guards confiscating the books and the community questioning the act has gone viral on social media, with many netizens tagging the Bengaluru police, pointing that the seizure of books is misuse of power and demanding suitable action. However, officials from the horticulture department defended the confiscation and stated that the group had to take permission for large gatherings. Cubbon Reads, a book reading initiative that started in Bengaluru, inspired a worldwide reading movement

and even earned the praise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Started by Harsh Snehanthu, an entrepreneur and Shruti Sah, a brand communication professional, Cubbon Reads community, meets every Saturday between 9 am and 2 pm at Cubbon Park, where people sit and read under the tree. On Saturday, people from Cubbon Reads had organised a book distribution event in Cubbon Park. Over 600 people gathered opposite Bal Bhavan in Cubbon Park around 12 pm to take part in the book distribution event. They were wrapping the books in plastic and were seen carrying plastic soft drink bottles", Deputy Director (Cubbon Park), Horticulture Department G Kusuma told T



The group did not seek any permission from the authorities for organizing the event inside Cubbon Park, she said and added that the organizers are required to take permission and follow the laid down

rules. "Without consulting any authorities, over 600 people gathered. If anything wrong had happened, who would have been responsible," she questioned. The security guards confiscated the books, warned the members, and let them go, she added that no complaint was registered. "If more than 30 people gather and organise any event, they must seek permission from the authorities," Kusuma stated. She also clarified that there is no objection to reading books in Cubbon Park. Cubbon Reads shared the video of the confiscation and said that they strongly condemn taking someone's private properties, books in this case, without consent, adding that it is no less than stealing.

Chautala was an amiable ally, a fierce opponent

WITH the death of former CM Om Prakash Chautala, an era in Haryana politics has come to an end. Known for his strong likes and dislikes, 'OPC', as he was known to many, was equally amiable when he chose to be. He could be a fierce critic of his political opponents at one moment and dining with them the next moment, if it suited his interests. He would often say there are no permanent enemies or friends in politics. He put this philosophy to use on several occasions.

In 1998, his party, the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), contested the Lok Sabha elections in alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Haryana. He assured the BSP supremo Mayawati that he would never go with the BJP or the Congress. But immediately after the elections, he extended support to BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Chautala had a strong reason to do so. At that time, Bansi Lal's Haryana Vikas Party (HVP) was heading the government in the state in alliance with the BJP. Chautala hoped that his support to Vajpayee would lead to collapse of the Bansi Lal government. But due to Sushma Swaraj's firm support to Bansi Lal, the BJP continued its alliance with the HVP.

Within months, however, Chautala got another opportunity when after 13 months the Vajpayee government collapsed. In the 1999 General Election, Chautala's party won five seats. The Vajpayee government was again short of the majority mark. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Parkash Singh Badal played a crucial role in persuading Chautala to again extend support to Vajpayee. Badal and Chautala's father, Devi Lal, shared a very close bond. They were known to be 'pag watt (exchanging of turbans) brothers. OPC and the entire Devi Lal clan used to treat Badal like the patriarch of their family. However, this time Chautala agreed to support Vajpayee only after getting a written assurance from him that the BJP would withdraw its support to the Bansi Lal government within a few months. Soon, the INLD formed the government in Haryana in alliance with the BJP and a few defectors from the HVP.

Chautala was known for his strong-arm tactics. He would often say a chief minister is of no use if a sleeping person does not jump out of his bed on hearing his name. In 1999, Chautala, however, worked hard to change this image, at least for the first few months. Once I jokingly told him "Chaudhry sahib aap ki yeh shaleenta aap ko suit nahin karti (this modestly does not suit you)". He laughed and said one changes with time. OPC called for a midterm Assembly poll in 2000 and gained absolute majority. After that he was back to his old self. In 1991, when Chautala became the Chief Minister after his father Devi Lal became the Deputy Prime Minister, OPC had to become a member of the Assembly within six months to meet a constitutional requirement. Two byelections, Meham (Rohtak) and Thanesar (Kurukshetra), were due. Several delegations from Kurukshetra met Chautala and urged him to contest from their constituency. In Meham, his protégé Anand Singh Dangri, who had fallen out with him, challenged him to contest from there. When Chautala visited Ambala where I was then posted, I asked him why he was not contesting from Thanesar from where his victory was assured. The GT Road belt had never got a chief minister from the area and its people were yearning for one. He said: "Nyota to vapas karna padta hai (Challenge has to be answered)." When I insisted that in that case why not contest from both the constituencies, his reply was what is the use of causing another byelection later. However, after the infamous mayhem in Meham, Chautala contested from two places to become an MLA.

Whenever he was extremely polite with someone, it used to be an indication that the person was in for trouble. Once during an Assembly election, Karan Singh Dalal, a fierce critic of Chautala, crossed him to go to the Speaker's podium. Chautala politely asked Dalal how was his elder brother. Dalal was very surprised at the courtesy. It was only after Dalal came out of the Assembly that he learnt that his brother had been booked in a murder case.

Why agri draft policy is not inclusive or progressive

The policy framework should be redrafted after public consultations with farmer unions and meaningful engagement with state governments and experts.

THE draft National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing was circulated by the Centre to the states last month, inviting suggestions for its improvement. It has sparked a nationwide debate as well as apprehensions among different stakeholders. The draft accepts that small and marginal farmers are still not able to benefit from bumper production and growth in the agriculture sector. A significant gap still exists in rural and urban economies.

It admits that most farmers are struggling for optimum income due to highly fragmented landholdings, increasing cost of production, lack of demand-driven production, accessibility to good markets and optimum realisation of value for their produce.

The major marketing reforms proposed in the draft include permission to set up private wholesale markets and allow direct wholesale purchase from farm gate to organised retailers, processors, exporters and bulk buyers. It has also proposed for deregulation of perishables outside the market yard; declare cold storages, warehouses and silos as deemed market yards and permit establishment and operation of private e-trading platforms. THE draft National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing was circulated by the Centre to the states last month, inviting suggestions for its improvement. It has sparked a nationwide debate as well as apprehensions among different stakeholders. The draft accepts that small and marginal farmers are still not able to benefit from bumper production and growth in the agriculture sector. A significant gap still exists in rural and urban economies.

It admits that most farmers are struggling for optimum income due to highly fragmented landholdings, increasing cost of production, lack of demand-driven production, accessibility to good markets and optimum realisation of value for their produce.

The major marketing reforms proposed in the draft include permission to set up private wholesale markets and allow direct wholesale purchase from farm gate to organised retailers, processors, exporters and bulk buyers. It has also proposed for deregulation of perishables outside the market yard; declare cold storages, warehouses and silos as deemed market yards and permit establishment and operation of private e-trading platforms. The draft does not specify what type of financial and other

support the government will provide to bridge the gaps between marketing and auxiliary infrastructure and carry out institutional reforms.

Suggestion to roll out a 'price insurance scheme' to insure the farmers' income at the time of sowing is apprehended to apply to contract farming by corporates or FPOs operated by them. What will be the basis for compensation — the MSP or contracted price and how the government will ensure it in a



deregulated market? The experience of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana in this context has not been encouraging for the farmers. The process of making payments to the farmers is also not trustworthy in an unregulated market.

Given this background, the effectiveness of an 'empowered agricultural marketing reform committee' is dubious. This appears to be a mechanism where all BJP-ruled states will be forced to accept the government's proposals so that any resistance at the national level due to genuine issues can be sidelined. The draft envisages making intense efforts to bring all farmers under one or other farmers' organisations i.e. cooperatives, FPOs, self-help groups, etc. to reduce their inaccessibility to market and price uncertainty. However, it has been observed that in many cases, the primary processing alone is not sufficient to enable the FPOs or other farmers groups to gain substantial income for their members. However, the provision related to value chain centric infrastructure (VCCI) does not commit firmly to providing all-out support to FPOs to set up

the VCCI. The 'ease of doing agri-trade' at the expense of protection of farmers' interests and 'promotion of contract farming' again reek of revival of the earlier farm laws. A narrative is building up among the farmers and other stakeholders that the reintroduction of basics of the repealed laws by the government under a new guise should be resisted.

The farmers' concerns about the weakening of the marketing infrastructure of markets, regulated by agricultural produce market committees (APMC) over time, are also not ill-founded. The policy draft suggests that the states consider allowing the buying of contracted produce outside the mandi yard and waive off the market fee when produce is bought for the purpose of processing and export to give impetus to these sectors. Organised retailers, processors, exporters and bulk buyers will be able to make direct purchases from the farm gate or at deemed market yards where they can initially offer higher prices to the farmers due to lower taxes. It will also affect the income of APMC markets due to lower arrivals. Thus, over time, these will become unviable.

Though the draft policy takes cognisance of the fact that agricultural marketing is a state subject under the Seventh Schedule in the Constitution, its mere glimpse

brings out the government agenda of addressing the long-standing challenges in agricultural marketing through a unified national approach. To allay the fears of farmers and to make it inclusive, the policy framework should be redrafted after public consultations with farmer unions and meaningful engagement with state governments and experts. Public investment in agro-processing and cold chains for supply and storage should be increased to strengthen the agricultural marketing infrastructure. Indian agriculture is facing a series of crises — income crisis due to the falling or stagnant incomes; degradation of natural resources; adverse impact of climate change, and last but not the least the loss of interest of the younger generation in agriculture. An inclusive and progressive agricultural marketing policy can go a long way in meeting these challenges by addressing major issues like the MSP, higher public investment and a participatory quick response system for responding to changes in the international market.

IAF training hiccups

CAG red-flags glaring deficiencies

THE highlight of the Indian Air Force's (IAF) 92nd Raising Day celebrations in October this year was a typically spectacular air show, whose theme was 'Bhartiya Vayu Sena — Saksham, Sashakt, Atmanirbhar (potent, powerful and self-reliant)'. Those three words were supposed to reflect the IAF's "unwavering dedication to safeguarding the nation's airspace". The ground reality, however, is not all that rosy. In a report tabled in Parliament on Wednesday, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has flagged deficiencies in the training of IAF pilots. Under intense scrutiny is the Pilatus PC-7 Mk-II aircraft, which is being used to impart Stage-1 flying training since 2013. The performance audit has noted that 25 per cent of these aircraft reported 38 snags due to engine oil leaks between 2013 and 2021. No less worrying are the delays in



the IAF's aircraft modernisation plans that have affected stages 2 and 3 of pilot training for transport and helicopter power.

