

PUBLISHED FROM Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Chandigarh, Himachal and Jammu

The Sikh Times National Daily

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Meet Modi instead of Akal Takht Jathedar if you want me to end fast

Sanjay Kumar

Chandigarh, Jan. 10: Punjab farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal targeted the BJP for seeking the Akal Takht's intervention for ending his fast-unto-



death, and said they should instead approach Prime Minister Narendra Modi and press him to accept farmers' demands if they want him to call off the strike, which entered day 46 on Friday. In a three-minute video message released on Friday, the 70-year-old farmer leader asserted he will end his fast only after the Centre accepts farmers' demands which include a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price for crops. A BJP delegation, comprising Sukhminder Pal Singh Grewal and Sarchand Singh, appealed to Akal

Takht Jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh on Thursday to intervene to end the indefinite fast of the farmer leader. The delegation expressed concern over Dallewal's deteriorating health. In his video message Dallewal said, "We have got information that the leaders of the Punjab unit of BJP appealed to the Akal Takht to intervene in order to end Dallewal's fast-unto-death. (They appealed to the Akal Takht that) a direction be given so that he should end his fast. I respect the Akal Takht." "But the Punjab BJP should approach (PM) Modi ji, the vice president (Jagdeep Dhankhar), Agriculture Minister (Shivraj Singh Chouhan), (Home Minister) Amit Shah ji. Instead of meeting them, they are approaching the Akal Takht Jathedar," he said. Dallewal, who is the convener of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political), has been on the indefinite hunger strike at the Khanauri border point between Punjab and Haryana since November 26 last year over farmers' various demands including seeking a legal guarantee on the minimum support price (MSP) for crops.

Supreme Court refuses to entertain pleas challenging 33% reservation to women

Simmi Kaur Babbar

New Delhi, Jan. 10: The 'Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam' got the President's assent on September 28, 2023 after a special session of the Parliament was called to pass the law. The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain petitions challenging the law providing 33% reservation to women, stating that the petitioners are free to approach the high court to contest the validity of the provision. The top court made the observations while hearing petitions filed by Congress leader Jaya Thakur and non-profit National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) against the bill preceding the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, which introduced 33% reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies. The twin pleas sought striking down of a specific provision which made conduct of census and subsequent delimitation as a prerequisite to implement the reservation as they argued for its immediate roll-out. "We are not inclined to interfere under Article 32," the bench headed by justice Bela M Trivedi said. The said provision in the Constitution allows citizens to approach the

Supreme Court for enforcement of their fundamental rights. "Tell us what is the fundamental right that is being affected," the bench, also comprising justice



PB Varale, said. The 'Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam' got the President's assent on September 28, 2023 after a special session of the Parliament was called to pass the law, and the historic proceeding took place in the new Parliament building on September 19 that year. Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for

NFIW, said that the issue is of equality as reservation for women cannot be dependent on carrying out delimitation exercise. "What does delimitation have to do with granting reservation? This is a violation of Article 14 (right to equality) of the Constitution. We are challenging that part which makes implementation subject to delimitation," Bhushan said. The bench observed, "There is no violation of Article 14," referring to the long history of legislative interventions to provide reservation for women in Parliament and Assemblies that failed to translate into law. "So far it was never brought into effect. Now it is implemented. If you find any unconstitutionality in it, you may challenge it in the high court," the court added. Representing the Centre, advocate Kanu Agarwal informed the bench that the timing of the implementation of the law is part of legislative policy, and no judicial review can lie in this regard. However, he slammed the petitioners for raising a challenging to a Constitution Amendment Act without pointing out how the basic structure of the Constitution is affected by this law. The bill on women reservation in Parliament and assemblies was introduced in 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2008 but it failed to fructify into a law.

Shiromani Akali Dal accepts Sukhbir Badal's resignation as party chief

ST Correspondent

Chandigarh, Jan. 10: Sukhbir Badal had tendered his resignation as the party chief on November 16 last year but the party's working committee did not accept his resignation. The working committee of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Friday accepted the resignation of Sukhbir Singh Badal as party chief. Badal's resignation was accepted in the working committee meeting held at the party's headquarters in Chandigarh. The move came over a month after Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh had asked the SAD to implement the December 2 edict at the earliest. On December 2, the Akal Takht had ordered the SAD working committee to accept the resignation of Sukhbir Singh Badal, who had been declared tankhaiya



(guilty of religious misconduct) for the mistakes committed during the SAD regime in Punjab. It had also formed a panel to appoint new delegates and hold elections for the post of SAD president and other office-bearers within six months. After his resignation was accepted, Sukhbir Singh Badal thanked party workers and leaders for their support. Badal had tendered his resignation as the party chief on November 16 last year but the party's working committee did not accept his resignation, appealing to him to reconsider his resignation otherwise the entire committee would resign en masse. While pronouncing the religious punishment for Badal and other leaders for the "mistakes" committed by the SAD and its government in Punjab from 2007 to 2017 on December 2, the Akal Takht also directed the SAD's working committee to accept the resignation of Badal as party chief and other leaders. Badal was declared 'tankhaiya' (guilty of religious misconduct) by the Akal Takht, the highest temporal seat of Sikhs, on August 30 last year. He had undergone religious punishment. Also Read | Don't drag your feet, accept Sukhbir's resignation, jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh tells SAD On December 4, a former militant Narain Singh Chaura had fired at Sukhbir from close range - while the latter was undergoing tankhah (religious punishment) for the "mistakes" of his party - but had missed the shot as he was overpowered by policemen in plain clothes and later arrested.

Rajiv Bajaj jumps in on '90-hr work week' debate

New Delhi, Jan 10: Amid an online outrage over Larsen & Toubro (L&T) chairperson's "90-hour work week" remarks, Bajaj Auto's managing director Rajiv Bajaj has said that the quality of work done matters much more than the hours. In an interview with CNBC TV18, Rajiv Bajaj said that if one wants a 90-hour work week, it should start from the top. "If you want a 90-hour week, start from the top," Rajiv Bajaj told CNBC-TV18. "Number of hours of work doesn't matter, the quality of work does. We need a kinder, gentler world more than ever before." Bajaj also said that companies must move away from adopting regressive policies like a fixed number of working hours. He also addressed the importance of work-life balance and weighed upon the cost of a 70 or 90-hour work week. "Even if someone works 70 or 90 hours a week, their life remains interconnected with other aspects-family, health, and well-being. Ignoring this interconnectedness will come at a cost," he said in the interview. Larsen and Toubro chairman SN Subrahmanyam triggered an online outrage after he asked people to work for 90 hours a week. "I regret I am not able to make you work on Sundays. If I can make you work on Sundays, I will be happier, because I work on Sundays," Subrahmanyam was quoted as saying in an undated video circulating on social media.

SC issues notice in Sambhal Shahi Jama Masjid well dispute, orders status quo

Navdeep Singh Sahni

New Delhi, Jan.10: The Supreme Court on Friday issued a notice on a plea by the Sambhal's Jama Masjid management committee, and ordered status quo with regard to a private well located near the entrance of the mosque. A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjay Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar directed that no steps be taken regarding the well without its permission and instructed the authorities to file a status report within two weeks. The plea filed by the Committee of Management of Shahi Jama Masjid challenged a November 19, 2024 order by the Sambhal Senior Division Civil Judge that allowed the appointment of an advocate commissioner to survey the mosque. It was argued that the survey led to violence and loss of life, prompting the urgent intervention of the top court. Senior Advocate Huzefa Ahmadi, representing the Committee of Management, emphasised the historical

significance of the well, stating, "We have been drawing water from the well since time immemorial. Ahmadi raised concerns



over a notice referring to the site as "Hari Mandir" and plans for starting religious activities there. "No such activities will be permitted. Please file a status report," the

CJI said. The bench said the status quo must be maintained concerning the well, and no notices related to it would be given effect. Advocate Vishnu Shankar Jain, representing the Hindu side, said the well is outside the mosque's purview and has historically been used for worship. Ahmadi said the well is partly within and partly outside the mosque premises, citing a Google Maps image to support the claim. "Pass an appropriate direction to the District Magistrate, Sambhal to ensure that status quo is maintained with respect to the private well situated near the stairs/entrance of the Mosque and not to take any steps/actions with regard to the same without due permission from this Hon'ble Court," the plea said. The mosque committee said it has filed the plea against a November 19, 2024 order of the Civil Judge, Senior Division, Sambhal at Chandausi, in a case. The local court allowed an application seeking appointment of an Advocate Commissioner to survey the Shahi Jama Masjid.

Donald Trump gets unconditional discharge in hush money case

Tejinder Kaur Babbar

New York, Jan. 10: In a singular moment in US history, President-elect Donald Trump faces sentencing Friday for his New York hush money conviction after the nation's highest court refused to intervene. Like so much else in the criminal case and the current American political landscape, the scenario set to unfold in an austere Manhattan courtroom was unimaginable only a few years ago. A state judge is to say what consequences, if any, the country's former and soon-to-be leader will face for felonies that a jury found he committed. With Trump 10 days from inauguration, Judge Juan M. Merchan has indicated he plans a no-penalty sentence called an unconditional discharge and prosecutors aren't opposing it. That would mean no jail time, no probation and no fines would be imposed, but nothing is final until Friday's proceeding is done. Regardless of the outcome, Trump will become the first person con-

victed of a felony to assume the presidency. Trump, who is expected to appear by video from his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, will have the opportunity to speak. He has pillored the case, the only one of his four criminal indictments that has gone to trial and



possibly the only one that ever will. The judge has indicated that he plans the unconditional discharge - a rarity in felony convictions - partly to avoid complicated constitutional issues that would

arise if he imposed a penalty that overlapped with Trump's presidency. The hush money case accused him of fudging his business' records to veil a \$130,000 payoff to porn actor Stormy Daniels. She was paid, late in Trump's 2016 campaign, not to tell the public about a sexual encounter she maintains the two had a decade earlier. He says nothing sexual happened between them, and he contends that his political adversaries spun up a bogus prosecution to try to damage him. "I never falsified business records. It is a fake, made up charge," the Republican president-elect wrote on his Truth Social platform last week. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, whose office brought the charges, is a Democrat. Bragg's office said in a court filing Monday that Trump committed "serious offenses that caused extensive harm to the sanctity of the electoral process and to the integrity of New York's financial marketplace." While the specific charges were about checks

and ledgers, the underlying accusations were seamy and deeply entangled with Trump's political rise. Prosecutors said Daniels was paid off - through Trump's personal attorney at the time, Michael Cohen - as part of a wider effort to keep voters from hearing about Trump's alleged extramarital escapades. Trump denies the alleged encounters occurred. His lawyers said he wanted to squelch the stories to protect his family, not his campaign. And while prosecutors said Cohen's reimbursements for paying Daniels were deceptively logged as legal expenses, Trump says that's simply what they were. "There was nothing else it could have been called," he wrote on Truth Social last week, adding, "I was hiding nothing." Trump's lawyers tried unsuccessfully to forestall a trial. Since his May conviction on 34 counts of falsifying business records, they have pulled virtually every legal lever within reach to try to get the conviction overturned, the case dismissed or at least the sentencing postponed.

No disputed structure should be called mosque: Yogi

Naresh Malhotra

Lucknow, Jan. 10: "The day we stop calling such a structure a mosque, people will stop going there too. It is also against the principles of Islam to hurt anyone's faith and build a mosque-like structure there and any kind of worship at such a place is not acceptable even to God," he said at a conclave organised by a private news channel at Airavat Ghat in Mahakumbh mela area ahead of the formal start of Mahakumbh-2025. "When the God does not approve of such worship, why should we worship there in vain. Also, it is not necessary to build a structure for worship in Islam, while it is very much so in Sanatan Dharma," the CM added. "Sanatanis will go to temple for worship but so is not in Islam. In such a situation, we should not insist on calling any structure a mosque. This is the time to move forward with thinking about a new India. We should pay attention to this," he said. Yogi further said the installation of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya a year ago and the Mahakumbh being held at such an auspicious time after 144 years, were due to the grace of God. He said sadhus from some states of Northeast along with South India were not able to come to

Kumbh-2019 whereas this time, the picture of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat' will be seen in Mahakumbh-2025. "Sadhus and devotees



from everywhere will be present here. The third largest population of the world will take a dip in the Triveni of Prayagraj in the next 45 days," the CM added. Countering the opposition's attack, Yogi said, "We never said that the

BJP has associated itself with the organisation of Mahakumbh. Who stopped them from taking the fair to new heights. Before 2017, this event was synonymous with dirt and chaos. What was the situation in the Mahakumbh-2013." "In 2013, when the then Prime Minister of Mauritius came to India to take a holy dip in the Ganga, he went back after seeing pollution, filth and mismanagement during the Kumbh," he added. The CM said the Mahakumbh 2025 will be known as a grand gathering of good governance, faith and modernity. Refuting reports of polluted water at Sangam, he said he too had read some such reports. "I have come here many times. I have come to the banks of Sangam and seen the water and its quantity. I have also bathed in the water and sipped it. My health did not deteriorate. Some people have taken a contract of spreading propaganda," Yogi said. "Currently, there is more than 10,300 cusec of water only in the Ganga and the Yamuna. Such a large amount of water has never been seen at the Sangam in independent India," he added. "It is so clean that you can take a dip and also do 'aachman' (sip) without any hesitation. I do it myself and this is also my belief," the CM said.

Congress takes dig at PM Modi over 'I'm not a God' remark in podcast with Nikhil Kamath

New Delhi, Jan. 10: The Congress party on Friday reacted to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "I'm not a god" remark during a podcast with Zerodha co-founder Nikhil Kamath. In the over two-hour-long

from hard work' and 'I will not do anything for myself and I am human who can make mistakes, but I will never do anything wrong with bad intentions.' This is my life's Mantra. Everyone makes mistakes, including me. After all, I am a human being, not some God," Modi said in the podcast. Reacting to the remarks, Congress MP Jairam Ramesh said that the statement is coming from the Prime Minister who had "proclaimed his non-biological status" before the 2024 Lok Sabha election. Ramesh was referring to a remark by Modi in an interview that he had been "sent by God". "This from a man who proclaimed his non-biological status just eight months back. This is clearly damage control," Ramesh wrote on X, while sharing a clip of PM Modi's old interview. "Until my mother was alive, I used to think I was born biologically. After her demise, when I look at my experiences, I am convinced that I was sent by God. This strength is not from my body. It has been given to me by God. That's why God also gave me the ability, strength, pure-heartedness, and inspiration to do this.



podcast, which was released on Friday on YouTube, the Prime Minister said that everyone makes mistakes, including him. Recalling a speech he had delivered as chief minister of Gujarat, Modi told Kamath: "When I became the chief minister, I gave a speech in which I said, 'I will not shy away

NEWS BOX

BBMP fines Rodic Consultants for major error in Tunnel Road project report

BENGALURU. The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) and the state government have been left red-faced following the 'error' in the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for its ambitious Tunnel Road project. Table 15 of the Executive Summary on page 29 of the DPR has details of cities like Nashik and Malegaon in Maharashtra instead of Bengaluru. Taking serious note of the same, BBMP imposed a penalty of Rs 5 lakh against New Delhi-based Rodic Consultants Limited. Chief engineer, BS Prahlad took to X and informed that the agency has apologised for the error, which he attributed to a compilation mistake. "Rodic Consultants Limited has tendered



its apologies for the mistake. A penalty of Rs 5 lakh has been imposed. BBMP looks forward to more constructive public participation," he wrote. The mistake drew sharp criticism from activists and the opposition BJP, who labelled it as 'copy paste' work for a project worth Rs 9.5 crore.

Rajagiri's green zone is so much more!

KOCHI. Kakkannad, once synonymous with everything IT, has in recent years been relegated to 'trash talks' after a fire at the waste treatment plant in Brahmapuram on March 2, 2023, left a greater part of Kochi gasping for breath for weeks. The incident threw light, among many things, on the fast-depleting green cover in the city as it makes giant strides to become a metropolis. Though several 'band-aid' campaigns have been launched since then, the Rajeevani initiative of Rajagiri College in Kakkannad deserves special mention.

The programme has seen a section of the campus designated as an 'Oxygen Zone' in 2014. Lush with greenery, this space improves air quality and enhances the overall well-being of the campus community. "It was Fr A J Savian's vision that helped shape this project," says Lakshmi K Raghavan, a Rajagiri faculty member. "Every year, we introduce new initiatives to further augment this programme. Now, it is spearheaded by the college's Nature Club." The Oxygen Zone also comprises Rajeevanam, an eco-friendly herbal orchard with ayurvedic medicinal plants.

There are 284 plant varieties here, including 28 found on the IUCN Red List and considered endangered, such as rudraksham," says Annu James, a faculty member and coordinator of Nature Club. In addition, there are 130 mahogany and 100 mango trees, a 'pachakkari thottam', a fruit garden, and a special section called Nakshatranavanam (star forest) wherein specific trees co-relating with the 27 birth stars as per Indian astrology are planted.

The initiatives undertaken by the students include millet farming, creating biodiversity and fauna registers, and organising sapling distribution to nearby neighbourhoods.

KSRTC to deploy 800 buses during Makaravilakku

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM. In view of the heavy rush during the Makaravilakku, KSRTC has decided to deploy over 800 buses for Sabarimala pilgrims. Buses will be pooled from different depots for chain services, special services and long-distance services. The elaborate arrangements come in the backdrop of a High Court direction to ensure that no pilgrim travels standing. A meeting held by the KSRTC management evaluated the arrangement of buses and their parking causing minimal disruption to other pilgrims visiting Pampa. There are currently 245 buses in the Pampa-Nilakkal chain service, long-distance services from Pampa and parking circular services. In addition, 228 buses are also operating from various special centres, including Pathanamthitta, Chengannur, Kottayam, Erumeli, Kumily, Kottarakkara, Punalur and Ernakulam. Besides, 400 more buses will be brought for special service on Makaravilakku day. The buses will be arranged for the pilgrims to reach Nilakkal after the Makara Jyothi darshan on January 14. The officials said that the long-distance services and chain services from Pampa to Nilakkal will be operated only in a controlled manner.

Air quality in Chennai improved by 43 per cent, says report

CHENNAI. Chennai may have made progress in its fight against air pollution, as per an analysis by environmental think tank EnviroCatalysts. The report states that the city's annual average PM2.5 levels have dropped from 49 µg/m3 in 2017, the baseline year for the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), to 28 µg/m3 in 2024, marking a 43% improvement in air quality. However, insufficient monitoring stations and data gaps continue to raise concerns. Ideally, a city of Chennai's size should have 30 continuous ambient air quality monitoring stations (CAAQMS). However, it currently has only nine. Only seven of these nine stations had data for the full year of 2024. The remaining two in Ennore and Manali, both industrial regions, didn't have data for nine and seven months respectively. The analysis also reveals uneven progress across Chennai's neighbourhoods. Alandur Bus Depot reported the highest annual PM2.5 concentration at 45 µg/m3, while Kodungaiyur recorded the lowest at 13 µg/m3. Four stations reported concentrations at or below 25 µg/m3, meeting India's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), which set the annual PM2.5 limit at 40 µg/m3. With this, however, Chennai has achieved the NCAP's set goal of reducing pollution levels by 40% by 2024.

Experts believe the city must now target WHO's interim standard of 15 µg/m3 and eventually strive for the guideline value of 5 µg/m3 to ensure healthier air for its residents. Sunil Dahiya, founder of EnviroCatalysts, said, "No doubt Chennai has made some progress, but these numbers do not represent the entire city



since the number of CAAQMS are less compared to other metro cities. But given the challenges posed by industrial emissions, vehicular pollution, and high levels of fuel combustion, these results are remarkable, and being a coastal city helps as pollutants get dispersed quickly." Dahiya pointed out that cities like Delhi, which struggle with annual PM2.5 levels nearing 100 µg/m3, can learn from Chennai's efforts. He added that better progress could be achieved through stricter industrial emission standards, modernisation of public transportation, and a transition away from fossil fuels in the energy and transport sectors. These measures could help Chennai meet WHO's interim and long-term air quality

targets. Prabhakaran Veerarasu of Poovulagin Nanbargal, however, warned against removing Chennai from the NCAP list, arguing that doing so could disrupt the flow of resources critical for further improvement, such as air quality monitoring infrastructure and pollution control initiatives. Prabhakaran said the government must continue financing air quality management programmes and expand the network of monitoring stations to ensure comprehensive and accurate data collection. He highlighted Chennai's unique opportunity to become the first Indian city to meet WHO air quality guidelines by 2030, given its geographical advantages and current progress.

3,580 govt schools in Karnataka lack functional loos: Report

BENGALURU. While toilets are considered a basic necessity, more than 3,580 government schools in Karnataka lack functional toilets while nearly 4,000 schools do not have hand wash facilities. The sorry state of government schools, which reflects on lack of functional toilets in 2,648 boys' or co-educational schools and 937 girls' or co-educational schools, was highlighted in the recently released Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) 2023-24 report, highlighting a glaring neglect of basic infrastructure in the state's education system.

Experts question what is stopping the government from providing basic facilities in schools and argue that the government must halt its focus on promoting modern practices in schools and universities until it fixes these critical infrastructure issues in government schools. Development Educationist Professor Niranjanaradhyha stated that the figures are 'underestimated' and fail to represent the

ground reality. "The availability of toilet facilities is far worse than what the report indicates. The actual numbers are likely three to four times more," he lamented. Providing basic facilities like functional toilets and drinking water are fundamental development rights, but development rights require adequate funding—something the state government seems unwilling to prioritise, he said. Prof Niranjanaradhyha stressed that the Right to Education (RTE) Act, which mandates these facilities, has been in place since 2010.

"Fifteen years later, in 2025, if the government still cannot fulfil these bare minimum standards, what hope do we have for achieving anything beyond this?" he questioned. Child rights activist Vasudev Sharma highlighted the dire state of washrooms, particularly in rural areas. He noted that many do not have running water, lack proper latches, or are located at inconvenient distances, making them inaccessible and unsafe for children. Further, he

also questioned the government of why it makes improvements in urban areas alone. Sharma said that during every child rights Gram Sabha, the first demand raised is always for proper, functional toilets. "Why is the government turning a deaf ear to such a basic and urgent need?" he questioned. He called this not just a severe violation of the RTE Act, but also a betrayal of every child in government schools.

These reports expose the truth, yet the government refuses to act on them. How long will they continue to ignore these findings?" he asked. Nagasimha G Rao, director of Child Rights Trust, criticised the government, for claiming to work for children, asking, "Where is the proof of this? Such figures only highlight the blatant neglect." Rao said that the government should examine the figures and identify where the gaps are being ignored. It must ensure that basic facilities are provided, creating an environment.

Sanitation workers boycott work, Bhubaneswar cleaning stalled

BHUBANESWAR. Cleanliness activities were crippled in the state capital as hundreds of sanitation workers of the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) staged a mass protest seeking justice for the family of their association leader Sahadev Nayak who was brutally murdered near Rasulgarh on Wednesday. Boycotting street sweeping, door-to-door waste collection and other cleaning work, the workers gathered at Sishu Bhawan Square and demanded capital punishment for those involved in the gruesome murder of their leader in broad daylight. "Our protest will continue till justice is delivered to Sahadev," said one of the agitating workers. The agitation brought city's sanitation activities to a grinding halt, prompting BMC to look for an alternative to ensure the ongoing Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) was not impacted. A senior officer of BMC said demands of the workers were justified but efforts are on



to ensure sanitation work is not affected by the agitation. "Accordingly, alternative arrangements have been made for waste collection and disposal in the priority road network during the PBD convention," he added. The BMC also urged the sanitary workers to resume their work at the earliest. Earlier, mayor Sulochana Das had termed Sahadev as a messiah of the sanitation.

Farewell to years and years of slices of love

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM. In the past week, a small blackboard appeared in front of Santha Bakery at Pulimood bearing a poignant note: "It's time to say goodbye. Thank you all for everything."

For some, it may seem just a few words on a board, but to many, it is a farewell to a lifetime of memories. For decades, this bakery has been a part of their lives, its aroma and warmth a companion in joy. As the shutters fall for the final time on Friday, it is not just the closing of a bakery shop - it is the end of an era, spanning three generations. For over eight decades, Santha Bakery has been a part of Thiruvananthapuram. Whether it was the simple everyday bread, the festive plum cake, or the hot and spicy puffs or cutlets, Santha Bakery gave Thiruvananthapuram a taste of the best. Founded in June 1940, this bakery has been one of the pioneers in bringing in new flavours.

"After the formation of Kerala state, many people from Malabar, who had worked in the Madras Residency, opted for the Kerala government. Many from Malabar moved here with families. In the Malabar region, bakery culture had already gained popularity, influenced by the British. Here too, bakeries were becoming popular. The Secretariat, Post



Office, and banks nearby were the backbone of our business," says P M K Premnath, the current owner of the shop. P M Krishnan, father of Premnath, moved from Thalassery to Thiruvananthapuram, to establish the Santha Bakery, and continued the legacy of the renowned Mambally family of Thalassery. This family is famous for Bapu, who is credited with creating the first Christmas cake in India.

Over the years, Santha Bakery has become a beloved destination, attracting famous personalities who visit to taste its special makes. "EMS Namboodiripad, A K Gopalan, P Krishna Pillai, and many others, had a close connection to my father through their involvement with the Communist movement, so they would often drop by. Sometimes, they would just sit and have friendly

conversations here. People like Sivaji Ganesan, Gemini Ganesan, Sathyan, Sukumari, and writers such as S K Pottekkatt have also visited the shop to buy things in the past," Premnath says. Santha Bakery was the first to introduce new tastes to Thiruvananthapuram, such as the doughnut in the 1970s, which people humorously referred to as 'Inippu vada' (sweet vada) at the time. They also offered hand-kneaded bread, apple cake, and many other firsts.

THE SIKH TIMES

Edited, Printed, Published
Owned by **Simmi Babbar**
N - 31, Dr. Mukherjee Nagar
Delhi-110009
Printed at **Qaumi Patrika Printing Press, A-4/A-144, Tronica City (Loni), Ghaziabad (Uttar Pradesh)**
Corporate Office:
5, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg,
Press Area, ITO, New Delhi
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RNI No. DELENG/2008/25465

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Two more held in BMC staff killing, drug cartel angle emerges

BHUBANESWAR. A day after the brutal murder of sanitary supervisor Sahadev Nayak rocked Bhubaneswar, police on Thursday arrested two more assailants even as the victim's family alleged a bigger brown sugar smuggling network was behind the incident.

On the day, another couple Laxmi Nayak and Rakesh Nayak were nabbed in connection with the crime on the day, taking the total arrests to five. Prime accused Lipika Nayak, her husband Laxmidhar Nayak along with an associate Rocky Nayak had been held on Wednesday. Police said the murder was over previous enmity of Sahadev with the two couples and carried out by six persons. Briefing mediapersons, Bhubaneswar DCP Pinak Mishra said, one more accused identified as Sushant Nayak is still at large

and police are trying to nab him. The arrested five, he said, had assembled at Sushant's house in Dumduma on Tuesday evening to hatch a plan to kill Sahadev over personal enmity. As part of their plan, Lipika, Laxmidhar, Rocky and Sushant intercepted Sahadev near Rasulgarh over-bridge when he was returning after dropping his daughter at her school. "The four attacked Sahadev with two swords and killed him on the spot. They then went to Daya river and disposed of the weapons along with their clothes. They fled to Lipika's native village within Sarankul police limits in Nayagarh district," said Mishra.

The victim as well as the accused belonged to Kedarpalli slums. Sahadev who was a sanitary supervisor with the Bhubaneswar



Municipal Corporation was also a police volunteer. Even as police stuck to the personal enmity angle, the victim's family alleged there was a bigger conspiracy to eliminate him as he was strongly opposed to

drug peddling in Kedarpalli. Sahadev's family members including his wife Sunita met Mancheswar police on the day and alleged that he was killed since he had confronted drug suppliers in his locality. "Sahadev was against the brown sugar trade as he was concerned about the future of youths in the locality. He had even confronted some peddlers in the past for selling the contraband," said the victim's uncle, Bijay Nayak. Since Sahadev was a police mitra and shared information with police, his family suspect a bigger conspiracy was hatched to eliminate him as he was opposed to the kingpin of the drug ring, reportedly a woman.

A night walk through the spooky lanes of Fort Kochi

KOCHI. People have witnessed many tourist locations and monuments in Fort Kochi. And many know that Kochi decked up for Christmas and New Year. What about Kochi at night? Food anthropologist Oneal Babu's spook trail through Fort Kochi lanes is an interesting heritage walk that introduces the lore, myths, history and horror stories of Kochi to visitors. Oneal came across the concept of a spook trail while he was studying in Edinburgh, Scotland. "A man there used to hold a spook trail with stories of witches and sorcery. Many of those lore sounded just like Harry Potter," he recalls. When he returned to Fort Kochi, his hometown, inspired by the Edinburgh spook trail, he set up his own night walk, filled with spooky tales and history talks. He named the initiative Phantasma - Colonial Crawlies. "The first edition of Phantasma was through Jew Town, a lesser-known location in Fort Kochi. Since December 2022, I have conducted walks through the lanes of Jew Town at night. Now, this year, I am kicking off the second edition, and the centre of the stories is Fort Kochi," he says. During the day, Kochi is filled with tourists, both foreign and domestic, and numerous vehicles. "One cannot understand or enjoy the beauty of this historical town. You wouldn't even see the people who live here. And many of the visitors come here to enjoy pop history," smiles Oneal. "So, I thought of introducing my hometown to the people, without distractions of the day." The walk starts at 11pm from Santa Cruz Cathedral Basilica and ends at the same place. In two hours, Oneal will take around 30 people through the bylanes of Kochi, less traversed by anyone other than locals, and reveal the legends he grew up hearing. Under the cover of night, step by step he will peel a few tantalising layers of the enigma that is Kochi. At the beginning of the walk, Oneal will present every walker with a postcard filled with riddles.

At the end of the walk, everyone can take a few minutes to solve those," he says. It is his way of introducing the real Kochi to people. "This is my small attempt at it," he says. Oneal held the first spooky trail through Fort Kochi on December 13.