Outdated equipment is another area of concern. The world's fourth-largest air force cannot afford to compromise on the upgrade of training simulators and aircraft. Trainee pilots need state-of-the-art technology to hone their skills. Issues such as engine oil leaks can dampen the spirits of aspirants who want to soar high and protect India's skies. Lowering the bar can prove to be a recipe for disaster.

There are problems not only in terms of quality but also quantity. The shortage of pilots has risen from 486 to 596 in about six years, as the recruitment has fallen short of the targeted intake. The CAG has done its job. Now it is up to the IAF and the government to take corrective action on priority. This vital pillar of India's defence edifice must not be allowed to lose its much-touted potency and

Bhagwat offers balm to the soul

THE GREAT GAME: It has taken the RSS chief to remind his own govt about the nation's diversity

AS the year turns, it may not be a far cry to say that 2024, in many ways, has belonged to RSS chief Mohan Madhukar Rao Bhagwat. The RSS chief's latest comments on Thursday in Pune, during a lecture on "India — the Vishwaguru" at the Sahjeevan Vyakhyanmala lecture series, seem startling enough to provide balm to the soul. To say that "mandir-masjid disputes are unacceptable"; that "after the construction of the Ram Mandir, some people think they can become leaders of Hindus by raking up similar issues in new places and that this is not acceptable"; to ask, "who is a minority and who is a majority" and answer that question himself, "everyone is equal." Perhaps Bhagwat realised that the competitive politics over who is a better Hindu leader had to be properly nipped

agwat's comments, 75 years after the Constitution guaranteed a secular republic, should have been par for the course. Instead, they are the stuff of relief — and headlines. It has taken the RSS chief to remind his own government that the nation consists of folks with bewilderingly diverse views, traditions, customs, religions, language. And that if this 'khichri' has to retain its distinctive flavour, then maybe there's no point trying to stuff it into the One Nation One People straitjacket. Predictably, those on the political left are looking for a chink in the armour of his Pune speech — maybe something is lost in translation, since Bhagwat spoke in his native Marathi. Not so predictably, those on the political right are perhaps also wondering why Bhagwat is unhooking the saffron flag from its stump, especially since Hindutva's victory over Muslims is hovering around the horizon. It's not clear when the penny dropped and what caused Bhagwat to make the comments he did in Pune. After all, for him to say that "we need to stay together" — Hindus, Muslims, Christians, all — mere weeks after the RSS began the year-long celebration of its 100th anniversary and on

the eve of Christmas (which the Modi government marks as "good governance day", a working day to boot) — is both singular and interesting.

Perhaps Bhagwat realised, after five people were unnecessarily killed in police firing after the communities clashed over the architectural antecedents of the Sambhal mosque a few weeks ago, that the competitive politics over who is a better Hindu leader had to be properly nipped in the bud. Perhaps he saw that India's 200 million Muslims, as much as 14 per cent of the population, had to live peacefully and equably with the rest, and that even contemplating another partition of the country was beyond the realm of contemplation. Perhaps he recognised the dangers lurking closer than anyone else. Perhaps he looked around himself and saw how — and why — Islamic nations like Syria and Afghanistan and Palestine had fallen, like ninepins, in the past couple of years. Where would India's Muslims go if they were not allowed to live like equal citizens in their own country by bulldozer hordes determined to raze their self-respect to the ground?

After all, back in 2018, Bhagwat had told reporters in Delhi that "without Muslims, Hindutva is incomplete." And last year, when the single Bench of the Allahabad High Court allowed a survey of the Gyanvapi masjid to see whether it had once been a temple and TV journalists began to palpitate over the implications of the decision, Bhagwat calmly said, "Why look for a shivling beneath every mosque?" Certainly, it is nobody's case that the RSS chief and PM Modi are not peas in the same pod or that the RSS has not benefited enormously from the BJP being in power over the last



decade. Of course, it has. The RSS knows that if not for Modi, there would be no Ram temple in Ayodhya or its expansion in 39 countries worldwide. The RSS chief is clear that all Indians of all religions are "Hindus", because once upon a time they were that.

In his Vijaya Dashami address earlier in October, Bhagwat made it clear that he had no time for "wokeism and cultural Marxism". He pointed out that Bangladeshi Hindus needed help from India. "Even the Gods do not care for the weak... What happened in Bangladesh should be a lesson for Hindu society. Weakness is a crime," he added. But Bhagwat's RSS is interesting in many more ways. It is credibly said that Sangh cadres, who often tip the scales between winning and losing, did not enthusiastically campaign for BJP candidates in the 2024 General Election like they had done previously

— one key reason for the party's lack of majority in Parliament. And that the RSS later decided to reverse course and pull out all the stops in the Haryana and Maharashtra polls. Certainly, the BJP is far more strengthened having Bhagwat as the wind in its sails.

Significantly, the RSS chief's comments come within days of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna ordering courts not to accept any fresh suits or pass orders on existing petitions seeking the survey of mosques and whether any temple structures lie beneath. Khanna pointed out that the Supreme Court was separately hearing petitions on reopening the 1991 Places of Worship Act, which had sealed the character of the place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947. For the time being,

Khanna has shut down all legal conversation on whether mosques-were-once-temples. At least for the moment, Bhagwat is also trying to calm down his aroused flock — be satisfied with the Ram Mandir, he's saying, no need to take over Kashi or Mathura or dig under the Sambhal shahi masjid or the Ajmer Sharif dargah. It's more than likely that Bhagwat knows the inside story of the mediation that took place between Hindu and Muslim groups which resulted in the 2019 Supreme Court verdict that gave the 2.77 acres constituting the Ram Janmabhoomi sanctum sanctorum to the "Hindu side". Bhagwat probably knows the give-and-take that took place over months, why the Muslims gave up what they did and what they were promised in exchange.

Here's how to give a delicious twist to

Regular Food



Kheer with orange essence, pulao with a hint of jasmine tea, or how about butter chicken with some herbs?
There's so much you can do to break monotony in everyday food

Tadka bread snack (Serves 2)

Malti says, "This is one of my signature dishes, which is incredibly simple to make with leftover pav or bread."

Ingredients

- Sunflower or olive oil: 2 tbsp
- Brown mustard seeds: ¼ tsp
- Onion, peeled and chopped: 1
- Green chillies, chopped: 2
- Turmeric: ¼ tsp
- Sugar (optional): ½ tsp
- Ground cumin: ¼ tsp
- Salt: ¼ tsp
- Yogurt: 1 tbsp
- Lemon juice: 1 tsp
- Bread, cut in cubes: 4 slices
- Fresh coriander for garnish
- Tomato, chopped: 1

Method

Heat oil in a small saucepan, add mustard seeds. Once they start popping, tip in onion and chillies, and stir for a minute. Then add the turmeric, sugar, cumin and salt and continue to saute for one minute. Pour in the yogurt and lemon juice, stirring continuously. Lastly, fold in the bread carefully making sure it doesn't crumble too much. Cook for two more minutes. Serve sprinkled with coriander and chopped tomatoes.

Tip: Add a dollop of yogurt over the finished dish to cool it.

Play with spices

Aamchoor powder

Amchoor has a pleasant sweet-sour aroma and a tangy, fruity flavour. A great way to use it would be as part of a spice rub for grilled meats or as meat marinade. Its sharp, acidic tang would definitely complement the smoky flavour of juicy, grilled meat.

Poppy seeds

While poppy seeds don't have a distinct flavour, they work well when combined with other spices. You could say it has a base flavour. Slightly nutty, it's great for enhancing the taste of a dish. Lightly roast them and sprinkle on your rotis, or season your salads, chutney, fish etc.

Za'atar

For those who don't like 'hot' spices, try za'atar for seafood dishes. It will lend your dish a mix of flavours comprising of dried mint leaves, dried coriander leaves, sesame seeds and rock salt.

cheddar cheese to the marinade works up a treat when preparing Malai Murgh Tikka. It adds to the creaminess and the subtle warm flavours of this Mughlai style North Indian dish."

Desi tastes, videsi twist

In recent times, restaurant menus have come up with interesting twists of popular Indian flavours. Here are some options for you to explore:

1. Mango jamun is a sinful combination of mango mousse and gulab jamuns paired with the unusual gulkand chutney.
2. Coconut Creme Brulee is an Indian take on the classic French dessert — the sweetness of the coconut adds to the rich smoky flavours of the cream.
3. The khichdi parmigiano elevates the staple khichdi to a sophisticated delight when paired with parmesan cheese and exotic truffle oil.
4. Boondi Cheesecake, Gulab Jamun Brulee and Madras Coffee Mousse are among the sinful names on some restaurant menus.

UK-based chef and food writer Manju Malti says a few years back she walked into a small mithai shop in Ludhiana, Punjab, and discovered something known as Bourvita barfi. "It tasted divine. The maltiness of the milk chocolate worked well with the richness of khoya. I asked the shop keeper how he made it and he said he just mixed the chocolate milk powder with a bit of sugar and folded it into the thickened whole milk."

Malti, who hosts cookery theatres around Britain on Indian food, suggests, "Adding grated

Thou shall never have to complain that everyday food is boring, as chefs and cooks embrace the idea of 'new twists in local tastes'. These experiments with food come from the need of keeping away the 'boredom factor', as celebrity chef Vineet Bhatia calls it. "We should always aim to make it better and beautiful. It helps in opening up mindsets about how food can be modified," he said recently.

The internationally renowned chef talks of simple twists like giving kheer a Banarasi paan flavour and roasting chicken with Darjeeling tea leaves. "The Darjeeling tea leaves are so old and world famous, and one would have hardly thought the

wonderful taste and aroma it can bring to roasted chicken. There is so much inspiration in India and constant relearning that can happen on the food front," he says. Actor and foodie Arjan Bajwa agrees. Eggs are an everyday feature on his menu, but he doesn't ever have to worry of getting bored of them. Simple changes in the seasonings like switching from garlic to curry leaves and cumin does the trick, he says. For Bajwa, it was during a meal at a small food joint in Canada that the idea of using different ingredients in tested recipes struck him. "At this place run by an Indian, I was served Italian pasta with mango, amla and garlic pickle. And it tasted amazing."