NEWS BOX

"False": International Fact-Checking Network On Zuckerberg's Censorship Claim

Washington, United States. Meta founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg's claim that the fact-checking program on Facebook and Instagram has veered into censorship is "false", the International Fact-Checking Network said Thursday.



decision to scrap fact-check operations currently only applies to the United States, the International Fact-Checking Network warned of the potentially devastating impact if the group were to end its worldwide programs covering more than 100 countries.

"If Meta decides to stop the program worldwide, it is almost certain to result in real-world harm in many places," it added.

In that program, content rated "false" is downgraded in news feeds so fewer people will see it and if someone tries to share that post, they are presented with an article explaining why it is misleading.

Malibu Ocean-Front Hollywood Stars' Homes Wrecked In LA Wildfires

Pacific Palisades, United States. Flying south through smoky skies down the famous Malibu coast, at first the burnt-out mansions are the exception -- solitary wrecks, smoldering away between rows of intact, gleaming beachfront villas.

But draw closer to Pacific Palisades, the ground zero of Los Angeles's devastating fires, and those small scorched ruins become sporadic clusters, and then endless rows of charred, crumpled homes.

There have been at least two separate reports of human remains found in this fire alone, though officials have yet to confirm the fatal toll.

On some of these highly coveted Malibu oceanfront plots, beloved by celebrities, skeletal frames of buildings indicated the lavish scale of what has been destroyed.

And looming above Malibu, a thin sliver of luxurious waterfront property, is Pacific Palisades itself -- an affluent plateau of expensive real estate, now deserted.

Deaths In Gaza During First 9-Months Of War 40% Higher Than Recorded: Lancet

Paris, France. Research published in The Lancet medical journal on Friday estimates that the death toll in Gaza during the first nine months of the Israel-Hamas war was around 40 percent higher than recorded by the Palestinian territory's health ministry.

The number of dead in Gaza has become a matter of bitter debate since Israel launched its military campaign against Hamas in response to the Palestinian militant group's unprecedented October 7, 2023 attack.

That toll represented 2.9 percent of Gaza's pre-war population, "or approximately one in 35 inhabitants," the study said.

The toll was only for deaths from traumatic injuries, so did not include deaths from a lack of health care or food, or the thousands of missing believed to be buried under rubble.

Grant Visa To Afghan Businessmen, Students: Taliban Urges India

World. Afghanistan has assured New Delhi that it does not pose a threat to any nation and expressed hope for raising the level of diplomatic relations with India, which it described as "a key regional and economic player."

Afghanistan's acting Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi and Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met in Dubai on Wednesday.

Indian delegation that Afghanistan does not pose a threat to any nation, FM Muttaqi expressed hope for raising the level of diplomatic relations, and easing the visa regime for Afghan businessmen, patients and students.

The Afghanistan Foreign Ministry statement said that during the Wednesday's meeting, Afghanistan's Deputy Ministers of Commerce & Transport were present and comprehensive talks were held on political, economic and people-to-people relations between the two countries.



concerns, it said. The Misri-Muttaqi talks came two days after India "unequivocally" condemned Pakistani airstrikes in Afghanistan that killed dozens of civilians.

In response to the request from the Afghan side, India will provide further material support in the first instance to the health sector and for the rehabilitation of refugees, it said.

Dubai's New Rs 85,000 Crore Project: 2 Buildings Connected By A "Sky Pool"

World. Two new skyscrapers, each standing at 591 feet, will soon be added to Dubai's skyline as part of a \$1-billion (around Rs 85,879 crore) luxury development at Marasi Marina.



remains out of reach for others, all apartments in the development will come with private swimming terraces and access to an 82-foot indoor lap pool.

Architectural firm Foster + Partners, which designed the project, said the towers' exterior was inspired by cascading water.

statement. This layout allows for one expansive apartment on each floor, maximising natural light and ventilation.

The towers' podium will include green spaces, retail outlets and dining options.

"You Burn...": Israel's Post On Los Angeles Wildfires Draws Backlash Amid Gaza War

World. At least ten people have died in the wildfires ravaging Southern California since Wednesday, with thousands more impacted by the devastating flames.



aid from the Biden government. The funds have been used to target Gaza since the October 7 Hamas attack in southern Israel.

Now, social media users are questioning Israel's empathy given its ongoing war on Gaza that has lasted over 15 months.

You're sending thoughts??? Lol after the US sent you billions. Thought they are your greatest ally lol. The people of the US need to wake up !!! Billions of

dollars sent to Israel while Americans homes burn to the ground," a comment read.

The wildfires ravaging Los Angeles County have caused widespread devastation with tens of thousands forced to evacuate.

don't know," the SpaceX CEO admitted.

But Musk also drew a distinction between a creative entity and a moral observer. He questioned whether such an entity is watching over our daily actions and passing moral judgment.

Musk said that Christian beliefs "result in the greatest happiness for humanity, considering not just the present, but all future humans..."



Jimmy Carter Funeral Brings Biden, 4 Ex Presidents To Honour One Of Their Own

The event saw President Joe Biden alongside former presidents Barack Obama, George W Bush, Bill Clinton, and Donald Trump.

humanitarian work. The event saw outgoing President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden seated alongside former Presidents Barack Obama, George W Bush, Bill Clinton, and their partners.



with Trump. Her husband, Doug Emhoff, however, was seen shaking hands with the former president.

World. Five US presidents -- past and present -- set aside political differences to pay their final respects to former President Jimmy Carter at his funeral in the Washington National Cathedral.

In his eulogy, Biden praised Carter's integrity and his transformative role as a private citizen post-presidency.

with Trump despite their fractured relationship following the Capitol riots of January 6, 2021.

In a way, former President Gerald Ford was also present, with his son, Steve, delivering a eulogy penned by his late father.

NEWS BOX

Sri Lankan Navy arrests 10 fishers from TN, Puducherry for crossing IMBL

NAGAPATTINAM. Ten fishermen from Puducherry's Karaikal and TN were arrested by the Sri Lankan navy on Wednesday night for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) and fishing in the island nation's waters. The mechanised boat in which the crew went for fishing is registered in the name of P Selvamani from Keezhakasakudimedu in Karaikal, said sources. The crew included three from Vanagiri, one from Perumalpettai and one from Vellakoil in Mayiladuthurai district; one from Samanthanpettai in Nagapattinam district; and two from Keezhakasakudimedu and two from Karaikalmedu in Karaikal. Sources said the fishermen ventured into sea from the Karaikal on Tuesday. They were fishing southeast of Kodiyakarai (Point



Calimere) on Wednesday evening when a group of personnel from Lanka's northern naval command allegedly captured Selvamani's boat. The fishermen were then led to the Kankesanthurai harbour and were handed to officials with the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DFAR) of Sri Lanka. CM MK Stalin and his Puducherry counterpart N Rangasamy have written to the Union External.

Walayar case: CBI arraigns parents of victims

KOCHI. In a dramatic twist in the Walayar case, the CBI, in a supplementary chargesheet, has arraigned the parents of the victims in the rape and death of two sisters, aged 9 and 13, that rocked the state in 2017. As many as six chargesheets were filed before the Ernakulam CBI court in the case, and in all of them, the parents of the victims were indicted. They were accused of abetting rape and not reporting the rape incident to the police, sources said. They were charged with offences under IPC and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The CBI investigation found that the parents deliberately concealed the facts that their daughters were raped by the accused persons. Similarly, the investigation agency also found that accused persons abetted the rape.

Earlier, CBI filed six chargesheets related to the rape and suicide deaths of two sisters. The accused in the cases are Valiya Madhu, Shibu, Pradeep and Kutti Madhu for the death of the elder girl. Similarly, Valiya Madhu and a minor boy were accused of abetting the murder of the younger girl. Kutty Madhu was later found dead in a closed private factory in Binanipuram near Aluva in October 2023. Another accused, Pradeep was found hanging in his Cherthala residence on November 4, 2020. While Valiya Madhu and Cheriya Madhu were close relatives of the girls, Shibu, a resident of Rajakkad in Idukki, had been living with the family for several years and frequently engaged in masonry work with them. The incident took place in 2017 when the two girls were found dead within a span of two months in Walayar, in Palakkad. The siblings were found hanging in the same fashion in a shed near their house. Walayar police had come to the conclusion that the girls were sexually abused for nearly a year until they were forced to end their lives. The CBI took over the probe following the directive of the Kerala High Court in April 2021 after ordering.

At 12.8°C, Ahmedabad sees second coldest morning of 2025

AHMEDABAD. Amdavadis woke up to a crisp winter morning as the mercury touched 12.8 degrees celsius on Thursday, bringing a fleeting chill that has been rare this season. While temperatures dipped below 13 degrees for the second time in 2025, the trend of warmer-than-usual winters continues, with average minimums staying above normal since Nov. The temperature rollercoaster is set to continue, as winds shifting to easterly and south-easterly directions are expected to drive temperatures higher. Though Thursday was cooler than usual, the minimum temperature was still 0.5 degrees higher than normal. This comes after a week where minimum temperatures climbed to 15.1 degrees celsius. Since Nov, the city's lowest recorded temperature was 11.8 degrees celsius on Dec 17. However, the overall trend shows a warmer winter, with minimum temperatures averaging 1.8 degrees above normal in Nov and 1.4 degrees higher in Dec. Meanwhile, a change in wind direction from easterly to south-easterly is likely to cause a rise in temperature in the city and state from Friday. The India meteorological department (IMD) predicts a rise in minimum temperatures by 2-3 degrees celsius over the next two days.

ACB questions KTR for over seven hours on alleged misuse of funds in Formula-E race

HYDERABAD. A team of ACB officials, comprising the agency's joint director Ritira, DSP Majid Ali Khan and deputy director SVN Shivaram, on Thursday grilled former Municipal Administration minister KT Rama Rao for over seven hours as part of the investigation into the allegation of corruption in organising the Formula-E car race in 2023.

Rama Rao, accompanied by senior advocate J Ramachandra Rao, reached the heavily barricaded ACB office at Banjara Hills at 10:10 am. According to sources, Rama Rao was reportedly asked whether he was aware of the alleged illegality in the transfer of funds to a foreign firm, the reason behind the payment at a time the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) was in force, and why no prior approval from the Cabinet or RBI was obtained.

He was also questioned about whether IAS officer Arvind Kumar or former HMDA chief engineer BLN Reddy informed him about the procedures and the reason behind the withdrawal of Ace Nxt Gen Pvt Ltd as a sponsor from the race. Additionally, he was asked if there was any proof to back his claim that the state earned about Rs 700 crore from the event and several questions based on the statements of Arvind Kumar, Accused No. 2 in the case. According to sources, Rama Rao countered some of the ACB's questions with his own while clarifying others. When asked why the file related to the Formula-E race was signed but not forwarded for Cabinet approval, the former minister responded that he signed the file to promote Telangana's reputation and facilitate the race in Hyderabad. He told the



ACB that Business Rules related to government operations and the movement of files fall entirely under the purview of the chief secretary. Regarding allegations of corruption, Rama Rao stated that since the funds sent by the government reached FEO, the issue of corruption does not arise.

He pointed out that the FIR itself clearly outlines the flow of funds and leaves no room for allegations of misuse. "The charges are baseless, and the case is illegitimate," the former minister reportedly told the ACB. He pointed out that all communications regarding the Formula-E race are stored in the official email account assigned to him as a minister, which is now under the state government's control. The former minister reiterated his authority to make policy decisions as part of the government. On the issue of Cabinet approval,

Rama Rao asserted that the chief secretary and senior officials oversee Business Rules. The former minister argued that the ACB did not have the authority to question policy decisions. Noting that both state and Union governments often make policy decisions to organise sports events, he cited Andhra Pradesh's hosting of the Afro-Asian Games as an example. The interrogation reportedly focused on the same six or seven questions. Earlier, before entering the heavily barricaded ACB office—where access was restricted to journalists and local residents—Rama Rao said that as a minister, he did his best to enhance Telangana's prestige and Hyderabad's brand image. "During the BRS regime, we did not give Rs 1,137 crore to our brothers-in-law. I did not award contracts to my son's companies. I did not buy Land Cruisers.

Kerala Government extends suspension of IAS officer Prasanth by 120 days

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM. The state government has extended the suspension period of IAS officer Prasanth N by 120 days, effective from 10 January, following recommendations from the suspension review committee.

Prasanth, who had failed to reply to the charge memo served on him, has been granted 15 days to submit his response. The IAS officer was suspended from his role as Special Secretary in the Agriculture Department in November last year for making social media posts against his senior, Additional Chief Secretary A. Jayathilak, and former Industries Director K. Gopalakrishnan. According to the charge memo, Prasanth had attempted to "build a narrative against other IAS officers among



the public" and tarnish the reputation of the government. The memo concluded that Prasanth's actions, including attempts to justify his stance through the press and social media, constituted a breach of the All India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968. In an earlier move, Prasanth had served a legal notice through his counsel to Chief Secretary Sarada Muraliedharan, A. Jayathilak, and K. Gopalakrishnan. Meanwhile, the suspension review committee has revoked the suspension of IAS officer K. Gopalakrishnan, who was embroiled in a controversy regarding the creation of a WhatsApp group allegedly formed on religious lines. The committee observed that there were "no substantive grounds necessitating the continuation of the officer under suspension" and recommended that the disciplinary authority lift the suspension pending finalisation of disciplinary action. In another development, Principal Secretary-rank IAS officer B. Ashok has been relieved from his position as Agriculture Production Commissioner and Agriculture Secretary.

Five crore rupees fake loan fraud uncovered, 11 arrested in Andhra Pradesh

GUNTUR. Guntur police uncovered a massive fake loan scam at the Guntur District Co-operative Central Bank (GDCC) and arrested 11 individuals on Friday. Guntur District Superintendent of Police (SP) Sathish Kumar revealed that over 54 fraudulent loans worth Rs 5 crore were approved in the scheme.

The scam came to light when U Lingeswar Rao, a resident of Veeriahpalem village in Prakasam district, discovered a Rs 6 lakh loan taken in his name at Chinakondrupadu Primary Agriculture Cooperative Society. He filed a complaint with Prathipadu police on October 18, 2024.

Upon investigation, authorities identified a



network of criminals from Palnadu district who had expanded their operations to other regions. The police found that over 30 individuals, including GDCC Bank staff, had created fake identities of farmers to obtain

loans. Among those arrested were S Nagaraju, J Prabhakar, T Yোগaiah, M Seetharamanjeyulu, S Venkateswarulu, T Venkata Sandeep Kumar, N Srinivasa Rao, M Nageswar Rao, B Lakshmi Narayana, A Tirupathi Reddy, and G Levi, a retired MRO. The accused forged passbooks, Aadhaar cards, and bank documents to secure the loans.

Investigations revealed that two former Mandal Revenue Officers (MROs), three Village Revenue Officers (VROs), and an ex-bank manager were also implicated in the scam. The authorities have launched an intensive probe into the matter, with further arrests expected.

Madras HC sought status report on PIL to open Sirumalai biodiversity park in Dindigul

MADURAI. The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court on Thursday sought a status report on a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petition seeking a direction from the state government to open the biodiversity park at Sirumalai in Dindigul to the public. The litigant R Manibharathi, an advocate from Madurai, submitted that Sirumalai is a dense forest sprawling over 60,000 acre, located 25 km from Dindigul district. It is home to 536 species of trees and 895 types of herbs. To promote ecotourism, the state government decided to establish a biodiversity park in 2019 at a cost of Rs 5 crore here. There were also plans to set up an arboretum consisting



of over 100 varieties of trees with botanical names, he added. Though construction of the park was over, it has not been inaugurated yet, due to maintenance works being carried out at the park, he alleged. This is due to the poor quality of construction by the concerned contractor, he further claimed. He requested the court to direct the government to open the park to public after ensuring adequate basic facilities were in place. A bench comprising Justices MS Ramesh and AD Maria Cleto issued notice to the state forest department.

DKS gets Dr G Parameshwara's dinner meet shelved, proves a point to Siddaramaiah camp

BENGALURU. Karnataka Deputy CM DK Shivakumar, who is also KPCC president, appears to have proved his equation with the party high command by getting Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara to defer the SC/ST legislators' meeting. This could help him strategise and stake claim for the CM's post in future. While Parameshwara, Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna and Social Welfare Minister Dr HC Mahadevappa asserted that the meeting has only been postponed and will be held in the near future, the party high command is bound to keep tabs on such meetings. According to sources, Shivakumar too has the backing of a sizeable number of legislators and it may go up as he has plans to take some SC/ST legislators, such as Malavalli MLA Narendraswamy, into confidence in Old Mysuru region. Already, Food and Civil Supplies Minister KH Muniyappa, who is nurturing the dream of becoming deputy CM, is in Shivakumar's good books, and Anekal MLA Shivanna, Nelamangala MLA



Srinivas and others have openly identified with his camp. His masterstroke came as a setback to Parameshwara, who wanted to win over SC/ST MLAs, suggested by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. "The party's top brass realised his organisational skill which was why it roped him in to announce the 'Pyari Didi' guarantee for women ahead of the Delhi polls. He is unlikely to step down as KPCC president anytime soon," Congress insiders

observed. But the turn of events within the Congress gave an indication of a change in guard after Siddaramaiah's 30-month tenure. "The Siddaramaiah faction wants to improve its bargaining power by hosting such dinners. The camp will also raise its voice for a Dalit CM," remarked a party leader. Thanjavur: Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday accused the BJP-led Centre of creating hurdles for non-BJP-ruled states. Speaking to reporters after offering prayers at the Maha Pratyangira Devi Temple in Ayyavadi near Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu, Shivakumar alleged that the Union Government is attempting to encroach the powers of the state governments. He said that funds due to Opposition-ruled states are being withheld, prompting those states to rally under the demand, "Our Tax, Our Right". "Whatever taxes we pay to the Union Government, we are not getting proper benefits in return for our states.

NGT warns Odisha Government of heavy costs over Tampara lake constructions

CUTTACK. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has expressed displeasure over state authorities failing to respond to notices issued one year and four months back on a petition regarding constructions in eco-sensitive Tampara lake in Ganjam district.

The east zone bench of Justice B Amit Sthalekar (Judicial Member) and Dr Arun Kumar Verma (Expert Member) has also warned of imposing heavy costs on the state authorities. The notices among others were issued to chief secretary, additional chief secretary Forest and Environment department, director of Forest, Environment and Climate Change department and chairperson of State Wetland Authority.

The bench said: "We find that this is a case of 2023 where notices were issued on August 11, 2023, but till date no affidavit has been filed by Chief Secretary of Odisha, Additional Chief Secretary, Forest and Environment Department, Director Environment, Forest Environment Climate Change Department and Chairperson, State Wetland Authority Odisha."

Sanjib Swain, counsel appearing (in virtual mode) for these respondents is granted four weeks' time by way of last chance, for filing the affidavit failing which the court will be constrained to impose heavy cost upon the authority," the bench



cautioned, while directing to list the matter on February 25. Wildlife Society of Orissa had filed the petition seeking demolition of all permanent structures and restoration of

the wetland area to its original condition. The petition also sought computation of the environmental compensation for the damage to the wetland and recover it from the officials who allowed the "illegal constructions" while issuing the notices on August 11, 2023, the bench in an interim order directed the collector Ganjam to ensure no illegal construction took place in the lake. Spread over 751 acres, Tampara, one of the largest freshwater lakes is located in Rushikulya river basin which has one of the prominent nesting grounds of the endangered Olive Ridley Turtles.

The pitfalls of elevating CDS to five-star rank

An incipient debate is underway in defence and security circles on further streamlining the stature and responsibilities of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). The CDS was first appointed five years ago to construct jointness and integration amongst the armed forces. One of these deliberations centres on whether the CDS should be accorded the rank of a five-star officer to elevate his authority and reinforce his role at the apex of India's military hierarchy. The current CDS, General Anil Chauhan, and Gen Bipin Rawat before him were four-star appointees — like the three service chiefs. Proposals to upgrade the rank are aimed at enhancing its operational clout and aligning its standing with international practices.

India has traditionally reserved five-star ranks for those who have rendered extraordinary military service, like Field Marshals Sam Manekshaw and KM Cariappa and Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh. Consequently, a cross-section of service veterans argues that bestowing such an elevated status upon a CDS might just end up 'diluting' its exclusivity during peacetime. But the possibility of such an event transpiring anyhow augurs a mix of opportunities, challenges and many implications for the armed forces and civil-military ties. The CDS' position came into being nearly two decades after the Kargil Review Committee recommendations, which emphasised the need for a single-point military adviser to the government and to forge military 'jointness'. The CDS also doubles as the Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee in addition to heading the Department of Military Affairs, established under the Ministry of Defence (MoD). Additionally, he executes numerous other tasks, like force modernisation and prioritising materiel purchases. However, despite these myriad responsibilities, the CDS is equal in rank to the service chiefs, albeit deemed the first among equals. Many insiders believe that this creates internal and, at times, antagonistic ambiguities in his authority. Hence, elevating him to a five-star rank could provide the CDS overarching clout to enforce decisions across the services and augment his capacity to ensure smoother execution of joint operations and reforms, particularly in the ongoing endeavour of establishing Integrated Theatre Commands (ITCs). The inference is that as a five-star officer, he could mitigate inter-service rivalries and be an effective interlocutor between the armed forces and political leadership, ensuring that military advice featured adequately in governmental strategic decisions. But such an elevation is not without complications and the potential of disrupting delicate service hierarchies, which are still in the process of familiarising themselves with a CDS. Perforce, it would generate further trepidation among the three service chiefs. They would perceive it as a further diminishment of their long-established autonomy, which, in any event, was likely to be notably reduced merely to recruiting and training of manpower and providing logistic support under the proposed ITC model, at present under governmental review. Consequently, many veterans, fearful of a rupture in inter-service cooperation, maintain that the challenge in this regard lies in ensuring that a higher ranked CDS does not morph into 'over-centralisation' of power, thereby endangering collaborative decision-making. Many argue that this needs political oversight and sagacity on the part of both the government and Opposition, which though presently non-existent, could emerge in the future with tactful management. Critics of creating a five-star CDS argue that such an elevated rank would largely be symbolic and in no way enhance his operational effectiveness. This, in any case, would be managed by ITC heads, who, too, are expected to be four-star officers. The naysayers also contend that the CDS' ability to institute reforms and foster integration depends less on his stars and more on institutional support, consensus-building, resource allocation and political will. And, though a five-star designation would add lustre to the post, it could also detract focus from the substantive challenges of swift modernisation that confronts India's military.

Perils of a Chinese mega dam

India must seek suspension of work until there is mutual understanding about the project

XINHUA reported on December 25 that the Chinese Government had approved the largest-ever hydropower project in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo river in Tibet. This announcement, reportedly made without informing India, a lower riparian state, is a reminder of the complexity of rebuilding relations with the northern neighbour. The proposed project, under preparation for several years and closely tracked by India, has major negative implications for India. As an upper riparian state, China has an unfortunate record of reluctance to cooperate, show transparency and safeguard interests of downstream states, as it is obliged to do. We have, therefore, another major irritant emerging in an already difficult relationship. Xinhua lauded the venture as a "green project" without offering details. However, a report in Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post (SCMP) said the total investment in the dam could exceed 1 trillion yuan (\$137 billion). It is expected to generate nearly 300 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity annually, more than thrice the designed capacity (88.2 billion kWh) of the Three Gorges Dam in China, presently the largest in the world.

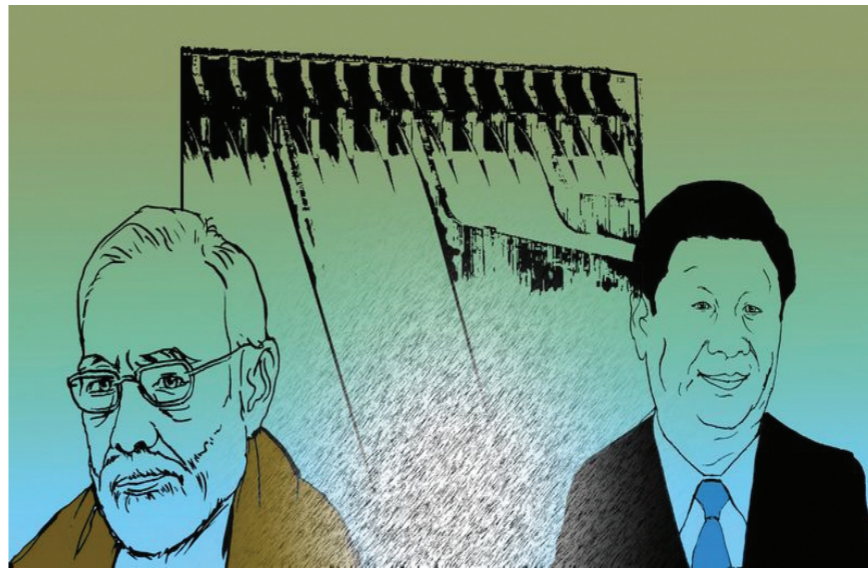
According to the SCMP report, this would be the world's largest infrastructure project and involve drilling four to six 20-km tunnels and diversion of half the river's flow. Yet, the Chinese Foreign Office spokesperson claimed that it would have no negative impact on downstream countries (India and Bangladesh)! The proposed project is likely to be at a site in the Big Bend area of the Yarlung Tsangpo, where the river takes a U-turn and enters India just over 20 km downstream. The adverse consequences of the project for us will manifest in many ways. It will disrupt water flows in the Siang, as the river is called after entering India and is the main channel of the Brahmaputra river system. According to an Assam Government website, the catchment area of the Brahmaputra is 2,93,000 sq km in Tibet; 2,40,000 sq km in India and Bhutan; and 47,000 sq km in Bangladesh. The bulk of the waters of the river flowing in India are generated within our territory, but this mega project will significantly impact the river flows and consequently, livelihoods of residents downstream. China's development of

smaller hydropower projects in the upper reaches of the Mekong (called Lancang in that country) and its cascade operations are leading to irregular fluctuations, drying out of certain areas, declining fish catches and the loss of access to fertile sediment deposits in the Lower Mekong Basin, affecting riparian residents in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. This presages foreseen and unforeseen consequences of the proposed dam for India and Bangladesh.

Equally, there will be an ever-present danger of disasters linked to this humongous project undertaken in an ecologically fragile and

larger, even if we do not talk of weaponisation of stored waters, as some experts are doing. It is with patient diplomacy that we have been able to put in place limited collaborative arrangements with Beijing, including three memoranda of understanding (MoUs) on the provision of monsoon season data by China for the Brahmaputra, on monsoon season data for the Sutlej (signed after the Parechu scare) and on "strengthening cooperation on trans-border rivers". The first two MoUs are renewed every five years and have now lapsed. No project has been possible under the umbrella MoU. The Chinese are niggardly in extending cooperation, not even agreeing to provide lean season data, let alone discussing broader cooperation like sharing of waters of trans-border rivers. A similar approach characterises China's dealings on trans-border rivers with other neighbours. It takes full advantage of its status as a predominantly upper riparian state vis-à-vis its co-riparians. Neither China nor India is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (1997). However, two key principles of the Convention — "equitable and reasonable utilisation" of shared waters and the "obligation not to cause significant harm" to downstream states — have broad relevance. India has been a responsible upper riparian state, even providing generous terms to Pakistan under the Indus Waters Treaty despite troubled bilateral relations. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of China.

A spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs remarked on January 3, "As a lower riparian state with established user rights to the waters of the river, we have consistently expressed, through expert level as well as diplomatic channels, our views and concerns to the Chinese side over mega projects on rivers in their territory. These have been reiterated along with the need for transparency and consultation with downstream countries following the latest report."



earthquake-prone geography. Even if there is no damage to the dam by an earthquake, large-scale diversion and impounding of waters will affect ecosystems and biodiversity downstream. This writer recalls emergency management by a group headed by the Cabinet Secretary when an artificial lake had formed in 2004 on the Parechu river, a tributary of the Sutlej, in Tibet.

Given the relatively good relations with China at that time, we could get advance notice and data, augmented by information generated by our geospatial resources and other means. The lake did not burst before freezing over, and drained partly the next year with only limited damage downstream in India due to preventive measures. Risks stemming from the planned project will be exponentially

Politicising Vcs

A call for vigilance, not panic

The University Grants Commission (UGC) Draft Regulations 2025, released on Monday for public feedback, herald significant changes in higher education. While touted as reforms aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, several provisions appear to dilute academic standards and invite undue politicisation into university administration. Most troubling is the removal of restrictions on contract teaching appointments. Under the previous guidelines, such appointments were capped at 10 per cent of an institution's total faculty. The removal of this cap risks turning critical academic positions into temporary, cost-cutting measures that prioritise convenience over quality. Contract positions, while expedient, undermine long-term institutional stability and the career prospects of the faculty. Equally contentious is the restructuring of vice-chancellor (VC) appointments. By granting chancellors — often state governors — the authority to appoint search committees, the draft centralises power in a manner that could compromise university autonomy. Moreover,



opening VC positions to industry experts and public sector professionals, while potentially bringing fresh perspectives, risks sidelining academics who understand the nuances of higher education. This redefinition of

eligibility dilutes the academic integrity of university leadership. While the draft abolishes the outdated quantitative Academic Performance Indicator (API) system, replacing it with qualitative assessments, the implementation remains opaque. Criteria such as innovation, societal contributions and digital content creation are commendable but lack clear evaluation mechanisms, opening the door for favouritism.

It is argued that these changes will foster flexibility and inclusivity, yet the draft's rushed timeline for feedback — 30 days — raises concerns about genuine stakeholder engagement. Such sweeping reforms demand careful deliberation to safeguard academia from being reduced to a political battleground or a marketplace for short-term contracts. India's higher education institutions are pillars of intellectual and cultural progress. The UGC must ensure that reforms strengthen, rather than erode, their academic foundations. Anything less risks undermining the very purpose of education.

India needs its own Draghi report

We should assemble our best economists & diplomats to work on our 'foreign economic policy'

European Union (EU) has turned the spotlight on its readiness to adapt and succeed in a world already in the throes of unprecedented and wide-ranging change. It commissioned a former president of the European Central Bank, Mario Draghi, to prepare a comprehensive report on 'The Future of European Competitiveness', which was released in September 2024. Its Part A is a summary, while there is a detailed Part B running into more than 320 pages. I have read Part A and my comments are based on that document. It is for our accomplished economists to read and digest the longer document, which contains rigorous analysis based on detailed data.