Noodle chaat with Manchurian sauce



Bite into this delectable crispy fried noodles, topped with Manchurian sauce and crunch vegetables. Enjoy!

- Preparation time: 20 minutes
- Cooking time: 20 minutes Serves: 4
- Ingredients:
- 4 cups boiled noodles
- Soy sauce: 2 tbsp
- Vinegar: 1 tsp Corn flour: 1 tbsp
- Green onions: 4 nos
- Garlic: 8 cloves Ginger: 2 inch piece, grated
- Tomato ketchup: 4tbsp
- Spring onions: 2
- Finely chopped vegetables (carrots, capsicum, cabbage): 1 cup
- Vegetable oil for frying
- Salt to taste
- Method:
- Finely chop the ginger, garlic, spring onion whites and greens.
- Mix together the tomato ketchup, soya sauce, corn flour, salt vinegar and 1 cup water.
- Heat sufficient oil in a pan.
- Deep-fry the noodles in hot oil till golden brown. Do this in batches.
- Heat 1-tablespoon oil in a wok or pan till fairly hot. Add chopped onions whites, garlic and ginger. Saute on high heat till golden in colour. Add the corn slurry. Bring to an immediate boil and cook till the gravy thickens.
- Put some fried noodles in a bowl. Add some chopped vegetables over it. Top with some Manchurian sauce. Garnish with chopped spring onion greens and serve.

Snacking your way to good health

Those who can not do much to improve their sedentary lifestyle are resorting to an assorted platter of nutritious quick-eats and mini meals to stay healthy and happy. We set out on a gastronomic tour of the city to sample the fibre rich tidbits that are changing the eating habits of urban folks... Edamame beans, dehydrated fruit mixes and granola bars are some of the items that conjure up the platter offered by Snackosaur.com, an online outlet that caters to orders from across the country. Entrepreneur Ankita Mendiratta Mehta, who co-founded the website, says, "There is a lack of healthy food choices for those who end up putting in longer hours at work or those who are often on the go. Although many people now watch what they eat, a sizeable amount of the urban population still gorges on junk food between meals. Traditional goodies are yummy, but at times harmful to health. The snacks that we provide are low in calories and include ingredients like millets, superfoods, whole wheat and fruits. Even the modes of cooking employed are healthy - mostly roasting and baking."



It is time to reinvent snacking by evaluating food trends as well as the preferences of people from different age groups. The nutrient-rich food boxes, which can be bought from select outlets in the city as well as online, are decently priced and often come with a note detailing the benefits of each item in them. These colourful concoctions of food contain high protein and fibre, meaning a healthy diet. According to Kushal Sharma, the co-founder of NutriTown, changing the eating habits of people requires radical thinking and a holistic approach towards achieving it. The meals offered by this outlet are claimed to be all-natural, sans maida, mayo and

You know you're turning into a serial snacker when following a diet plan seems like an uphill struggle, and ever so often, you end up grazing on unhealthy nibbles. While gyming is an obvious remedy to shed the excess flab lingering around your body, there's a new food mantra that may help you shrug off the guilt and continue munching.

cream. The metabolic system relies a lot on what we eat and drink throughout the day. Thus, a meal consisting of items such as Onion infused Cha patti, Soya Aata Kadi, Sprouts Subzi, Capsi cum Mint Ra ita and Chi ckpea Salad, complete with a spinach-based drink, could ensure our overall well-being. Apart from keeping a check on our cholesterol and blood sugar levels, consuming food that contains natural ingredients may help us detoxify and stay energised all day.

While this bunch of newbies in the city is using innovative methods to mix up crumbs and chunks to offer a delicious mouthful, a few others are engaged in giving a healthy retouch to home-made delicacies. Momscurry.com, for instance, involves home makers to ready up meals that are freshly-prepared and delivered at doorsteps. Manish Jha, who is at the helm of the portal, says, "It is very important that we eat our food on time. Skipping breakfast can actually make weight control more difficult. We endorse food that is conventional, yet ingenious and healthy. For example, litti chokha, a traditional cuisine from Bihar, could make an interesting quick-bite."

Indian food additives market to grow 12% CAGR

The growing demand for ready-to-eat food products coupled with rising preference for natural or organic food ingredients will grow at a compounded rate of 12 per cent and drive the food additives market in India over the next five years, a research firm recently.

According to a report from TechSci Research, the growth in per capita disposable income and rising urban middle class population are among the key market contributors which will drive the growth. "India has been witnessing significant rise in food consumption level, prevalence of processed and packaged food, convenience food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, bakery items, ready-to-eat food products and cereals. These trends are expected to drive remarkable growth in the demand for food additives in the country over the coming years," the report said. According to the report, due to cultural and regional diversities, the pattern of food consumption is not uniform in India resulting in the western region generating the highest demand for food additives. "The region is expected to continue spearheading the market due to the presence of a large number of food and beverage



manufacturing companies in the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra," it said. "Indian food additives market is dominated by the flavours segment due to their substantial use in beverages, savory items and cereals. With rising incidences of health problems like diabetes, consumers are also shifting towards all-natural, low calorie sweeteners such as Stevia. As a result, sweeteners are most likely to witness faster growth over the next five years and emerge as the leading segment in India food additives market through 2020," said research director at the firm Karan Chechi.

Indian skills will help build 'New Kuwait': PM Modi

Government to check commercial viability of D2M tech

NEW DELHI. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said the diaspora has filled Kuwait's canvas with the colours of Indian skills and assured that India has the manpower, skills and technology needed by a "New Kuwait". Modi, who is on a two-day visit to Kuwait at the invitation of Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, addressed a gathering of the Indian community in Kuwait City.

His visit to Kuwait is the first for any Indian PM to this Gulf nation in 43 years. The last PM to visit Kuwait was Indira Gandhi in 1981. Ahead of his arrival in Kuwait, Modi graciously agreed to meet 101-year-old Mangal Sain Handa, a former Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer, after a request from his granddaughter Shreya Juneja on X.

Juneja's post read, "Humble request to Hon'ble PM @narendramodi to meet my 101-year-old Nanaji, ex-IFS officer, in Kuwait during tmrw's interaction with the Indian Diaspora. Nana @MangalSainHanda is a great admirer of yours. Details have been emailed to your office." Modi's response was swift: "Absolutely! I look forward to meeting @MangalSainHanda Ji in Kuwait today."

Addressing the Indian diaspora, Modi said, "It takes you four hours to reach here from India but it took four decades for an Indian PM to travel to Kuwait." Greeting the gathering for the series of festivals that would be celebrated over next few weeks, he said, "You all have come from different parts of India, but looking at all of you, it feels like a mini India has gathered here."

"Every year, hundreds of Indians come to Kuwait; you have added Indian touch to Kuwaiti society. You have filled Kuwait's canvas with colours of Indian skills, mixed with the essence of India's talent, technology and tradition," the PM said. "India has manpower, skills and technology needed by New Kuwait," he added. Earlier, Modi met two Kuwaiti nationals who translated and published India's two iconic epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana in Arabic. He also signed copies of the Arabic versions of the two epics. "Happy to see Arabic translations of the Ramayan and Mahabharat. I compliment Abdullah Al-Baroun and Abdul Lateef Al-Nesef for their efforts in translating and publishing it. Their initiative highlights the popularity of



Indian culture globally," Modi said in a post on X.

Handa, a longtime admirer of Modi, was overwhelmed by the PM's warmth and approachability. In 2023, on the occasion of Handa's 100th birthday, PM Modi sent a letter to him, acknowledging his contributions to India's global engagement. In the letter, PM Modi wrote: "It is a pleasure to learn about your 100 birthday on September 1, 2023. Greetings and heartiest congratulations to you on this occasion." He noted Handa's role as an IFS officer, mentioning his work in promoting India's diplomatic relations and navigating complex global issues. The Prime Minister concluded the letter with warm wishes, saying, "May you continue to be blessed with good health and well-being." Handa,

touched by the gesture, expressed his gratitude on X, sharing the letter with the message, "My heartfelt gratitude to our hon'ble @PMOIndia @narendramodi for sending his kind wishes on my 100th birthday. It has been worth living for 100 years to witness India grow under his leadership & continue the stride."

Rann Utsav offers an otherworldly experience: PM Modi

PM Narendra Modi, ahead of his Kuwait visit on Saturday, urged people to explore the cultural richness and natural beauty of Gujarat's Kutch region, during the ongoing Rann Utsav. "Kutch awaits you all! Come, discover the pristine White Rann, the spectacular culture, and warm hospitality of Kutch during the ongoing Rann Utsav," Modi posted on microblogging site X. The festival, which began on December 1, is scheduled till February 28 next year, with extended arrangements to be made till March 25. Highlighting Kutch's attractions in detail on LinkedIn, Modi wrote, "Kutch's vast salt desert gleams under the moonlight, offering an otherworldly experience. It is equally celebrated for its thriving arts and crafts."

NEW DELHI. After the "reasonably successful" preliminary trials of direct-to-mobile (D2M) technology — telecast of live TV channels on smartphones without an internet connection — Prasar Bharati has sent a detailed proposal with findings to the government to seek approval for initiating large-scale testing to check its commercial feasibility.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting officials said the proposal is considered "seriously" and a go-ahead is expected within two months. Initial short-term technology trials have "reasonably" been successful, and now it is only a matter of time before the commercial viability is established, they added.

"Short-term trials of D2M have been completed. We need to carry out large-scale trials, which will take two to three years. The project plans will have to be worked out accordingly. The detailed proposal to check commercial viability of the technology has already been sent to the government. With large-scale trials, commercial viability will be tested. That is a major step, so a policy decision is required. The proposal sent by Prasar Bharati is being seriously considered. It will take another two months to get approval," said officials privy to the matter. After the policy decision, the tendering process for the selection of agencies to conduct trials will begin. The officials, however, said that actual field work might start in the next 8-10 months depending on decision at the government level. Initial trials were conducted in different cities, including Delhi, Noida and Bengaluru last year in collaboration with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur and Saankhya Labs. On the significance of second-stage 'long-term' trials, the officials said that during the small-scale trials, by and large, there are no difficulties as they are technology-focused trials. "Small-scale trials give you, by and large, an idea whether the technology will work or not because it has already been tested in the laboratory. In large-scale trials, you get a chance to check commercial viability. On that basis, people make investments," said an official.