In presenting the document to the European Commission, Draghi explained the backdrop to its preparation: "The starting point is that Europe is facing a world undergoing dramatic change. World trade is slowing, geopolitics is fracturing and technological change is accelerating. It is a world where long-established business models are being challenged and where some key economic dependencies are suddenly turning into vulnerabilities." These words well define the challenges that India, too, confronts today. The election of Donald Trump as US President has heightened these risks significantly.

Draghi is brutal in his diagnosis of why Europe, despite its advanced economy, intellectual capital and sophisticated finance and banking sectors, is falling relentlessly behind the US and China. It suffers from an innovation gap, it no longer leads in cutting-edge technologies and is dependent on critical minerals and inputs from a relatively small number of source countries, with which the EU is "not strategically aligned". In a contested

geopolitical landscape, these dependencies have become vulnerabilities, threatening the security and autonomy of Europe. These challenges are compounded by demographic decline, which immigration is not able to offset. In any event, immigration is politically toxic.

The report focusses mainly on how the EU compares with the US and China in respect to various metrics of development, but centred on technology as its key driver. Draghi says that EU has missed the digital revolution and is falling behind in artificial intelligence. It has maintained its lead in clean-tech, but China's challenge is unrelenting. It is interesting that Draghi proposes a possible trade-off in this sector: "China may offer the cheapest and most efficient route to meeting our decarbonisation targets. But China's state-sponsored competition also represents a threat to our productive clean-tech and automotive industries."

It should come as no surprise that Draghi urges much closer integration among the EU countries to enable the scale required to compete with the US and China. Financing of larger projects would be facilitated by a Capital Union and the setting up of a Banking Union. He proposes an industrial policy that is aligned with the EU's ambitious climate targets and much greater investment in research and development.

What is more relevant for countries that are international partners of the EU is the advocacy of a "genuine EU foreign economic policy". This would include "coordinating preferential trade agreements and direct investment with resource-rich nations, building up stockpiles in selected critical areas and

creating individual partnerships to secure the supply chain of key technologies".

Why is it important to study this report and follow its implementation? One, India has all along seen an integrated Europe as a potential and relatively autonomous pole in its preferred multi-polar world order. A powerful Europe, exercising relatively



independent agency in world affairs, would be a better prospect for India than a bipolar world dominated by the US and China. There would be a strong incentive for India and the EU to work closely together to sustain multi-polarity.

Two, how can India locate itself as a key component in the "foreign economic policy" proposed by Draghi? India does not figure at all in the report. It is not seen as a possible partner in the EU's quest to stay relevant

in the emerging world order. And yet in terms of each component of this policy, India could be a significant partner. There could be partnerships in building up stockpiles of critical minerals or in scaling up clean-tech. The Global Capability Centre model could work with European entities as well as it has with the US. Three, in clean-tech, India has ambitious plans

for scaling up its renewable energy sector, including a future hydrogen economy. In addition to its strengths in clean-tech, the EU has a significant electrolyser industry that could boost this potential energy source of the future. The Draghi report could be the basis for working together with the EU to identify areas where synergy is possible, benefiting both sides. For India, Europe will remain a significant source of both technology and capital as it pursues higher but quality growth. If a trade-off to dependence on China is an option, surely India can offer that trade-off.

Finally, I think India should undertake its own economic strategy exercise on the lines of the Draghi report. We need a critical evaluation of our current economic and market strategies to determine whether they are aligned to the nature and scale of challenges that we will confront, just as the EU will. One should assemble some of our best economists and diplomats to work on our own "foreign economic policy". Flying blind in the gathering storm may stall India's growth story and, in the process, increase our geopolitical vulnerabilities.



According to a study, there is a positive association between screen time and exposure to cyber-bullying, video game addiction, offline meetings and online sexual behaviours. Read more about the study here.

Economic Forum noted that over 50 per cent of the age bracket was susceptible to cyber-bullying, video game addiction, offline meetings, disinformation and online sexual grooming. Notably, the problem is more acute in emerging economies, where "internet adoption has been more rapid and less subject to appropriate safeguards by parents, industry or government". The study of 38,000 children noted that 47 per cent have been victimised through cyber-bullying in the past year. "Today's youth make up an important part of our informed society, they will be tomorrow's voters and our future

leaders. Ensuring they are better equipped to face the challenges of hyper-connected life, earlier on, should be a societal priority," said Cheryl Martin, MD Head of Industries and Member of the Managing Board at the WEF. Moreover, the children spend an average of 32 hours per week in front of digital screens for entertainment alone— longer than the time they spend in school, the study said. There is a positive association between screen time and exposure to cyber-bullying, video game addiction, offline meetings and online sexual behaviours, it said. "We must act

Majority of 8-12 yr subject to **Old kids Online threats**



quickly and take positive steps to help these children...especially in emerging countries. We need to work together to help our children outsmart cyber-risks and become successful and responsible digital citizens who maximise their potential and minimise cyber-risks," said Yuhyun Park, founder and CEO of DQ Institute, Singapore. The purpose of the '2018 DQ Impact Report' is to highlight the need for concerted action by government, industry and civil society to help parents counter the threats facing the youngest 'digital citizens' and such a need is more acute in emerging economies.



Outdoor classes make students more open to learning: study

About 300 students participated in a programme called "researcher weeks" aimed at getting pupils excited about the natural sciences. Students were prepared for a one-week stay in the classroom. This was then continued on site during the research week, culminating in a two-day research expedition with experiments



well as positive social relationships exert the primary influences on motivational behaviour, researchers said. The study showed that motivational behaviour in both contexts was influenced equally strongly by these three needs, albeit at different levels. Basic needs are met to a significantly higher degree during outdoor instruction than in the classroom. A sense of achievement particularly increases motivation during outdoor instruction. On the other hand, the student-teacher or student-student relationships had little or no influence on this increase. Nor did gender have any influence on the results.

Teaching science subjects outdoors instead of within closed classrooms can increase students' motivation to learn and participate, a study has found. The study by the Technical University of Munich (TUM) and the University of Mainz advises offering more outdoor instruction at the lower secondary level. About 300 students participated in a programme called "researcher weeks" aimed at getting pupils excited about the natural sciences.

Students were prepared for a one-week stay in the classroom. This was then continued on site during the research week, culminating in a two-day research expedition with experiments. Both before and after the course, the students completed a questionnaire on their satisfaction and overall motivation. At the end of the week, the students again shared their experiences during the outdoor class. Basic psychological needs to experience autonomy and competence as

outdoor instruction sessions as well. The teaching techniques explored and developed for this instructional program should therefore be included as a standard feature of lessons in schools. "Whether it involves rural study centres away from school or forms a part of the science curriculum, or both, this statistical analysis demonstrates that regular outdoor teaching is an appropriate strategy to meet the

challenges of the 21st century," said Ulrich Dettweiler, associate professor at the University of Stavanger in Norway. "Such models might even be suitable to bridge the existing gap between science education and environmental education in the long term," said Dettweiler, who was at TUM at the time of the study.



Supreme Court says no third attempt for JEE (Advanced), but leeway for dropouts

NEW DELHI. The Supreme Court on Friday granted relief to students who challenged the decision to reduce the number of attempts for the Joint Entrance Examination (Advanced) from three to two, ruling that petitioners who dropped out of their courses between Nov. 5, 2024, and Nov. 18, 2024, will be allowed to take the exam. However, the court refused to interfere with the decision of the authorities to reduce the number of attempts for JEE (Advanced). Senior Advocate K Parmeshwar, representing the petitioners, argued, "Initially, it was decided to allow three attempts, but within thirteen days, it was revoked, which is arbitrary. On Nov. 5, you held out a promise that students would be eligible. Decisions have been made based on that, which are irreversible."

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Joint Admission Board (JAB), defended the move. "The decision was taken after it was found that students who had enrolled in regular engineering courses were focusing on JEE exams instead of their B.Tech



coursework. This decision was made in the students' interest and is a pure policy decision," he told the bench. After hearing the arguments, a bench of Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George

Masih noted: "In the press release dated Nov. 5, 2024, a clear promise was made to students that those who appeared for the Class 12 exam in 2023, 2024, and 2025 would be eligible for JEE (Advanced). If

students, acting on this representation, withdrew from their courses believing they would be entitled to appear, the withdrawal of this promise on Nov. 18, 2024, cannot work to their detriment." In the peculiar facts and circumstances, without commenting on the merits of JAB's decision, students who withdrew from their courses and dropped out between Nov. 5, 2024, and Nov. 18, 2024, will be permitted to register for JEE (Advanced). "The court clarified that it was not questioning the wisdom of the authorities. "For valid reasons, if respondent No. 2 [the JAB] restricted the zone of consideration to two years instead of three, no fault could be found with it," the order stated. The court's order came in response to a plea by aspirants challenging the reduction in the attempt limit for JEE (Advanced). On Nov. 5, 2024, the JAB announced that students would be allowed three attempts at the exam. However, just 13 days later, on Nov. 18, 2024, the decision was reversed, reducing the attempt limit to two.

Why blinding fog paralyses North India every winter

North India is engulfed in blinding fog, causing flight delays, train disruptions, and accidents. Let's discuss why the region experiences dense fog every winter.

NEW DELHI. On Friday morning, Delhi and its surrounding areas were enveloped in one of the densest fogs of the season. Satellite imagery revealed the entire Indo-Gangetic Plain--encompassing parts of India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh--blanketed by a thick layer of fog. This recurring phenomenon occurs annually as winter arrives in the region each December and January. Here are six main reasons why the Indo-Gangetic Plain experiences dense fog every year, leading to reduced visibility and disruptions.

Temperature Inversion: During winter, the nights are longer, and the ground cools down quickly, especially in rural areas where there is less urban heat island effect. This cooling leads to a temperature inversion where the air near the ground is colder than the air above it, trapping moisture and pollutants close to the ground.

High Humidity: The proximity to the Himalayas and the rivers like the Ganga, the Yamuna, Brahmaputra, and Indus means there's a high level of moisture in the air. When the temperature drops, the relative humidity increases, leading to condensation and fog formation. **Western Disturbances:** Occasionally, western disturbances (moisture-laden systems from the Mediterranean sea) move into north India, bringing cooler air and sometimes rain, which can further contribute to foggy conditions by adding more moisture.

Stagnant Air Masses: The region often experiences calm or very light wind conditions in winter, which do not disperse the fog. For example, on Friday the wind speed was less than 4 km/h in Delhi. The lack of wind means that the fog does not get blown away but instead lingers over the area. **Air Pollution:** High levels of pollution from various activities including vehicular emissions, industrial pollution and agricultural burning (like stubble burning in parts of Punjab and Haryana) contribute to the formation of dense smog, which is a combination of smoke and fog. Pollutants act as condensation nuclei around which water droplets form, enhancing fog density.

Topography: The Indo-Gangetic Plain is a vast, flat area surrounded by the Himalayan range to the north. This topography can trap moisture and pollutants, reducing the flow of air which would otherwise dissipate the fog. In addition to causing significant disruptions in transportation, particularly affecting air, rail, and road travel, the fog also poses health risks due to its interaction with pollutants.

Protest Outside Arvind Kejriwal's House: AAP, BJP Spar Over Purvanchali Voters

New Delhi. With an eye on Purvanchali votebank in Delhi, the ruling AAP and the Opposition BJP on Friday crossed swords over the honour and welfare of migrants from Bihar and east Uttar Pradesh as both parties claimed to be their true well-wisher. While the BJP women wing held a protest outside AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal's house over his "anti-Purvanchali" comments, the former Chief Minister countered by claiming that he had given a dignified life to Purvanchalis by providing civic and health facilities in unauthorised colonies and slums where they live.

The poll-bound city is witnessing a battle over Purvanchalis with BJP protesting against Kejriwal's comment on Thursday in which he allegedly called people from Purvanchal "fake voters" and the AAP has been accusing the saffron party of indulging in politics. Kejriwal took to damage control on Friday by blaming the BJP's central government for not carrying out any development in the unauthorised colonies that are home to the community.

"People from Purvanchal come here and live in slums. Before 2014, it was difficult to live in these slums. It was a life of hell, with mud and sludge everywhere. There was no development. According to the Supreme Court and central government orders, no development could take place there. More than 90 per cent of the people in these slums are from Purvanchal. I want to ask the BJP, what have you done for slums in the last 10 years?" said Kejriwal. "BJP is just a party for protesting. They only hold dharna and protest and indulge in dirty politics. They can't work for the people," he said. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said Kejriwal's remarks last evening, where he called people from Purvanchal "fake voters," have once again revealed the dark truth of his mindset.

L&T Chairman's work-on-Sunday plan is problematic. Here's why

NEW DELHI. Work 70 hours, even 90, don't take an off on Sundays and definitely don't work from home. CEOs of major corporations often take to the internet to share advice on being the employee of the month. Recently, SN Subrahmanyam, Chairman of Larsen and Toubro (L&T), joined the league of honchos who want Indians to work more. Well, Indians are the world's second-most overworked people, according to International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Subrahmanyam sparked a controversy by advocating for working even on Sundays. Questioning how people spend their Sundays, he made remarks that have led to debates about India's work culture. "I regret that I am not able to make you work on Sundays. If I could make you work on Sundays, I would be happier," Subrahmanyam said during a meeting with employees. He further asked, "What do you do sitting at home? How long can you stare at your wife?"

CEOs and chairman's of big corporates, such as Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy, who advocated for a 70-hour work week. Even Tesla's boss, Elon Musk, has been a strong proponent of all work and no play. But Indians are paying a heavy cost for overworking.

HOW INDIANS OVERWORK, PAY WITH BURNOUT

India's work culture comes with significant consequences. Reports indicate that Indians are among the most overworked people in the world, with burnout rates alarmingly high. Actor Deepika Padukone addressed this issue on social media, criticising such statements for their potential impact on mental health. She posted, "Shocking to see people in such senior positions make such statements. #mentalhealthmatters (sic)."

This is true for a country which is the second-most overworked. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), India ranks as the second most overworked country globally, with 51% of employees working 49 hours or more per week.

The ILO recommends a maximum 48-hour work week, with no more than eight hours a day. However, many Indians far exceed these limits. Indians have also reported burnout symptoms. A 2023 survey by the McKinsey Health Institute revealed that 59% of Indian respondents reported burnout symptoms--the highest rate globally. Moreover, 62% of Indian workers reported experiencing workplace exhaustion, the highest among all countries surveyed.

Maharashtra misled: Congress slams Mahayuti over delay in 'Ladki Bahin' aid increase

New Delhi. The Congress on Friday accused the BJP-led Mahayuti government in Maharashtra of failing to fulfil its promise of increasing financial assistance under the flagship 'Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojna' scheme. The program, which provides cash assistance to poor women, was a cornerstone of the Mahayuti campaign during the 2024 Maharashtra assembly elections.