The duration of the large-scale trial is only decided after an assessment, which will be undertaken by the agencies that will participate in the trial. "For trials, critical mass of people are required. They will not come overnight. One lakh people will not join or get the devices. It will be checked if people are actually using the devices. This takes time," the official said.

Live broadcasting of content directly to mobile devices is done using broadcast signals like television and radio, bypassing traditional cellular or internet data networks. For this, the phones or devices require specific hardware to receive and decode broadcast signals.

Delhi may get rain for 3 days next week, relief from pollution likely

New Delhi. Delhi and its neighbouring states, including Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan will likely see rainfall after Christmas from December 26 to 28. If the forecast holds, it could provide a respite for the people in these places, particularly Delhi, which has been seeing pollution levels ranging between 'very poor' and 'severe' for the past few days.

The rain is expected due to the interaction of a western disturbance in the region and a low-pressure area over the Bay of Bengal. Western disturbance refers to a storm originating in the Mediterranean region that brings sudden winter rain to the northwestern parts of India and its neighbouring countries. It will likely enter India on December 26. The western disturbance will form a cyclonic circulation over Rajasthan and other states on December 27.

The interaction of the two wind systems is expected to facilitate high moisture from both the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, and may persist until December 28. This will likely result in rainfall and snowfall over the western Himalayan region, particularly peaking on December 27 and 28. The plains of northwest India, including Delhi, and adjoining central areas will also experience rain on these dates. Thunderstorms accompanied by hailstorms are expected across Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh on December 27 and 28.

Delhi's Air Quality In 'Very Poor' Category As Cold Wave Grips National Capital

New Delhi. Delhi witnessed yet another day of toxic air on Sunday, with the Air Quality Index (AQI) remaining in the 'very poor' category for the second consecutive day. At 6 am, the overall AQI was recorded at 386, as per data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Parts of the city were covered by a dense layer of smog, reducing visibility and enforcing the strict implementation of GRAP Stage IV measures.

AQI readings from various parts of Delhi highlighted the severity of the situation: Okhla Phase 2 (388), Alipur (407), Rohini (423), ITO (382), Ashok Vihar (339), Wajipur (432), Shadipur (387), Mundka (426), Jahangirpuri (437), Narela (472), DTU (352), R.K. Puram (462), Anand Vihar (423), Pusa (377), and Punjabi Bagh (417). Notably, several locations approached or exceeded the "severe" threshold of



400.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) reported a slight rise in Delhi-NCR's minimum temperatures, ranging from 7 degrees Celsius to 9 degrees Celsius, with maximum temperatures hovering between 21-23 degrees Celsius.

The IMD warned that the smoggy conditions may persist in the coming days, with a potential intensification of the cold wave. Early mornings are

expected to witness reduced visibility and chilly conditions.

While the AQI has slightly improved from the 'severe' to 'very poor' category, a significant improvement appears unlikely due to unfavourable weather conditions. Prolonged exposure to such air poses serious health risks, especially for vulnerable groups. The wind speed on Saturday evening was four kmph making it difficult for pollutants to disperse. In the coming days, Delhi may experience continued poor air quality due to cold waves and unfavourable weather conditions. Authorities have urged residents to minimise outdoor activities and adhere to anti-pollution measures. The CPCB emphasised the health hazards of AQIs above 400, warning of grave consequences for all residents if pollution levels persist.

1 killed, another injured in Patna shooting, victims were returning from funeral

The men were on their way back from a cremation ceremony when the attack occurred in Patna. One of the men died on the spot while other was rushed to a hospital in critical condition.

New Delhi. A man died while another one was critically injured after being shot by unidentified assailants in Patna on Saturday, December 21. According to the police, the incident happened in Pethiya Bazaar area in Patna's Danapur when the two men, identified as Gorakh Rai and Ranjit Rai alias Dahi Gop, were returning after attending the last rites of a person when the incident happened.

Gorakh Rai succumbed to his injuries on the spot, while Ranjit Rai, who is a former Deputy Chairman of Danapur Cantonment, was rushed to a hospital in a critical condition.



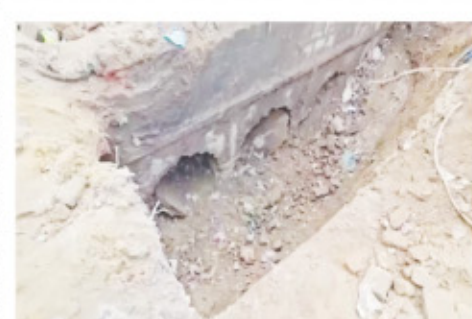
A Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) team was called to the spot and some cartridges were recovered from the crime scene. Speaking about the incident, Patna Police's Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Bhanu Pratap Singh said "Two people have been shot at in Pethiya Bazaar which comes under the jurisdiction of Danapur Police Station. One of the persons has been referred to Paras Hospital for better treatment. Meanwhile, the second person, Gorakh Rai, has succumbed to his injuries. The FSL team has been called and some cartridges have been recovered. Further investigation is underway."

Earlier in August this year, a BJP leader was shot dead near his house in the Bajrangpuri area of Patna by two bike-borne assailants. Ajay Sah, who was the General Secretary of the Patna District BJP, was shot dead when he was sitting inside his milk parlour, which he operated close to his residence.

Stepwell dating back to 1857 revolt era found in UP's Sambhal during survey

New Delhi. A 250-foot-deep stepwell, dating back to the era of the 1857 revolt, was found on Saturday during a survey in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal. The stepwell was found after two bulldozers were involved in excavation at the site in the Laxman Ganj area. The discovery of the stepwell, named Rani ki Bawdi, came after the ruins of an ancient Banke Bihari temple were found in the same area earlier this month, according to reports.

The matter came to light when Sanatan Sevak Sangh's state publicity chief, Kaushal Kishore, wrote to Sambhal District Magistrate (DM) Rajendra Pansia that Laxman Ganj used to house the royal family of Sahaspur and also had a stepwell. As per locals and historical accounts, the stepwell dates back to the era of the First War of Independence in 1857. Kishore urged



the DM to excavate and beautify the site. Following this, the DM ordered an excavation at the site in Laxman Ganj. Two bulldozers were used in the operation and dug up the spot, following which the stepwell was discovered.

"During digging, a two-storey building and Rani ki Bawdi were seen, which is there in historical records. Excavation is currently underway," an official told. The digging was halted at night due to

visibility issues. The DM said that those families who encroached on the site where the stepwell was found would be removed by giving notice to them. On Friday, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) conducted carbon dating at the Kartikeya Temple in Sambhal, which was reopened on December 13 after remaining locked for 46 years. The temple had been shut since 1978, following communal riots that displaced the local Hindu community, according to local accounts.

Officials conducted carbon dating and examined five pilgrimage sites in the vicinity, including Bhadrak Ashram, Swargdeep and Chakrapani, along with an inspection of 19 wells. Authorities had earlier said that the temple was discovered during an anti-encroachment drive. Officials described the discovery as unplanned, claiming they "stumbled"

The discovery of the 250-foot-deep stepwell, named Rani ki Bawdi, in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal came after the ruins of an ancient Banke Bihari temple were found in the same area earlier this month.

upon the site during the operation. The temple is just a stone's throw away from the Shahi Jama Masjid, where four people were killed in the violence on November 24 during a protest against a court-ordered survey.

At PM-UDAY camps, residents from Delhi's unauthorised colonies line up for 'pakka kaagaz'

NEW DELHI. Girish Sharma, a 41-year-old autorickshaw driver from Karawal Nagar, is giddy with happiness. He just got his property registered, fulfilling his dream to finally own his house. Sharma is at a camp organised by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in Mandawali under the PM-UDAY scheme, which aims to assist residents of unauthorised colonies secure ownership rights to their houses. The DDA is organising camps across the Capital's unauthorised colonies on the weekends throughout December.

The camp on Saturday saw several people about to finally get legal documents that prove they own the properties where they have resided for long, since generations in some cases. Following the registry or conferment of ownership rights, residents can sell their properties, avail loans against them, and also get plans approved if they want to make changes in the current building or construct structures in a vacant plot for which they have received ownership

rights.

Sharma explains why these documents are so important. "In a few years, I am going to get my daughter married and will need a loan for the wedding. If I didn't have registry papers for my house, the bank wouldn't have given me a loan against it." He is thankful to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Unki wajah se humare pakke kaagaz ban gaye (We have proper documentation due to him)."

Modi and L-G V K Saxena's faces adorn the banners of the PM-UDAY scheme. The L-G had directed DDA to expedite PM-UDAY applications in November after the scheme did not see a high number of property registrations for over four years. According to a reply given by the Union Housing Minister in Parliament in July, of the 1,22,729 applications, only 23,811 have been granted ownership rights under the scheme. The push to the scheme comes at a critical time, just ahead of the Delhi elections. The approximately 50 lakh



residents in Delhi's 1,731 unauthorised colonies form about one-third of the Capital's electorate.

"This time, it seems government officials are under pressure to work," says Navratan Goel (64), who owns a general store. He is about to get his house registered at a camp in East Vinod Nagar. "Earlier, officials used to delay and postpone. Now, they are saying all problems will be resolved and the process will be over today." However, not everyone shares their optimism.

Shankar Pandey (65), who installed dental chairs in clinics till 2016, is now retired. Residents of nearby Ganesh Nagar, he

and his wife Sunita Pandey have a power of attorney dating back to 1981 for the house where they stay, but it was not accepted as proof of ownership at the Mandawali camp on Saturday.

"DDA officials are saying that some papers are not stamped properly. How do I account for how documents were stamped back then?" Pandey asks as the couple make their second visit to such a camp in two weeks. Far from Mandawali, Manik Mukherjee (46), a financial broker, faces a similar fate at a camp in Bharat Vihar, Dwarka. In 2016, he had bought his flat that had come up in an unauthorised colony, but a 2021 policy change requires him to show proof of ownership which is from before 2015. He is here with his neighbour Jayant Jha. Residents of a society in Chandra Park, they are frustrated. "It's not as if they are not taxing us on our property. If they are collecting tax from us, why not recognise our property," Jha asks.