"It has been a month, but the Mahayuti government in Maharashtra has not increased the financial assistance under the 'Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojna' from Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,100, as promised. This shows they misled voters and are failing to deliver on their commitments, leaving the people of Maharashtra feeling deceived. This is another jumla



by BJP," Congress spokesperson Shama Mohamed said. During the election campaign, then-Chief Minister Eknath Shinde had pledged to raise the cash assistance to Rs 2,100 if the alliance was voted to power. The Mahayuti government secured a decisive victory in the November 2024 elections, and BJP leader Devendra Fadnis took oath as Maharashtra

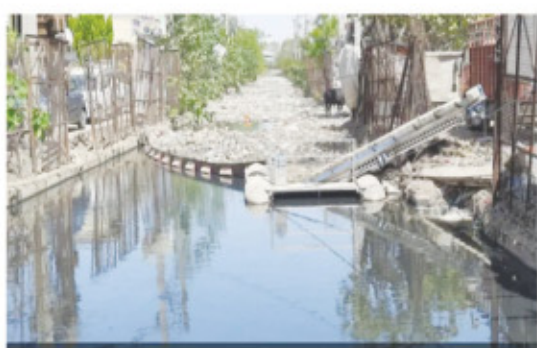
Chief Minister in December. However, the state government has now initiated a scrutiny process to evaluate the eligibility of beneficiaries under the scheme. The move aims to ensure that only those meeting the scheme's norms receive financial aid. Aditi Tatkare, the Minister for Women and Child Development, reassured the public, saying, "There will be no broad-based scrutiny. Only complaint-based verification is being launched." Mahayuti leaders had earlier credited the scheme for their victory, noting that it garnered significant support from women voters who viewed the initiative as a step toward financial and social empowerment.

The BJP-led Mahayuti swept the Maharashtra Assembly elections, bagging 236 out of 288 seats.

Supreme Court Pauses Rs 746 Crore Fine On Rajasthan Over Waste Management

New Delhi. The Supreme Court on Friday stayed a hefty penalty of Rs 746 crore levied by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on the Rajasthan government over non-compliance with waste management regulations. A division bench, comprising Justices Abhay S Oka and KV Vishwanathan, heard the matter.

Additional Advocate General Shiv Mangal Sharma informed that the NGT had not only directed payment of ₹113.10 crore within a month but also issued show cause notices for prosecution against the Chief Secretary and Principal Secretary/Additional Chief Secretary of Urban Development. He argued before the Supreme Court that the



penalty was arbitrary and ignores significant compliance made by the state. The decision, Mr Sharma argued, caused widespread concern in the state government, which was working seriously to ensure compliance with environmental regulations. He also informed the court that the state has invested Rs 4712.98 crore in liquid waste

management and Rs 2872.07 crore in solid waste management since 2018.

The bench acknowledged the efforts of Rajasthan and said that such a huge financial penalty and the possibility of criminal prosecution may hamper the environmental protection efforts of the state.

The fine was imposed on September 17 last year. The NGT had highlighted the state's gross negligence in handling environmental concerns related to untreated waste, adding that it poses serious risks to public health and ecological balance. The tribunal found that the state generates approximately 6,523 tons of solid waste daily, yet only 63.19 per cent of this waste is properly processed.

ED raids ex-Bihar minister, others in bank fraud case; searches on in 4 states

New Delhi. The Enforcement Directorate on Friday launched searches on 18 premises linked to an Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) MLA, as part of a money laundering investigation into an alleged fraud of Rs 85 crore in a state cooperative bank. The searches on the 18 premises in Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi were launched by the ED officials on Friday morning and were undergoing at the time of writing of this news.

The premises include properties of RJD MLA and former Bihar minister Alok Kumar Mehta (58), who is the promoter of the Bihar-based Vaishali Shahri Vikas (VSV) Cooperative Bank, apart from some other properties of other officials and customers of the bank, the sources said.

Mehta is an MLA from the Ujjainpur seat of Bihar and is a senior politician of the Lalu Prasad Yadav-led Rashtriya Janta Dal (RJD). He has earlier served as the minister for revenue and land reforms in the state. The ED investigation stems from some state police FIRs filed against the bank and its office-bearers for alleged embezzlement of funds worth about Rs 85 crore.

How strong is the Indian passport on Henley Index topped by Singapore's

The strength of a passport indicates the number of destinations its holders get visa-free access to. India's ranking in the Henley Passport Index 2025 dropped to 85 from 80 in 2024. This is how others stack up.

New Delhi. The strength of India's passport dipped five places to land at the 85th spot in the recently released Henley Passport Index. The strength of a country's passport indicates how many countries allow its holder visa-free access. India shares the 85th spot on the Henley Passport Index with Equatorial Guinea

and Nigeria. Indian passport holders, like those of the other two countries, get visa-free access to 57 destinations. The Singapore passport emerged the top on the index, with Singaporeans getting visa-free access to 195 destinations.

Japan's passport was the second-strongest, with Japanese citizens getting visa-free access to 193 destinations. The third spot was shared by six countries -- Finland, France, Germany, Italy, South Korea and Spain -- with their respective passport holders getting visa-free access to 192 countries. The Henley Passport Index ranks 199 countries, using exclusive data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the largest, most accurate travel information database.

WHERE DO THE BRICS COUNTRIES STAND?

Among the original BRICS countries, Brazil is ranked 18th, with Brazilians getting access to 171 destinations without



prior visa, Russia at 46th (116 destinations), China 60th (85 destinations) and South Africa 48th (106 destinations). China is also among the big gainers. Its passport has jumped from 94th place in 2015 to 60th now.

India's ranking, which moved up from 84th in 2023 to 80th in 2024, dipped to 85th in 2025, on the Henley Passport Index. India's passport was ranked 71st most-strongest when the ranking began in 2006. It dipped to the lowest ever (90th) in 2021, a year that saw Covid lockdowns and travel restrictions. Other

than that it was the lowest at 87th in 2017. One of the most noticeable absentees from the top five is the American passport.

The US passport is in the ninth position with Americans getting access to 186 visa-free destinations. It was ranked No 1 in 2014. In fact, the US passport is the second-biggest loser after Venezuela's. The UAE is the only Arab country in the Top 10 on the Henley Passport Index. The UAE passport is ranked 10th and its holders get visa-free access to 185 destinations.

At the 106th spot, Afghanistan is at the rock bottom of the list. People of the Taliban-ruled country get to travel to just 26 destinations without prior visa approval.

Neighbouring Pakistan's passport is ranked 103rd, with Pakistanis getting visa-free access to 33 countries. Interestingly, in a recent meeting with India's foreign secretary, Afghanistan's acting foreign minister requested New Delhi to grant visas to Afghans for education.



Homes go green with indoor Plants

Rather than putting up modern art paintings in their homes, Faridabad's residents prefer to go green and beautify their homes with house plants instead. While it may seem simple, however, there are a few things you should know before you bring a plant home. Read on to find out what Faridabad's residents say is a must-have for keeping potted plants indoors.

Finding the right place

While everyone knows that plants should be kept in a place with a lot of sunlight, there are some spots in your house that you

should avoid at all costs. Don't keep your plant near a heater, air-conditioner, between curtains or near a window that allows cold drafts to pass through. It's best to keep your plant at a window facing south, as this will get the most sunlight. Windows that face east, west or north always have lesser light. However, some plants need partial shade, so be sure to look up every plant's separate requirements. Debashish Ghose, who is a resident of Sector 21-D, Faridabad, says, "The spaces between your furniture can be used to keep

indoor plants, which add to the 'green look' of your house. Even if you can't put them in a place where they have sunlight constantly, you could always expose them to light for a few hours each day. Every weekend, when I am at home, I clean the leaves of the plants and expose them to the sunlight for at least four-five hours."

Keep your plant healthy

When selecting a plant, you should check for signs of pests or diseases. If you see spots on the leaf or the leaf is a colour it's not supposed to be, then it probably has a disease. This will leave any other plants you have in your home at risk of getting infected as well. You should also do some research on what type of fertilizer your plant requires.

Shailesh Jha, who also lives in Sector 21-D, says, "Initially, when I shifted to my flat, I wanted to have a small garden, but couldn't do that because there was no space. However, I later decided to keep potted plants in the balcony. I called up my gardener and made holders in the balcony's railing to accommodate small pots. The right amount of fertilizer is important for your plants and you can find out which type you'll need by visiting a nearby nursery. The months from January to September are the best time for plants to be fertilized. I usually

call my gardener every week and spend a few hours discussing what fertilizer should be used."

Know how much you should water your plant

Every plant is different and while some need a good amount of water, others need their soil to dry out between watering sessions. A common mistake people make is to water the plant every day, which could inadvertently kill some types of plants.

Drainage

Since you might often give your plant too much water, be sure to create a proper draining system in the pot. The best way to do this is to have a layer of pebbles of around 2.3-four cm at the bottom of the pot. The pebbles will keep the roots of the plant away from any excess water at the bottom of the pot. If the plant is placed in the balcony, you could even buy a pot that has a draining hole.

Dust the leaves

Make sure you don't let dust settle on the plant's leaves because if too much dust gathers, your plant could have difficulty in breathing. You can fix this problem by taking a soft towel or a paintbrush and sponging both sides of the leaf each week.



How to store your boots

Clean them
Give your boots a scrub. If they have stains, use a soft-bristled toothbrush and a solution of water and vinegar to remove them. Use a leather cleaner to clean any remaining spots.

Deep condition
Get your boots conditioned, especially if they are leather boots, immediately after you clean them.

Get them repaired
Have them repaired instead of waiting until next winter to fix any damage that they have sustained.

Stuff them
Before putting your boots away, stuff them with either a shoe tree or newspapers so that their shape is maintained. You can also use rolled-up magazines, which will help keep the boot's shaft upright. n

Deodorize
Buy a shoe deodorizing spray, or fill a sachet with baking soda and put it in your boots before storing.

Store them properly
Though storing them upright is ideal, you can also store them in bins. But make sure you put the heaviest ones down first. Lay a cloth or old t-shirt between every pair or use a cloth bag.



Shopping at a hypermarket? Keep these tips in mind

shopping for essentials in a supermarket is now passe. With hypermarkets mushrooming all around the city, the shopping experience has just gotten bigger. Here's how you can make your shopping experience even better. Shop on weekdays: Often, these markets have less crowd on weekdays, so make some time during the week for a has sle-free shopping experience.

Stick to your list
Most of us set out shopping with a specific list of items to buy. The sheer size and the number of items available in a hyper market can be distracting. So make sure, you stick to your list.

Don't fall for cheap buys
Often at the store, one is likely to spot massive offers, which seem too good to be true. Make sure you check the manufacturing date of such products.

Have a stand-in at the billing counter
Have a friend or relative take a spot at the long queue at the billing counter when you are at the end of your shopping, to speed things up.



How to reuse an old toothbrush

An old toothbrush is perfect for cleaning dirty spots around taps. Wet the brush with some vinegar and use the toothbrush to scrub it.
-Remove mud from shoes.
-An old toothbrush is perfect for cleaning computer keyboards.
-You can also clean the bristles of other brushes and combs with a good scrub with an old toothbrush.
-Remove dead skin from



your lips by wetting an old toothbrush and rubbing it across your lips.
-A slightly damp toothbrush is perfect for cleaning delicate jewellery.
-Get the grime between your bathroom or kitchen tiles out with an old toothbrush. Don't scrub too hard on or near the sealant because it could break.
-Keep an old tooth brush at hand for spot cleaning stains and spills on clothes or around the house.

Design ideas to try in your small bathroom

in a city like Mumbai where houses offer minimum space, here are a few ideas that you can incorporate in your bathroom to make it look bigger and better.

Gilded fixtures
Give your outdated bathroom a makeover and get a fresh look by choosing fittings which are gold plated. You can opt for blue and white tiles along with it to lend a nautical look.

Metallic and marble combo
Metallic doors and bathroom fittings along with marble flooring are the best option to make your washrooms look classy and chic. You can choose from a wide variety of bathroom fittings in metallic - shower, taps and the washbasin. But when choose a marble flooring, make sure that the floors are not too slippery.

Pink and monochrome magic
If you want a classy bathroom, it is always great to choose a colour scheme that stands out. It's a great option for the urban couple. While pink will lend a feminine effect to the washroom, the monochrome shade will be a perfect choice for your man. If you are not too keen on going completely pink and monochrome, you can have a pink washroom with a monochrome decal on the main wall.

Antique accessories
Just like any other corner in your house, your bathroom too requires accessories that will make your washroom stand out. A big antique mirror in your bathroom is a good option. You can also have bathroom fittings which are quite vintage in its look and will give a traditional feel to it.



Faux wooden flooring

To make your bathroom look bigger, opt for wooden flooring that will make your bathroom look bigger. Well, actual wooden flooring may get damaged in the long run; thus opt for faux wooden flooring. You can then have tiled bathroom fittings.

Soothing pattern on the walls

When choosing the bathroom tiles on the walls of your bathroom, make sure that you opt for shades and patterns that are soothing to the eyes. Apart from making it look calm, these shades will also maximise the space in your washroom. A classic white and beige combination always works wonders. Apart from this, it also spells elegance.

Amid backlash, L&T defends its Chairman over his 90-hour work week stand

NEW DELHI. L&T has come to the defence of its Chairman SN Subrahmanyam who received heavy backlash on social media for advocating 90-hour work week. The company said on Friday that the Chairman's remarks reflect the larger ambition of nation-building, "emphasising that extraordinary outcomes require extraordinary effort".

"The Chairman's remarks reflect this larger ambition, emphasising that extraordinary outcomes require extraordinary effort. At L&T, we remain committed to fostering a culture where passion, purpose, and performance drive us forward," a company spokesperson said in a statement. Top celebrities including Bollywood superstar Deepika Padukone and Harsh Goenka, Chairperson of the RPG Group had condemned Subrahmanyam's remarks.

Earlier, Subrahmanyam had said: "I regret I am not able to make you work on Sundays, to be honest. If I can make you work on Sundays, I will be more happy, because I work on Sundays also," he said in an undated video, apparently of an internal meeting, which has gone viral on social media. "What do you do sitting at home? How long can you stare at your wife? How long can the wives stare at their husbands? Get to the office and start working," he further said.

"...If you have to go on top of the world, you have to work 90 hours a week," the video has him saying.

To support his views, according to reports, Subrahmanyam shared an anecdote about a conversation he had with a Chinese individual. According to him, the person claimed that China could surpass the United States because Chinese workers put in 90 hours a week compared to the 50 hours worked by Americans.

TCS headcount down by 5,370; says campus hiring on track

BENGALURU. TCS, which onboarded more employees in Q1 and Q2, reported a net decline of 5,370 employees in the third quarter. The company's total workforce as of December 31, 2024, stood at 6,07,354 and attrition rate at 13%.

The IT services company added 5,726 employees in the September quarter, and 5,452 employees in Q1. It onboarded 11,000 trainees in both first quarter and second quarter of the current financial year (FY25). During the third quarter, the company promoted over 25,000 employees and with this, the total promotion in this financial year stood at over 1,10,000. Milind Lakkad, chief HR officer, said that the company is on track to onboard 40,000 through campus recruitment this fiscal and in the next final year the company will onboard a higher number of campus hires. He said attrition is within its comfort range and going forward, they anticipate reduction in the quarterly attrition.