How to pick the perfect

Red rice



Red rice is considered a healthier option when compared to white rice and nutritionists-dieticians recommend this. However, when we go to the stores, more often than not, most of us are left confused with the number of options and variants of red/brown rice available. How do we know which one is the best? What do we need to look out for? We asked these questions to holistic nutritionist Luke Coutinho and nutritionist Dr Nupur Krishnan. They share how to pick the best red rice... Look for a deep red colour, as this regulated by the anthocyanin levels. This unpolished rice has

Look for the ones that say '100 per cent wholegrain'. These are much higher in fibre, protein, vitamins and minerals. Foods that go with it Traditional Indian curries are best when paired with red rice. Luke says, "For example in Goa, the traditional Gaon fish curry tastes best with red rice. Vegetable stews also go well with red rice. You can make a cold or hot salad with it as well. Cooked red rice with added raw veggies for crunch, served cold or warm, enhances its flavours all the more." **Benefits** Red rice is packed with nutrients.

The antioxidant pigment present in red rice is called anthocyanins. This is beneficial in reducing inflammation, managing weight and even in preventing some cancers. The B-vitamins present in it are essential for our body. It also has iron, calcium and zinc. Calcium is required for bone health, iron for blood supply and zinc for brain functions. Eating red rice the right way

Red vegetable pot rice serves as a healthy option compared to white rice. You will need one tablespoon olive oil, two de-seeded peppers, minced garlic cloves, mushrooms, one cup of red rice, salt to taste, spring onions, one cup of sprouts and coriander leaves for garnishing, your choice of spices and two and a half to three cups of veget

able broth. You need to rinse the rice and keep it in a large bowl with enough water and let it soak for 30 minutes. Now, drain and set it aside. In a pan, heat a little bit of olive oil and saute the garlic until it is soft. Now add finely chopped mushrooms and spring onions and let it saute for some time till it turns golden. Next add the red rice in the pan along with spices and add a pinch of salt and the vegetable broth, while you stir all the ingredients properly. Bring it to a boil over medium heat. Once you turn the heat, simmer the rice until it gets soft and thoroughly cooked. Garnish with coriander leaves and sprouts and serve hot.

only its husks removed, thus retaining its vitamins and nutrients. Both medium and long-grained red rice have a light nutty flavour and are not as rich in starch as white rice. Himalayan Red Rice are long-grained rice varieties that feature bran with a red colour. The rice has a rich red colour and nutty flavour when it is cooked. It has a firm texture making it a perfect option for salads and various other recipes.



The water buffalo diet

When I mean a Water Buffalo Diet, I don't mean that you eat like one. I merely use this title as a way to classify — and to correct misconceptions of — diets that are high in liquid. What I call Water Buffalo Diets are those that make you wallow in water or other liquids, depriving you of essential nutrition. You know how it starts. After a particularly unending weekend of binge eating and binge drinking, you decide to turn over a new leaf or compensate for all the indulgences. You then decide to take the extreme step - liquid diet. It is actually quite bad for you. It doesn't matter whether it's juices, soups or water. I once had a client who came into my clinic after completing a liquid diet. It comprised lime water, reduced food intake and drinking more

than four litres of water every day. Needless to say, the weight she lost came right back, and then some more. I'll tell you what I told her: if you are on a liquid diet — no matter what that liquid may be — you will be almost completely starved of carbs, proteins and fats, all of which are crucial for your health. And, get this, crucial for long-lasting weight loss plans. Fat burning is a high metabolic activity and one needs nutrition to sustain it. Without that, the weight will come back as quickly as you lose it, and in many cases, you may gain more than you lost. As all liquid diets are crash diets — side-effects include hair loss, brittle or weak nails as well as weaker bones, teeth or digestive tracts. Then comes, an irritable bowel. By drinking so much, you are essentially preventing your brain from sending out hunger signals. So even if you 'feel fine', your body will protest on its own way later. Other starvation side effects include dizziness, breathlessness, headaches, hallucinations, nausea, low blood pressure, palpitations and extreme fatigue.



Way to fight choco cravings found



Intake of prebiotics -- dietary fibers found naturally in foods like chicory, artichokes, raw garlic, leeks and onions -- may help improve sleep and act as a buffer against the physiological impacts of stress, a study shows. Prebiotics are certain types of non-digestible fibers that probiotic bacteria feed on, such as the fibers found in many plant

sources like asparagus, oatmeal, and legumes as well as in breast milk. The findings showed that rats on the prebiotic diet spent more time in non-rapid-eye-movement (NREM) sleep, which is restful and restorative and is dreamless, than those on the non-prebiotic diet. "We found that dietary prebiotics can improve non-rapid eye movement (REM)

sleep, as well as REM sleep after a stressful event," said lead author Robert Thompson, post-doctoral student at University of Colorado - Boulder. "Given that sufficient NREM sleep and proper nutrition can impact brain development and function and that sleep problems are common in early life, it is possible that a diet rich in prebiotics started in early life could help improve sleep, support the gut microbiota and promote optimal brain/psychological health," added Monika Fleshner, Professor at University of Colorado - Boulder. For the study, published in the journal Frontiers in Behavioural Neuroscience, the team fed three-week-old male rats a diet of either standard chow or chow that included prebiotics. They then monitored the rats' body temperature, gut bacteria and sleep-wake cycles -- using EEG, or brain activity testing -- over time. After being exposed to a stressor, the rats on the prebiotic diet also spent more time in rapid-eye-movement (REM) sleep. REM sleep is believed to be critical for promoting recovery from stress -- previously been shown to reduce healthy diversity of gut bacteria. But rats on the prebiotic diet were buffered from the impact, maintaining a healthy and diverse gut microbiota and normal temperature fluctuations even after stress exposure, the study said.

Britannica didn't just survive. It's an AI company now

NEW DELHI. For nearly 250 years, the Encyclopaedia Britannica was a bookshelf-busting series of gilt-lettered tomes, often purchased to show that its owners cared about knowledge. It was the sort of physical media expected to die in the internet era, and indeed, the encyclopedia's publisher announced that it was ending the print edition in 2012. Skeptics wondered how Britannica the company could survive in the age of Wikipedia. The answer was to adapt to the times. Britannica Group runs websites, including Britannica.com and the online Merriam-Webster dictionary, and sells educational software to schools and libraries. It also sells artificial intelligence agent software that underpins apps like customer service chatbots and data retrieval. Britannica has figured out not only how to survive, but also how to do well financially. Jorge Cauz, its CEO, said in an interview that the publisher enjoyed pro forma profit margins of about 45%. The company is weighing an initial public offering, in which it could seek a valuation of about \$1 billion, according to a person with knowledge of the deliberations. That could provide a sizable return for the company's owner, Swiss financier Jacob E Safra, who acquired the publisher in 1995 and, in a lawsuit filed in 2022, cited an investment bank in valuing Britannica at \$500 million. The company says its websites draw over 7 billion annual page views a year, with users in more than 150 countries.

Britannica has come far from its origins in the 18th century as the publisher of a reference work put together by three Scottish printers. Over the years, the Encyclopaedia Britannica became a heavyweight of the knowledge business, both literally - the 32-volume 2010 edition, the last to run in print, weighed 129 pounds - and figuratively, drawing on contributions from thousands of experts. It also became an aspirational status symbol, with customers paying nearly \$1,400 for that edition.

By the time the last Encyclopaedia Britannica was printed, the company had already started its suite of websites and educational software. Now it sees even greater opportunity in the growth of generative AI tools, which the company says can help make learning more dynamic - and therefore more desirable.

Cauz said Britannica had experimented with the technology over the past few decades. It acquired Melingo, the company that makes its AI agent software, in 2000 because of its strength in natural language processing and machine learning. And it has two technology teams, based in Chicago and in Tel Aviv.

Ex-finance minister Arun Jaitley had given go-ahead to clean up bad loans, says Raghuram Rajan

MUMBAI. Former finance minister Arun Jaitley had encouraged Raghuram Rajan to take decisive action on cleaning up bad loans of Indian banks, the former RBI governor said in a recent interview to a news portal and asserted that the build-up of non-performing assets (NPAs) in the banking sector, worsened by corruption, delayed clearances, and the global financial crisis, had necessitated a comprehensive review.

"When I discussed the need to clean up the system with Jaitley, he said, 'fine, go ahead'. We did it," Rajan told a digital news platform. However, he highlighted the slow pace of recapitalisation by govt, which hindered resumption of lending by banks. Rajan was RBI governor from 2013 to 2016. "We had problems in India over and above the global financial crisis which was that there were corruption scandals and therefore permissions started getting delayed a lot, projects weren't getting land, projects weren't getting environment permissions... they were building NPAs in the financial system," Rajan said. In a 2014 interview with TOI, Rajan had spoken of the need for "forensic skills" in RBI supervision to identify "where the bodies are buried" in banks. The RBI initiated an asset quality review (AQR) in 2015, which exposed significant bad loans that had been carried as performing assets. Rajan said, "Many loans became NPAs after the crisis and delays in projects. During my predecessor's time, a moratorium was allowed on terming them non-performing, but it only prolonged the problem."

While the system eventually stabilised, he emphasised the importance of avoiding a repeat of past mistakes, particularly in retail and MSME loans. The AQR turned out to be the biggest clean-up in Indian banking history with lenders posting losses worth crores and facing lending curbs.

Google proposes fix to solve search monopoly

WASHINGTON. Google said Friday what it thought should change to address a ruling that it had illegally maintained a monopoly over online search: not much. It follows the landmark ruling in Aug by judge Amit P Mehta of the US district court for the district of Columbia, who said Google had illegally maintained a monopoly in online search by paying companies like Apple and Samsung to be the search engine that automatically appears when users open a web browser or a smartphone. The govt then asked the judge to force Google to sell Chrome, the world's most popular browser, among other remedies.

In Google's own proposal to fix the search monopoly, it asked Mehta to allow it to continue to pay other companies for its search engine to get prime placement. But it said those agreements should be less restrictive than in the past.

Apple, for example, could select different search engines to come up automatically for iPhone and iPad users, said Lee-Anne Mulholland, the company's VP of regulatory affairs, in a blog post. Cellphone makers using Google's popular operating system, Android, could also install multiple search engines and could install other Google apps without installing its search tool or its Gemini artificial intelligence assistant product.

Holiday Week Ahead: Global Trends And FIIs' Moves To Drive Stock Market Sentiment

Last week, the BSE benchmark fell sharply, shedding 4,091.53 points or 4.98%, while the Nifty declined by 1,180.8 points or 4.76%.

NEW DELHI. Stock market participants are expected to focus on global trends and foreign investors' trading activity in the upcoming holiday-shortened week, analysts said. With no major domestic triggers, the markets will look to global cues for direction.

Equity Markets Closed for Christmas
Indian equity markets will remain closed on Wednesday, December 25, for Christmas, limiting market activity further during the week. Key Global Indicators to Shape Market Sentiment While no major domestic events are lined up, several global economic indicators, including US



bond yields, dollar index performance, initial jobless claims, and new home sales data, are expected to influence market direction. "Amid heightened volatility and persistent FIIs (Foreign Institutional Investors) selling pressure, investors are likely to adopt a cautious stance," said Pravesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd. "Despite recent weakness, the market outlook remains cautiously optimistic. However, relentless selling by FIIs has added to market pressure."

Recent Market Performance Highlights

Last week, the BSE benchmark fell sharply, shedding 4,091.53 points or 4.98%, while the Nifty declined by 1,180.8 points or 4.76%. "The sudden change in FII strategy from buying to selling has impacted markets," noted V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services.

Rupee, Crude Oil Prices to Be Monitored
Apart from global indicators, the rupee-dollar trend and the movement of global oil benchmark Brent crude will play a key role in determining the market's trajectory.

December Derivatives Expiry to Add Volatility

The scheduled expiry of December's derivative contracts could further amplify market volatility this week. "The holiday-shortened week will see participants closely monitoring FII flow trends and global market performance for direction," said Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

Low Activity Expected Amid Festive Season

Siddhartha Khemka, Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, added, "With the festive season approaching and global markets closed for 2-3 days, including a domestic holiday on December 25, market activity is expected to be low this week."

Central PSUs Record 47 Per Cent Jump In Net Profit For 2023-24, Market Cap Doubles

New Delhi. Overall Net Profit of operating Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) rose to Rs 3.22 lakh crore in FY24 as against Rs 2.18 lakh crore in FY23 showing an increase of over 47 per cent, according to an official report. The market capitalisation of CPSEs more than doubled in Fiscal Year 2024-25 as compared to Fiscal Year 2023-24, the report said. The major contributors to the increase in market cap are NTPC Ltd, Oil & Natural Gas Corporation Ltd, Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd, Coal India Ltd and Indian Railway Finance Corporation Ltd. A major proportion of the increase in profit of Rs 0.89 lakh crore was contributed by the Petroleum (Refinery & Marketing) group, according to the report compiled by the Public Enterprises Department of the Finance Ministry. Within the Petroleum (Refinery & Marketing) group, the major contribution towards the increase in Overall Net Profit is contributed by Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (Rs 0.31 lakh crore). The profitability of the



Petroleum (Refinery & Marketing) group has impacted the overall profitability," the survey said. Net Loss of loss-incurring CPSEs was Rs 0.21 lakh crore as against Rs 0.29 lakh crore showing a decrease of over 27 per cent. Major loss-incurring CPSEs are Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd, Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd, Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd, Bharat Petro Resources Ltd and NMDC Steel Ltd.

"Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd. converted from a loss of Rs 0.15 lakh crore to a profit of Rs 0.15 Lakh crores in FY 2023-24, while Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd was able to reduce the loss

from Rs 0.08 lakh crore in FY 2022-23 to Rs 0.05 lakh crore in FY 2023-24," the report said. Contribution to the Central Exchequer (CCE) of all CPSEs by way of excise duty, customs duty, GST, corporation tax, interest on Central Government loans, dividend, and other duties and taxes stood at Rs 4.85 lakh crore in FY 24 as against Rs 4.58 lakh crore in FY 23, showing an increase of

around 6 per cent. Among the components of CCE, Excise duty is the highest component which accounts for 46 per cent in FY 2023-24. The increase in CCE is mainly due to an increase in Corporation tax from Rs 0.56 lakh crore in (FY 2022-23) to Rs 0.81 lakh crore in (FY 2023-24). The top five CPSEs contributing to the Central Exchequer are Indian Oil Corporation Ltd, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd, Oil & Natural Gas Corporation Ltd and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd.

Pegasus: 300 of 1,400 users from India, why ruling may re-open tapping debate

New Delhi. For the first time, a court in the US has held Israel's NSO Group liable for its intrusive spyware Pegasus, which could set up a measure of accountability for the company that it has, for long, allegedly downplayed.

The decision came in a case filed by Meta-owned WhatsApp against the NSO Group, with the judge in the case, Phyllis Hamilton, holding that the Israeli spyware maker was liable for targeting the devices of 1,400 WhatsApp users, and violating sections of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA), a federal cybersecurity law, and a similar state law in California called the California Computer Data Access and Fraud Act (CDAFA).

Victims of Pegasus's use included senior government officials, journalists,

human rights activists, political dissidents and diplomats. The installation of Pegasus also extended to devices in India, including those allegedly belonging to journalists, politicians, Union Ministers, besides members of the civil society. In the US, President Joe Biden's administration put the NSO Group on a blacklist in 2021 and forbade US government agencies from purchasing its products. Pegasus has been implicated in hacks by authoritarian governments across the world. The alleged Pegasus targeting in India, Centre's denial in 2021, it was reported that Pegasus was used on more than 300 Indian mobile numbers, including that of two serving ministers in the Narendra Modi government, three Opposition leaders,

one constitutional authority, several journalists and business persons.

The revelations raised eyebrows over the Central Government and state government's involvement in the attacks, since NSO Group has repeatedly said that it only deals with governments and government agencies. However, it should be noted that as part of the WhatsApp vs NSO Group case, unsealed documents had shown that NSO Group, for years, downplayed its role in the deployment of Pegasus. Through interviews and an assessment of subpoenaed documents, WhatsApp contradicted this claim, alleging that Pegasus customers had "minimal role" in its deployment, with NSO Group managing a substantial part of the process.

GST Council Meeting Highlights: Key Recommendations To Provide Relief To Individuals And Businesses

Jaisalmer. From reducing the GST rate on fortified rice kernel (FRK) to fully exempt GST on gene therapy, the 55th GST Council meeting, chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, on Saturday made some key recommendations to provide relief to individuals and businesses.

The Council recommended exemption of GST on contributions by general insurance companies from third-party motor vehicle premiums for the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund. It also recommended no GST on the transaction of vouchers as they are neither a supply of goods nor supply of services. The provisions related to vouchers is also being simplified. GST Council clarified that no GST is payable on 'penal charges' levied and collected by banks and NBFCs from borrowers for non-compliance with loan terms. The Council recommended reduction of payment of pre-deposit for filing an appeal before the Appellate Authority in respect of an order passed which involves only penalty amount. It recommended reduction in GST rate on fortified rice kernel (FRK), classifiable

under 1904, to 5 per cent, as the commodity is supplied to the weaker sections of society through the public distribution system (PDS).

Under goods category, the meeting decided to extend IGST exemption to systems, sub-systems, equipment, parts, sub-parts, tools, test equipment, software meant assembly/manufacture of LRSAM system. It also recommended to reduce the rate of Compensation Cess to 0.1 per cent on supplies to merchant exporters at par with GST rate on such supplies and exempt from IGST imports of all equipment and consumable samples by Inspection Team of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) subject to specified conditions. The GST members also recommended to extend the concessional 5 per cent GST rate on food inputs of food preparations under "HSN 19 or 21" that are supplied for food preparations intended for free distribution to economically weaker sections under a government program subject to the existing conditions. Under the Services category, the GST Council recommended to bring supply of the sponsorship services

provided by the body corporates under Forward Charge Mechanism and exempt GST on the contributions made by general insurance companies from the third-party motor vehicle premiums collected by



them to the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund, constituted under section 164B of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988. This fund is constituted for providing compensation/ cashless treatment to the victims of road accidents including hit and run cases. It recommended to increase the GST rate from 12 per cent to 18 per cent on sale of all old and used vehicles, including EVs other than those specified at 18 per cent like sale of old and used petrol vehicles of engine capacity of 1200 cc or

more and of length of 4000 mm or more; diesel vehicles of engine capacity of 1500 cc or more and of length of 4000 mm and SUVs.

The Council also clarified that Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (ACC) blocks containing more than 50 per cent fly ash content will fall under HS 6815 and attract 12 per cent GST. It further clarified that pepper, whether fresh green or dried pepper and raisins when supplied by an agriculturist, is not liable to GST.

It also clarified that ready-to-eat popcorn which is mixed with salt and spices are classifiable attracts 5 per cent GST, if supplied as other than pre-packaged and labelled, and 12 per cent GST if supplied as pre-packaged and labelled.

However, when popcorn is mixed with sugar thereby changing its character to sugar confectionary (eg caramel popcorn), it would attract 18 per cent GST. The Council has approved an amendment to the definition of prepackaged and labelled items intended for retail sale. The step is aimed at clarifying the definition for all goods as currently there is a lot of confusion on the issue.

NEWS BOX

Who is Gongadi Trisha? India's U19 World Cup winner, now U19 Asia Cup final hero

New Delhi. Gongadi Trisha was the star for India in the inaugural edition of the Under-19 Women's Asia Cup in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The 19-year-old finished as the top scorer of the tournament, having notched 159 runs from five innings at an average of 53 and a strike-rate of 120.45. It was on the back of her performance that India stayed unbeaten throughout the tournament. Trisha bagged a duck against Pakistan, after which he got an unbeaten 17 against Nepal. It was during the Super Fours that the teenager started showing her true class. She scored an unbeaten 58 against Bangladesh and helped India win by eight wickets. In the next Super Four match, Trisha made 32 against Sri Lanka as the Girls in Blue finished atop the points table. In the final against Bangladesh, Trisha scored 52 runs off 47 balls with the help of five fours and two sixes. On the back of her knock, India put up a decent score of 117 for seven. Thereafter, India bowled their opponents out for 76 runs in



18.3 overs to win the match by 41 runs. Not only did Trisha win the Player of the Match, but she also bagged the Player of the Tournament award. Gongadi Trisha shining for India Under-19. Interestingly, Trisha was a part of the Indian team that won the Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup in South Africa last year. In seven matches in the tournament, Trisha racked up 116 runs at an average of 23.20 and a strike-rate of 108.41. She got her top score of 57 off 51 balls against Katherine Fraser's Scotland at Willowmoore Park B Field in Benoni.