He said the company continues to invest in employee upskilling and overall well-being. Speaking about the new government in the US, K Krithivasan, chief executive officer and managing director, said once the government comes, the policies will be clear. "We expect discretionary spending to pick up in healthcare and manufacturing. We are waiting for some clarity," he said.

Meanwhile, the company also announced its proposed acquisition of two wholly owned subsidiaries of Tata Realty and Infrastructure Limited—TRIL Bengaluru Real Estate Five Limited and TRIL Bengaluru Real Estate Six Limited—for Rs 1,625 crore.

Error in gold imports data is because of double calculation, govt clarifies

NEW DELHI. A day after 'quietly' revising the gold import data for November, the ministry of commerce has come up with an explanation for the change in the data. The ministry has said that the discrepancy in the numbers was primarily due to migration of data transmission mechanism from SEZ to Indian Customs Electronic Gateway (ICEGATE). "...it was noticed as the system was calculating both imports into SEZ and subsequent clearance into Domestic Tariff Area (DTA) as separate transactions after the migration," a statement from the commerce ministry explained. It must be noted that the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics



(DGCI&S) on Wednesday revised India's India's gold import figure for November 2024 from \$14.8 billion to \$9.9 billion—a decline of 33%. For April-November, gold imports were revised 24% down from \$49 billion to \$37 billion. Revisions were also made in cases of silver (revised downward by 29%) and electronics imports (by 4%). According to the ministry, DGCI&S receives trade data from approximately 500+ locations and about 2.5 lakh transactions every day from different sea ports, land ports, airport and inland container depots.

The EXIM data from more than 100 SEZs was earlier captured by SEZ Online System and EXIM data for all other ports (non-SEZ locations) was captured by ICEGATE system. Both systems (ICEGATE and SEZ Online) were transmitting the EXIM data separately to DGCI&S for publishing foreign trade statistics. After the decision to shift EXIM declarations from SEZ Online to ICEGATE system, the EXIM data pertaining to SEZs as well as all other ports is being captured and transmitted by ICEGATE to DGCI&S. The ministry said that owing to persistence of certain technical glitches, the migration is still not complete. Both SEZ Online and ICEGATE are still capturing and transmitting mutually exclusive EXIM data to DGCI&S.

Sarcasm to criticism: Social media reacts to L&T Chairman's 90-hour work week comment

NEW DELHI. In recent months, there has been a lot of talk about work culture and work-life balance. The tragic death of 26-year-old Anna Sebastian Perayil in 2024 led to a wider discussion in India about harmful work environments and the struggle to balance work and personal life.

Her story, unfortunately, is not an isolated one. Many employees, especially GenZ, have been vocal about their struggles in workplaces marked by stress, unrealistic expectations, and a lack of support. Despite these ongoing challenges, employees' voices continue to be dismissed by many employers and high-level executives, invalidating their need for balance and well-being.

"How long can you stare at your wife?"

Recently, SN Subrahmanyam, Chairman of Larsen & Toubro (L&T), sparked fresh controversy regarding work-life balance by advocating for 90-hour work weeks. In an undated video from what

appeared to be an internal meeting, which went viral on social media on Thursday, he said, "I regret I am not able to make you work on Sundays, to be honest. If I can make you work on Sundays, I will be more happy, because I work on Sundays also." He went on to add, "What do you do sitting at home? How long can you stare at your wife? How long can the wives stare at their husbands? Get to the office and start working."

Netizens react

The internet came together once again to target another wealthy figure for their controversial views. Many online users condemned his remarks as outdated and dismissive of work-life balance. One user sarcastically commented, "How long can employees stare at screens and data managers?" Another added, "He literally said: 'Why are you even living? Take this pile of work.'" Several others found his comment about staring at



one's spouse sexist and reflective of an anti-family mindset. "L&T Chairman Subrahmanyam's salary is 534.57 times the median salary of L&T employees. If I'm paid 56 crore per annum plus all privileges like Larsen and Toubro chairman, forget Sunday, I'll invent more days in a week to work. All the CEOs & CFO need to SHUT UP," a user wrote on X. In response, actor Deepika Padukone took to social media to express her disagreement, writing,

"Shocking to see people in such senior positions make such statements. #MentalHealthMatters."

RPG Group chairperson Harsh Goenka also sharply criticised the remarks, writing on X, "90 hours a week? Why not rename Sunday to 'Sun-duty' and make 'day off' a mythical concept!" He further added, "Working hard and smart is what I believe in, but turning life into a perpetual office shift? That's a recipe for burnout, not success. Work-life balance isn't optional, it's essential. Well, that's my view," and concluded, "Work smart, not slave." Former badminton player Jwala Gutta also took to X to criticise the statement, writing, "I mean...first of all why shouldn't he stare at his wife...and why only on a Sunday!" She called the statement misogynistic and frightening. As the backlash intensified, L&T issued a statement defending the chairman's remarks.

Akasa Air pilots write to aviation minister against management

NEW DELHI. A group of pilots at Akasa Air has launched a personal attack on the airline's CEO Vinay Dube, claiming he has 'no control over the company'. They have claimed that Akasa Air's vice President Capt. Floyd Gracious has brought in his associates from Jet Airways and placed them in key positions of power. These allegations were detailed in an email sent on Thursday (Jan 9) to aviation minister Rammohan Naidu Kinjarapu, seeking his intervention. The letter was also sent to Director General of Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) Faiz Ahmed Kidwai and Secretary of the Ministry of Civil Aviation Vumlungmang Vualnam.

"CEO Dube said in his recent interview that his dream was to make Akasa Air one of the best places to work, to reach world standards in safety, customer care and have an employee-centric approach etc. Sadly, it's all blown... and Dube seems to have no control over



the company. Over 40 pilots, 200 crew and 35 engineers left the company...." said the letter adding that rather than addressing the in-house issues, the company went to court against those individuals. Dube is an aviation industry veteran and a former CEO of Jet Airways and GoAir. Currently, Dube is the CEO and co-founder of Akasa Air, which is backed by the family of late billionaire trader Rakesh Jhunjhunwala. Akasa commenced operations in August 2022. Akasa Air is yet to comment on the development. A query sent to the

airline's management remained unanswered till the time of writing of the report. The letter added that while Akasa claimed that they have sued the pilots leaving due to breaking of legal bonds, it should be noted that the company could not pursue this case legally on 42 pilots since they had left in a perfectly legit manner. Since its early days, Akasa and its pilots have been at loggerheads. In a letter dated December 11 to aviation minister Naidu, a section of pilots sought an independent probe into the airline's management practices, training methods and safety standards. Akasa then said it has the highest levels of job satisfaction.

Recently aviation regulator DGCA pulled up the airline on multiple occasions. In late December, DGCA ordered a six-month suspension for the director of operations and the director of training at Akasa due to alleged deficiencies in pilot training protocols.

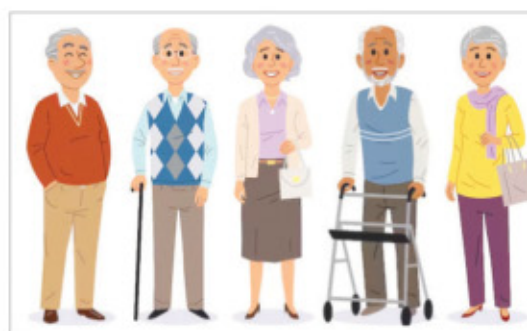
Budget 2025: Looking back at tax relief measures for senior citizens in 2024

NEW DELHI. As Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman prepares to present her eighth Union Budget on February 1, 2025, senior citizens are hopeful for meaningful tax reforms. With inflation and the rising cost of living eroding their fixed incomes, this group anticipates measures to ease financial pressures and enhance their quality of life.

CHALLENGES FACED BY SENIOR CITIZENS

Senior citizens often rely on fixed-income investments or rental income to sustain themselves. However, these sources fall short of keeping pace with inflation, leading to financial struggles. Restricted incomes necessitate targeted tax relief and financial support to help this vulnerable group manage their expenses effectively.

NOTABLE REFORMS IN BUDGET



2024
Last year's budget introduced several changes tailored to senior citizens. The standard deduction for family pensioners increased from Rs 15,000 to Rs 25,000, providing much-needed relief.

Salaried employees and pensioners also benefited from an increased deduction limit of Rs 75,000 under the new tax regime.

Senior citizens continue to enjoy higher exemption limits in both the old and new tax regimes. For instance, the new regime exempts income up to Rs 3 lakh, compared to Rs 2.5 lakh for regular taxpayers under the old regime.

ITR FILING MADE SIMPLER

Section 194P, introduced in Budget 2024, simplified the tax filing process for senior citizens aged 75 and above. Those meeting specific conditions—such as receiving income solely from pensions and interest—are exempt from filing income tax returns. Specified banks handle tax deductions, ensuring compliance without the need for additional filings.

TAXATION OF PENSION INCOME

Pension taxation varies based on its nature. While uncommuted pensions are fully taxable as salary, commuted pensions enjoy exemptions.

Sensex, Nifty close lower amid earnings concerns; TCS gains 6%

The S&P BSE Sensex lost 241.30 points to end at 77,378.91, while the NSE Nifty50 was down 95 points to end at 23,431.50.

NEW DELHI. Benchmark stock market indices closed lower for the third straight session, marking weekly losses due to concerns over corporate earnings. However, IT stocks rose after TCS hinted at a potential recovery in demand. The S&P BSE Sensex lost 241.30 points to end at 77,378.91, while the NSE Nifty50 was down 95 points to end at 23,431.50. Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd said that markets continued its downward trajectory as rupee scaling new lows due to the strengthening dollar, which has further dampened investors' sentiment.

"Amid concerns of subdued economic growth and expectations of a slowdown in the quarterly earnings, investors cut their bet on banking and mid & small cap stocks. With expensive valuations of Indian markets at large still a concern, investors would mostly resort to stock specific activities," he added. The decline was broad-based, with all sectoral indices in red except IT stocks, which continued to rise following top IT firm TCS meeting its quarterly profit estimates. Midcap and smallcap indices were also stressed. "Investor sentiment was impacted by global cues, including concerns over U.S. economic data and continued selling by foreign institutional investors. Despite a brief recovery during the day, the overall market breadth remained weak, with significantly more stocks declining than



advancing," said Vaibhav Vidwani, Research Analyst, Bonanza. In today's trading session, technology stocks showed remarkable strength with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) leading the gains, surging 5.60%, followed by Tech Mahindra which jumped 3.59%. HCL Technologies maintained the positive momentum with a 3.22% rise, while Infosys advanced 2.53%, and Wipro gained 2.51%. On the declining side,

Shriram Finance faced the steepest fall, dropping 5.30%, while IndusInd Bank declined 4.29%. Adani Enterprises slipped 3.95%, followed by NTPC which fell 3.79%. Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) rounded out the major losers with a decline of 3.72%.

"The market remains under strain, with even minor pullbacks attracting selling pressure. In the absence of any clear signs of a trend reversal, particularly in the banking index, traders are advised to use rebounds as shorting opportunities. Caution should remain a priority, with a focus on robust risk management. Additionally, as the earnings season kicks off, erratic market swings are likely to intensify. Adopting a hedged approach and maintaining disciplined position sizing is recommended for navigating the current conditions," said Jit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

NEWS BOX

ICC chairman Jay Shah to be felicitated by BCCI at Special General Meeting

New Delhi. Newly-elected International Cricket Council (ICC) chairman Jay Shah will be felicitated by the BCCI's state units on the sidelines of the Special General Meeting, scheduled here on Sunday. Former BCCI secretary Jay Shah became the youngest ICC chairman after he was elected unopposed in August last year and took over the prestigious post on December 1. He replaced Greg Barclay, who decided not to



seek a third term. Shah was the BCCI secretary since October 2019 and chairman of the Asian Cricket Council since January 2021.

Shah will be a "special invitee" to the SGM, convened to elect the new secretary and treasurer of the BCCI. The cricket administrator has been at the forefront of expanding the game's imprint globally and recently met top officials of the 2032 Brisbane Olympics organising committee to discuss the sport's inclusion in the Summer Games. Cricket will make a return to the Olympics after 128 years when it is played in the 2028 Los Angeles Games. The sport is not yet confirmed for the 2032 edition in Brisbane. Australian newspaper, The Age, recently reported that Shah will meet Cricket Australia chair Mike Baird and his England counterpart Richard Thompson later this month to discuss the finer points of a two-tier Test system to facilitate more series between the big three nations.

Real Madrid set up El Clasico vs FC Barcelona for Spanish Super Cup Final

New Delhi. Real Madrid secured their spot in the Spanish Super Cup final with a commanding 3-0 victory over Mallorca in Jeddah on January 10. The win, fuelled by a clinical second-half display, sets up a highly anticipated showdown against arch-rivals FC Barcelona for Sunday's final.

Carlo Ancelotti's men dominated the first half, creating multiple scoring opportunities. Despite relentless pressure, Mallorca's goalkeeper Dominik Greif stood firm, pulling off crucial saves to deny Jude Bellingham and Aurelien Tchouameni. His impressive performance kept the game goalless at the break.

The breakthrough finally came in the 63rd minute when English star Jude Bellingham capitalized on a chaotic sequence inside



Mallorca's penalty box. After attempts by Rodrygo and Mbappé struck the post and were scrambled clear, Bellingham slotted the ball home to give Real Madrid the lead.

Mallorca struggled to find a response as Real Madrid's relentless attack continued. The game was effectively sealed in the closing moments when Martin Valjent inadvertently turned Brahim Diaz's cross into his own net during stoppage time. Moments later, Rodrygo capped off the victory by converting Lucas Vazquez's pinpoint cross to make it 3-0.

This triumph marks Real Madrid's fourth consecutive Spanish Super Cup final appearance. Their consistency in the competition is a testament to Ancelotti's tactical acumen and the team's depth. Sunday's final against Barcelona will be their third consecutive meeting in this prestigious event, adding another chapter to the storied rivalry. As both Spanish giants prepare for a high-stakes encounter, Real Madrid will look to maintain their winning momentum while Barcelona seeks redemption. The stage is set for another thrilling El Clasico clash in Saudi Arabia as the fierce competitors vie for Spanish football supremacy.

Iga Swiatek felt 'awkward' making excuses for absence during doping ban

Iga Swiatek described her doping ban as the worst time in her life and revealed she had considered publicly disclosing her positive test for the banned substance trimetazidine but chose to wait until authorities resolved the case.



New Delhi. Iga Świątek, World no. 2 and five-time Grand Slam champion, has described the emotional turmoil and uncertainty she faced during her recent doping ban, calling it "the worst time in my life." Speaking ahead of the Australian Open, Swiatek revealed her struggles in dealing with the situation and the reasoning behind her decision to remain silent about the positive doping test until the case was resolved. Swiatek tested positive for the banned substance trimetazidine in August and was provisionally banned the following

month. During this period, she attributed her absence from tournaments in Asia to personal matters and fatigue. However, it was later disclosed that her withdrawal was due to a one-month doping suspension after the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) confirmed the positive test. The Polish star denied knowingly taking the banned substance, explaining that it had entered her system through contaminated non-prescription sleep medication. Following her successful appeal, the ITIA accepted this explanation, allowing her to return to competition in October. Swiatek's provisional ban officially ended on

December 4, factoring in time already served.