In the final against England at the Senwes Park in Potchefstroom, Trisha made 24 runs off 29 balls with three fours, helping India chase down 69 in 14 overs. Trisha also plays for Hyderabad in domestic cricket.

India high on confidence after Gabba: Series 50-50 going into MCG, says Akash Deep

New Delhi. The Border-Gavaskar Trophy is 50-50 going into the final two Test matches of the series, said India seamer Akash Deep. Speaking to the media on Sunday, December 22, Akash Deep said that India took a lot of confidence from the 3rd Test match at the Gabba after they managed to save the follow-on, on Day 4. Akash Deep added that the team environment was quite cheerful after their sensational escape in Brisbane.

Despite trailing for the majority of the Test match, India managed to eke out a draw in the 3rd Test match. Akash Deep and Jasprit Bumrah's heroic partnership was key to India's survival, as they added crucial 47 runs for the final wicket, saving India from the embarrassment of follow-on. In the process, Australia were forced to come out to bat for the second time, which cut into their crucial bowling hours on the final day. With inclement weather playing part, the hosts failed to capitalise on their advantage, with the Test match ending in a draw. Speaking



ahead of the Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Akash Deep said that the entire dressing room was happy when he and Bumrah returned to the dressing room unbeaten at the end of Day 4. On that day, Virat Kohli, Gautam Gambhir and Rohit Sharma celebrated wildly after India had crossed the 245-run threshold.

"The position that I bat it, if we can add 25 runs at the back end, it becomes very important. I always want to contribute with the bat. On Day 4 at the Gabba, my mindset was that I did not want to get out and thankfully by God's grace that worked out. When I went back to the dressing room, the mood had lifted up. When you save a follow-on, you get confident and you could see that on everybody's face, everyone was enjoying," Akash Deep said at the MCG on Sunday.

"The series is 50-50 going into the last two Test matches. In the last Test match, while we were behind for the most part, the confidence we got in the last day, I think that matters and

IND vs AUS: Injury scare for Rohit Sharma after blow to knee in Melbourne nets

India captain Rohit Sharma and batter KL Rahul copped injury blows ahead of the Boxing Day Test match in Melbourne. While Rohit was hit on his knee, KL Rahul was spotted getting attended by the physio after an injury to his right hand.



under the leadership of Virat Kohli and then under Ajinkya Rahane. The hope for the three-peat might be under threat if the India captain gets injured for the last two Tests of the series. On Sunday, Sharma was spotted applying an ice pack on his knee after his injury and had hobbled out of the nets in Melbourne. Earlier on Saturday, India opener KL Rahul got hit on his hand while batting at the nets and was promptly attended to by the team's physio ahead of the fourth Test against Australia. Rahul was hit on his right hand and was seen in some discomfort at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The BCCI did not provide clarity on either of the injuries.

New Delhi. Ahead of the Boxing Day Test match, India captain Rohit Sharma copped a big blow on his left knee during practice on Sunday, December 22. Rohit was injured during a session with the throwdown specialist when the ball sneaked through his pads and hit him on the knee.

The injury comes just four days ahead of the Boxing Day Test match in Melbourne. India are level 1-1 with Australia in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and will push for a win in the final two Test matches of the series, in the hope of a three-peat vs Australia. India have won the last two tours Down Under, first

MCG in January 1948 against a Donald Bradman-led Australian side. Under the leadership of Lala Amarnath, India lost the

match by 233 runs. India's recent record at the MCG is however quite good. India have not lost at the 'G' since 2014.

Frustrated Flick says 'losing 9 points not normal' after tough Atletico result

New Delhi Barcelona's disappointing run continued as they slipped off the top of LaLiga, suffering a 2-1 home defeat to Atletico Madrid on Saturday. Despite the setback, coach Hansi Flick urged his team to learn from their mistakes and come back stronger after the winter break. The loss extended Barcelona's winless streak to three LaLiga games, with just five points earned from their last 21 available. This includes defeats to Leganes and Las Palmas in their previous two home matches. With the loss, Barcelona now trail Atletico by three points, having played one more game than their rivals. Flick, despite the defeat, praised his team's performance, emphasising that the winter break would provide the perfect opportunity for a reset. "Today it was unbelievable how we

played," said Flick. "Maybe this break came at the right time. I appreciate how we played, but we have to learn from these things. Losing nine points is not normal, and we have to work on it." Acknowledging the frustration of recent results, Flick remained optimistic about his young squad's potential. "The points lost against Las Palmas and Leganes are in the past. We will show after the break how strong we are. We are very disappointed with the defeat, but life goes on." Reflecting on his team's progress, the former Bayern Munich coach said he remained proud of his players and their potential. "When I drive at 0630 to go to training, I am happy because I can train with these players. Now, there is not a good atmosphere in the dressing room, but that's football.

Delhi SG Pipers' Rajkumar Pal aiming for Hockey India League spotlight

New Delhi For Delhi SG Pipers' Rajkumar Pal, the journey over the past years in hockey has been sensational. After missing the chance to make the trip for the Tokyo Olympics, the midfielder went back to the drawing board and worked hard. This was rewarded in 2024, when he was part of the Indian team that won the bronze medal at the Paris Olympics. Now, set to be part of the revamped Hockey India League, Rajkumar is hoping to make the spotlight his own with the Delhi SG Pipers. The team made heads turn at the auction table with their eye for young talent and the midfielder feels this will help the side in the long run. Speaking exclusively to Indiatoday.in, Rajkumar was realistic about Delhi's chances in the 2024-25 season and also opened up about being reunited with PR Sreejesh. The midfielder also gave a sneak peek into his journey so far and his goals going forward.

same impact from the upcoming league? Rajkumar Pal: Absolutely! In this league, I think three or four players will shine. I also want to give my 100 percent and take the



spotlight. Every player wants to be noticed, and everyone will try their best. It's great to be a part of a team. The whole game should be about making an impact, as every team has that one player who consistently scores goals and gets noticed. Scoring gives

confidence and motivation and the game continues to improve. I hope that if I start the tournament well, I can aim for better performances throughout the league.

India Today: As you mentioned, you are playing for Delhi SG Pipers. What makes the Delhi SG Pipers team special compared to other teams this time? Rajkumar Pal: I think our team has the most number of young players, which is going to be a huge advantage for Delhi SG Pipers. The players are young and fit, and we've built a well-balanced team. We have experienced forwards, midfielders, and defenders, and even the juniors are getting the support they need. So, I believe it's a strong team, and we will all support each other. The more experienced players will guide the younger ones. We have a good balance, and now it's just about preparing well and putting in our best effort.

India clinch inaugural Under-19 Women's Asia Cup title after beating Bangladesh

New Delhi Gongadi Trisha and bowlers starred as India became champions in the inaugural edition of the Under-19 Women's Asia Cup 2024. On Sunday, December 22, Trisha, who was an architect of India's triumph in the Women's T20 World Cup last year in South Africa, scored a gutsy half-century as Niki Prasad and Co. beat Bangladesh by 41 runs in the final at the Bayuemas Oval in Kuala Lumpur. After being asked to bat first, India could only manage 117 for seven on the board. Barring Trisha, none of the batters could get a big score. Opening the batting, Trisha scored 52 runs off 47 balls with the help of five fours and two sixes. Skipper Prasad got into double digits, but could not convert.

Mithila Vinod injected some late momentum into the innings with a quick-fire 17-run knock off 12 balls. For Bangladesh, fast bowler Farjana Easmin finished with figures of 4-0-31-4. The in-form Nishita Akter Nishi took two crucial wickets and made sure that that Indian batters weren't allowed to overly



dominate. Aayushi Shukla steps up again Bangladesh did not get off to the best of starts as Mosammat Eva and Sumaiya Akhter could not go past single digits. Opening batter Fahomida Choya and Juairiya Ferdous scored 18 and 22 respectively. Skipper Sumaiya Akhter faltered after Sonam Yadav accounted for her wicket. Sonam and Parunika Sisodia picked up two scalps apiece. It was again Aayushi Shukla, who was the pick of the bowlers for India. Shukla, who finished the tournament as the top wicket-taker, rattled the Bangladeshi batting with figures of 3-3-0-17-3. After VJ Joshitha dismissed Eva for a duck in the second over, India did not look back. Bangladesh also slumped to a batting collapse as they lost their last seven wickets for 21 runs in a space of 40 balls. India, in the meantime, will be looking to carry the momentum into the U19 World Cup next year.

India captain Niki elated after historic Asia Cup win: Bowlers did a fantastic job



New Delhi. Skipper Niki Prasad admitted that India were around 20 runs short in their Under-19 Women's Asia Cup 2024 final against Bangladesh. But she also heaped praise on the bowlers for defending a low total as India became the champions of the inaugural edition after winning the match by 41 runs at the Bayuemas Oval in Kuala Lumpur. After being asked to bat first, all India could manage was 117 for seven on the

back of Gongadi Trisha's half-century and a 17-run cameo from Mithila Vinod. Thereafter, Aayushi Shukla picked up three wickets as India bowled their opponents out for 76 in 18.3 overs. Prasad, who will play for the Delhi Capitals (DC) in the upcoming Women's Premier League (WPL), said that staying calm under pressure has helped the Indian team in the tournament. "We felt we were a few runs short, maybe 20 runs short,

but scoring 117 on this wicket is good. But we knew that we had a good bowling side and would bowl well. We were trying to stay in the game, have that intent, body language and our bowlers and fielders did a fantastic job," Prasad said in the post-match presentation ceremony.

"The first thing is that all of us are very calm in the dressing room and so, that brings a lot of confidence. When the batters are batting and things are not going in our side, it doesn't matter as we are calm and that's why we got to that score," Prasad said.

Niki lauded Trisha for scoring 52 runs off 47 balls while opening the batting. She also hailed Trisha as India's "mystery bowler" after the latter bowled three overs for 10 runs. "The way G Trisha has batted, it was fabulous. I liked the approach we had, and we batted really well. She is also our mystery bowler, and she bowled really well," Prasad added. After becoming the champions of Asia, India are set to defend their title in the Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup to be held in Malaysia from January 18 to February 2.

Disciplined Akash Deep credits Rohit-Kohli for massive growth-curve in Australia

India pacer Akash Deep credited senior batters Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma for the betterment of young India fast bowlers. The seamer credited the duo for helping young pacers not look like novices on their first tour of Australia.

New Delhi. Sunil Gavaskar has been critical of the timing of R Ashwin's retirement call, claiming that the spinner should have made the decision after the end of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Ashwin would make the shock call after the Gabba Test on Wednesday, December 18, after the match ended in a draw.

The rumours had started to come in on Wednesday morning when Ashwin was seen

sharing a warm embrace with Virat Kohli in the dressing room as the game was halted by rain. Ashwin would then appear alongside Rohit Sharma in the post-match press conference and announce his decision to the reporters. Speaking to the broadcasters, Gavaskar said that the shock call had now left the Indian squad one man short. The Indian legend feels that Ashwin could have had a chance to make it to the side during the Sydney, where the pitch could have offered support to spinners. He could have said, listen after the end of the series, I won't be available for selection for India. What it does is that, similarly when MS Dhoni retired at the end of the 3rd Test in 2014-15 series, it leaves you one short. The selection committee has



picked so many players for a tour with a purpose. If there are any injuries they can select from the reserve players to have in the team. So, Sydney is somewhere where there

is a lot of support on offer for spinners. So India could have played with 2 spinners. You never know. He could have been there for sure. I don't know how the pitch in Melbourne will be like. "Normally, you tend to look at the end of the series. That's it. In the middle, it is not usual," said Gavaskar. When asked if Washington Sundar was ahead of Ashwin in the pecking order, Gavaskar said that could be the case. The Indian legend ended by hailing Ashwin as a fine cricketer. "Maybe Washington Sundar is ahead of him. Rohit said he is flying out tomorrow. So that's the end of Ashwin as an international cricketer. He has been one heck of a cricketer," said Gavaskar.



Katrina Kaif

Reveals Vicky Kaushal's Advice On Balancing Work And Personal Life: 'Put Down The Phone'

Katrina Kaif and Vicky Kaushal, who recently celebrated their third wedding anniversary, continue to strike a balance between their flourishing careers and personal life. In a candid chat with The Week, Katrina opened up about the challenges of juggling her dual roles as an actress and entrepreneur. She also revealed how Vicky encourages her to take a break from work, saying, "Even now my husband asks me to put down the phone, and I want to send just one more email." Talking about the differences between her acting career and managing a business, Katrina explained that filmmaking comes with a fixed schedule, making it easier to coordinate with Vicky. However, running a business demands constant attention. "There's no schedule," she said, adding that setting boundaries is essential. "Otherwise, one would just go on sending emails and having discussions."

Katrina also shared a lighthearted detail about their life together. When asked if she and Vicky compete for counter space in the bathroom, she laughed and said no, calling him an "adjusting and understanding" husband. Katrina Kaif revealed that the secret to her gorgeous hair is her mother-in-law Veena Kaushal's homemade hair oil! The actress shares a close bond with Vicky Kaushal's mom and often spends time with her, "I'm equally passionate about skincare, because I have very sensitive skin. I



enjoy fun routines, like the gua sha. I know I'm late to the party, but I've just started using it and it's amazing. My mother-in-law also makes me this hair oil with onion, amla, avocado and two-three other ingredients. Home remedies are incredibly powerful too," she stated. The couple celebrated their third anniversary on December 9, 2024, with a romantic getaway. Katrina marked the occasion with a heartfelt Instagram post, sharing a selfie with Vicky and captioning it, "Dil tu, jaan tu... (My heart, my life)," along with a red heart emoji. Later, she treated fans to glimpses of their jungle retreat, showcasing wildlife, bonfires, and cozy evenings. On the work front, Katrina was last seen in Merry Christmas earlier this year and is set to star in Jee Le Zaraa. Vicky, meanwhile, has an exciting slate of films, including Chhaava, Love & War, and Mahavatar.

Shah Rukh Khan's Jawan Co-star Ridhi Dogra On How She Dealt With Criticism



Ridhi Dogra has carved a niche for herself in the entertainment industry. Starting her career on the small screen with the TV show Jhoomke Jiiya Re, the actress featured in big-budgeted films like Shah Rukh Khan's Jawan, Salman Khan's Tiger 3 and The Sabarmati Report. Ridhi, who enjoys a significant fan base, recently shared some insights from her behind-the-scenes experiences during the initial stage of her career. During a chat with Pinkvilla, the actress recalled an incident while filming for a show where she offered some improvisation to her directors. In response, she shared that the director said things like she will get the Oscars.

"These are discouraging statements and I understand why people feel this way because no one takes pride in television. I even fought with them. If anyone comes and makes me feel small, I would always come back and tell them off," she added. Furthermore, the actress recalled another incident during the show's shoot, when one of her co-stars told her that the director mentioned that he couldn't shoot a show like a big film because the actress (Ridhi) wasn't Aishwarya Rai. "I confronted the director and objected to the situation. The director had stated, 'Yeh kaunsa Aishwarya Rai hai (She is not Aishwarya Rai),' and I replied him, 'Aap kaunsa Mani Ratnam ho (You're not Mani Ratnam),' said Ridhi. The actress revealed that she connects with those who don't take pride in calling themselves TV actresses. She stated that people in the TV industry degrade one another.

Meanwhile, on the work front, Ridhi was recently seen in the drama film The Sabarmati Report which also featured Vikrant Massey and Rashmi Khanna in the lead roles. Helmed by Dheeraj Sarma and backed by Ekta Kapoor, the film received good responses from fans and critics alike. She will be next seen in the romantic drama Abir Gulaal, featuring Pakistani actor Fawad Khan and Vaani Kapoor in the lead roles. Directed by Aarti S Bagadi and produced by Vivek B Aggarwal, the film will also feature Lisa Haydon, Soni Razdan and Farida Jalal in significant roles.

Varun Dhawan Confirms Alia Bhatt And His Daughters' First Meeting: 'Lara and Raha Have Met'



Varun Dhawan and Alia Bhatt, one of Bollywood's most adored onscreen pairs, have captured hearts with their chemistry in films like Student of the Year (2012), Humpty Sharma Ki Dulhania (2014), Badrinath Ki Dulhania (2017), and Kalank (2019). Offscreen, the two now share the joys of parenthood. Alia, alongside her husband Ranbir Kapoor, welcomed their daughter Raha Kapoor in 2022, while Varun and his wife Natasha Dalal became proud parents to baby girl Lara Dhawan this year. But have these little stars-in-the-making met yet? In a recent chat with Bollywood Hungama, Varun confirmed, "Raha and Lara have met, I think. Lara is still very small, but they have met." Will these adorable babies grow up to share a bond as cherished as Alia and Varun's friendship? Only time will tell, but fans can't wait to see this sweet connection blossom.

As for their much-awaited onscreen reunion, Varun revealed that he and Alia are actively searching for a project that does justice to their dynamic. "We haven't found the perfect fit yet," he shared. For now, their conversations are all about their little ones, and we can't help but find that absolutely endearing.

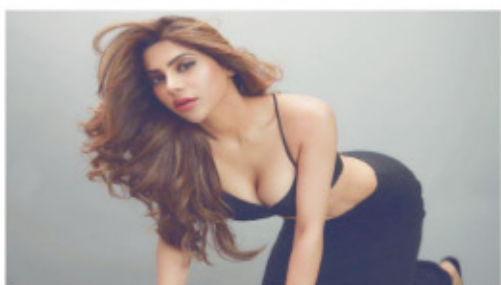
During the same interview, while promoting his upcoming film Baby John, Varun was asked which of his movies he would want Lara to watch first. His pick? The one that started it all: Student of the Year. "I think still the first one which she could watch is Student of the Year only. I think that would be the first one she could watch because it's a very easy watch for her to see," Varun said.

Varun is all set to bring his real-life experiences as a doting dad to the big screen in Atlee's Baby John, an action thriller releasing this Christmas. The film also stars Wamiqa Gabbi and Keerthy Suresh. Meanwhile, Alia is currently busy shooting for Sanjay Leela Bhansali's highly anticipated project Love & War, co-starring Ranbir Kapoor and Vicky Kaushal. Fans are eagerly waiting to see what's next for both stars, on and offscreen!

Nikki Tamboli's

Fun Interaction With Paparazzi Is Winning Hearts

Nikki Tamboli is back with another look to make her fans go crazy. The Chikati Gadilo Chithakotudu actress was spotted last night entering the eatery Chin Chin Chu in Juhu, Mumbai. Before going inside, the gorgeousness even posed for the paparazzi stationed outside the restaurant, which is beautifully decorated with Christmas special adornments. Her appearance in a chic denim look raised the temperature even during the chilly winters. In a video making rounds on Instagram, Nikki Tamboli was seen posing for



the paparazzi in her sizzling style. For the outing, she wore a little halter-neck top with a plunging neckline and a small knot in the front and back. The Khatra Khatra Show star teamed her look with baggy jeans and white-hued sneakers. To amp up her fashion game, she carried a box bag with a broad strap on one of her shoulders. The diva ditched any heavy accessories and let her chic glam minimal. Tamboli left her freshly-coloured tresses middle-parted and open to cascade down her shoulders. A glowy foundation base with rosy cheeks and the perfect amount of contouring on her face made her look

prettier. Thin strokes of eyeliner and pink lips finished off her overall appearance. The Bigg Boss 14 contestant's video is creating a ruckus on social media as she slayed her bold style in front of the camera. Soon after it was posted, her fans flooded the comments section, appreciating her bold look even during winter. While one person wrote, "Looking so pretty," another mentioned, "You look stunning." Not only this, Nikki Tamboli left her fans in a frenzy a few hours ago with another set of oh-so-glamorous photos from one of her recent photoshoots. On Instagram, she shared stunning pictures wearing an oversized white shirt. She layered her dress with a lacy bralette and paired them with denim shorts. Long boots teamed with open hair simply finished off her bold avatar. She opted for dewy makeup, which is setting the perfect style trend for this Christmas. On the work front, Nikki Tamboli made her acting debut in 2019 with the Telugu horror comedy film Chikati Gadilo Chithakotudu. Following this, she appeared in a number of television shows, films and music videos. The actress even participated in reality shows such as Bigg Boss 14 and Bigg Boss Marathi Season 5, in both of which she emerged as 2nd-runner up. She was last seen in India's Best Dancer 4, also known as India's Best Dancer: Jab Dil Kare Dance Kar.