In her remarks to the Polish media, Swiatek shared her internal conflict about whether to publicly address the issue while the case was ongoing. "For a long time, when I was in Warsaw and couldn't play, I wondered if it would be better to say publicly what happened," Swiatek said. "But the truth is that with no source at the time and no decision from the ITIA yet, we would be only half-informing that I had a doping case, and that would have caused me more stress and problems."

She acknowledged the stigma surrounding doping allegations and her fear of being judged negatively. "I always worked hard to be a good example, to show my integrity, show good behaviour. Having no control over this case really freaked me out a bit," she admitted.

Swiatek also expressed gratitude for the support she received from fellow players in the locker room. "Most of them even approached me, saying, 'Hey, how can we avoid this? Is there any way that we can be more careful?' They're worried this can happen to them as well," she said. The

Iga Swiatek faced emotional turmoil during her doping ban

Swiatek tested positive for trimetazidine, was banned for a month

Swiatek to begin Australian Open campaign vs Katerina Siniakova

handling of Swiatek's case, as well as that of men's world number one Jannik Sinner, has drawn criticism from some players who allege double standards in the adjudication process. However, Swiatek emphasised her belief in the importance of resolving cases thoroughly before making them public. "Ultimately, the system that is in place now, which gives a chance to find an answer and resolve the situation before it is revealed publicly, is reasonable," she concluded.

Swiatek is set to begin her Australian Open campaign against Katerina Siniakova in the first round on Sunday, hoping to move past a tumultuous chapter in her career.

Sam Konstas might miss out on opening spot in Sri Lanka, hints George Bailey

New Delhi. Breakout star of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy 2024/25 Sam Konstas might not have a place in the playing XI in the Test series against Sri Lanka, hinted chief selector George Bailey. Speaking after the squad announcement for the Sri Lanka series, Bailey said that Australia might promote Travis Head to the opening slot as they did against India in the BGT 2023. Konstas, who made a name for himself in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy 2024/25, played two crucial innings for his team. In Melbourne - his debut Test game, Konstas took apart Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj in his brief stay. And in the last innings of the series, Konstas got Australia off the blocks quickly in a chase of 162 runs.



We've got a number of options and there's been a few preliminary discussions around where that may land, and that may depend on the makeup of that first XI," Bailey told cricket.com.au. "I think (head coach) Andrew (McDonald,) and (stand-in captain) Steve (Smith) will settle on that in due course, once we hit Sri Lanka," he added. Head, who top-scored in the recently-concluded Border-Gavaskar series against

India in the middle order, has experience of batting at the opening spot in the sub-continent. He had replaced David Warner during the 2023 tour of India and scored 90 runs at a strike rate of 55.21. Australia announced a 16-member squad on Thursday with several fresh faces added to the group that played India in Sydney last week. Smith will captain the side as Pat Cummins is on leave for the birth of his second child. The 19-year-old Sam Konstas will remain in contention to make the starting lineup in Sri Lanka after his impressive start against India in the two Tests. "What we have seen is he's (Konstas) a quick learner. (He) absorbs a lot of information," Bailey said. "So (we're) expecting him to get to get a lot out of it. I know from his spin play in Australia, and the opportunities he's (had) in different parts of the world, we think he's got a game that's well suited, and a technique that can stand up.

Virat Kohli, Anushka Sharma visit Vrindavan after woeful Australia series

New Delhi. India batter Virat Kohli and actor Anushka Sharma visited Vrindavan to meet Shri Premanand Govind Sharan Ji Maharaj. Kohli had a woeful outing on the tour of Australia where he was dismissed in identical fashion in 8 out of his 9 innings. A video of Virat Kohli and Anushka Sharma went viral on the internet, where the duo can be seen seeking blessings from Shri Premanand Govind Sharan Ji Maharaj. In the video, Shri Premanand Govind Sharan Ji Maharaj can be heard praising Anushka for keeping Virat Kohli on the path of humility and faith despite



Australian Open: Defending champion Jannik Sinner still in dark about doping ban

New Delhi. Defending Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner revealed on Friday that he remains uncertain about the outcome of his doping case, which continues to loom over his preparations for his title defense at Melbourne Park. Sinner, who failed two drug tests in March due to low levels of the anabolic steroid clostebol, was initially cleared by an independent tribunal in August after the body accepted his explanation of unintentional contamination. However, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) appealed the ruling at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in September, leaving the Italian still facing the possibility of a two-year ban.



enjoying a standout year that saw him win his second Grand Slam title at the U.S. Open. The handling of Sinner's case, as well as that of Iga Swiatek, by tennis anti-doping authorities has faced criticism from some players, including Australian Nick Kyrgios, who called the situation a "horrible look" for the sport. However, Sinner refrained from engaging with Kyrgios or other critics. "I haven't done anything wrong," he stated. "That's why I'm still here, that's why I'm still playing. I don't want to respond to what Nick said or what other players say." Sinner begins his Australian Open campaign against Chile's Nicolás Pietrangeli.

Speaking to reporters ahead of the Australian Open, Sinner admitted there was little clarity about the ongoing proceedings.

"I know exactly as much as you guys know. We're in a stage where we don't know many, many things," Sinner said. "Yeah, you think about this, of course. I would lie if I said I forget. It's been with me for quite a long time. But it is what it is. I'm here trying to prepare for the Grand Slam. Let's see how it goes." Despite the ongoing uncertainty, Sinner was able to keep his focus last season,

struggles she went through amid the doping controversy she was involved in. Last year, the Pole served a one-month ban after testing positive for a banned substance, named trimetazidine (TMZ), which is used as a heart medication. Swiatek was provisionally suspended on September 12, 2024 before she missed three tournaments: the WTA 500 Hana Bank Korea Open, WTA 1000 China Open and WTA 1000 Dongfeng Voyah Wuhan Open. Recalling the tough times, Swiatek revealed that she was prosecuted and treated like a liar.

"You can be at peace with yourself that you didn't do anything wrong, but no one actually treats you like that... Especially the people that are kind of prosecuting you. Even when you're telling the truth, you feel like they treat you like a liar," Swiatek told Tennis Insider Club. "I fought for everything so hard the past years. What if people are going to, in their head, take it away from me? What if they're going to look at me differently? I was home at the time and still there were people coming for autographs or for a selfie. And I was like 'Well, are you going to do that in one month?'" Swiatek added.

being one of the most successful persons of his generation.

VIRAT KOHLI'S TOUR OF AUSTRALIA. Visiting Australia for the fifth time, Virat Kohli carried immense expectations on his shoulders. However, the 36-year-old ended the tour with a modest 190 runs in nine innings, averaging just 23.75. The series began on a high note, with Kohli reaching a significant milestone by becoming the batter with the most Test hundreds on Australian soil, registering his seventh ton during the Perth Test.

Unfortunately, his performance dipped in the latter part of the series, as he managed only 85 runs across seven innings in the final four Tests, which India lost 1-3. Kohli also made headlines for his on-field antics, including a shoulder bump with Sam Konstas, an incident for which the ICC sanctioned him. Additionally, Kohli attempted to provoke the Australian crowd with a sandpaper gesture. Several former players have been critical of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma after the tour. There have been calls of getting the top India stars back into the Ranji Trophy game so that they can fix their red-ball game.

East Bengal vs Mohunbagan, ISL Livestreaming: When and where to watch Kolkata Derby

New Delhi. The iconic Kolkata Derby between East Bengal FC and Mohun Bagan Super Giant in the Indian Super League (ISL) 2024-25 season promises to reignite fierce footballing passion. Scheduled for January 11 at Guwahati's Indira Gandhi Athletic Stadium, this high-stakes match was relocated from Kolkata's Salt Lake Stadium due to logistical challenges posed by the Ganga Sagar Mela. East Bengal FC, under new manager Oscar Bruzon, has been fighting to regain competitive form after a challenging start to the season. Recent victories against Jamshedpur FC and Punjab FC showed glimpses of resurgence, though their playoff hopes suffered a setback with a 2-3 defeat to Mumbai City FC. With minimal room for error, East Bengal faces an uphill task against



their arch-rivals. In contrast, Mohun Bagan Super Giant is enjoying a remarkable run, currently sitting atop the ISL table. Their commanding performances against Punjab FC and Hyderabad FC have solidified their position as a formidable contender, making them favorites for the derby. The team will be

eager to extend their dominance and maintain their supremacy in Indian football.

Historical Edge for Mohun Bagan. The head-to-head record heavily favors Mohun Bagan. East Bengal has failed to secure victory in their last nine ISL derbies, with Mohun Bagan scoring at least twice in each encounter. This history fuels Mohun Bagan's confidence as they prepare to assert dominance once again.

A Shot at Redemption. Despite past struggles, East Bengal will look to disrupt their rivals' momentum and secure a morale-boosting victory. The Kolkata Derby, known for its unpredictability, could be the perfect platform for Bruzon's men to make a statement and rally their season forward. Fans and pundits alike anticipate a

fiery showdown as East Bengal and Mohun Bagan vie not only for bragging rights but also crucial points in the ISL race. Will Mohun Bagan continue their reign, or can East Bengal turn the tide? Only time will tell in this latest chapter of Indian football's most storied rivalry.

When and where is East Bengal vs Mohun Bagan in ISL?

The highly anticipated Kolkata Derby clash between Mohun Bagan Super Giant and East Bengal in the ISL 2024-25 season is set to unfold on January 11 at Guwahati's Indira Gandhi Athletic Stadium.

Where to watch East Bengal vs Mohun Bagan in ISL?

Fans can watch the Kolkata Derby clash between Mohun Bagan Super Giant and East Bengal FC on Sports 18 and Sports 18 HD and can also be live-streamed on the JioCinema app and website.

Wamiqa Gabbi

Reacts After A Paparazzo Calls Her Premika, Says 'Aap Logon Ne Diya Hai Naam'

Actress Wamiqa Gabbi, who has been making waves with her stellar performances, recently shared a lighthearted moment with the paparazzi at Mumbai airport. In a viral video, Wamiqa is seen interacting with media when one of them referred to her as "Premika." This left her smiling. She was last seen in Baby John. In the video, shared by Snehzala, we can see Wamiqa wearing a blue colour saree paired with a pink blouse. As she headed towards her car, paps came for photos. One of them called her premika. Hearing this she said, "Aap logon ne diya hai naam." Coming to Baby John, the film is an official remake of the Tamil movie, Theri. It starred Ilayathalpathy Vijay and Samantha Ruth Prabhu in the lead roles. In the remake, Keerthy stepped in to portray the role played by Samantha. Recently, the actress revealed that Samantha had recommended her to Atlee for Baby John.

Directed by Kalees, Baby John was released in theatres on December 25. The film, besides the three leads, also features Jackie Shroff, Sanya Malhotra and Rajpal Yadav in key



roles. Wamiqa Gabbi has joined the cast of the upcoming spy thriller "G2," directed by debutant Vinay Kumar Siriginedi. "G2" is a sequel to the 2018 hit spy thriller "Goodachari", written by and starring Adivi. Wamiqa stars opposite Adivi Sesh in this next instalment of the franchise, continuing the story of Sesh's character from "Goodachari", reports variety.com. The actress said that she is beyond excited to be part of the incredible journey of "G2." "The first film set a remarkable benchmark, and stepping into this world is both thrilling and challenging. Working with such a talented cast and crew inspires me to push boundaries and bring fresh energy to my character. I can't wait for the audience to experience what we're crafting - it's going to be extraordinary." She just completed the European shooting schedule for "G2" with Sesh. Produced by T.G. Vishwa Prasad and Abhishek Agarwal under People Media Factory, Abhishek Agarwal Arts, and AK Entertainments, "G2" is being developed as a pan-Indian release in the Telugu, Hindi, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam languages, reports variety.com.



Nandamuri Balakrishna And Urvashi Rautela's Chemistry Shines In Daaku Maharaj

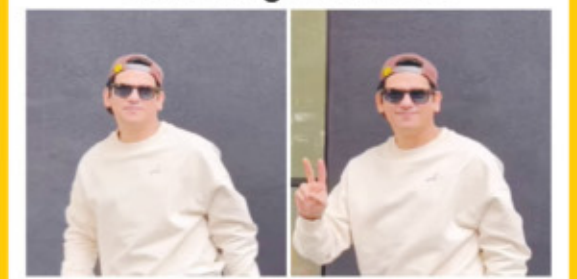


South producer Naga Vamsi's next film, Daaku Maharaj is making waves lately and for all the right reasons. Starring the iconic 64-year-old South actor Nandamuri Balakrishna in the lead role, the film will hit theatres on January 12. Directed by KS Ravindra and produced by Naga Vamsi and Sai Soujanya, Daaku Maharaj promises to be an action-packed thriller. The film features Balakrishna in the titular role and also boasts an ensemble cast including Shradha Srinath, Pragya Jaiswal, Rishi, Chandni Choudhary, Jeevan Kumar and Satya Akela. Adding to the buzz is Bollywood diva Urvashi Rautela, who will be seen performing an exciting item number in the film. A recently surfaced behind-the-scenes video has fans talking, as it shows Nandamuri Balakrishna striking romantic poses with Urvashi, hinting at the exciting chemistry to expect in the film.

Balakrishna's rugged portrayal of the dacoit-turned-hero is already a talking point, setting high expectations among fans. The film's foot-tapping number Dabidi Dibidi has already become an instant sensation, with Urvashi Rautela's fiery moves and screen presence stealing the show. Fans are raving about her electrifying performance, which has made the song go viral. A few days ago, a rehearsal video from the song surfaced online, showing Urvashi practising the choreography. Urvashi herself shared the video on Instagram, giving fans a glimpse into her intense practice sessions with the choreographers. Dressed in a striking pink midi dress with full sleeves, a collared neckline and a fit-and-flare design, she exuded confidence. Paired with sneakers for comfort, her bold red socks added a playful touch to the look.

The excitement for Daaku Maharaj doesn't stop there. Bobby Deol's inclusion in the cast as the antagonist has added an extra layer of intrigue to the project. Directed by Bobby Kolli and produced under the Sitara Entertainment banner, the film is shaping up to be a treat for action lovers. Meanwhile, Urvashi Rautela has a plate full of exciting projects.

For Vijay Varma, Beige Is The New Black And We Can't Agree More



In the last few years, actor Vijay Varma has emerged as one of the most promising talents in Hindi cinema. With his impressive performances in projects like Darlings, Jaane Jaan, Dahaad, Mirzapur, and IC 814: The Kandahar Hijack, the 38-year-old has carved a niche in the industry. Apart from his acting skills, Vijay has, time and again, left everyone stunned with his impeccable fashion sense. On Wednesday, January 8, the actor was spotted in and about in the city, and his simple look for the day was a lesson in winter fashion. In a video posted on Instagram, Vijay was getting out of his car, wearing a beige sweatshirt paired with straight-fit jeans and matching sneakers. Unlike many others, the Darlings always make sure to wear some sort of accessory to add an oomph factor to his look. For his latest outing, Vijay opted for a brown baseball hat, uber-cool sunglasses and a classy watch. He was also seen carrying a brown leather bag.

In the video, as soon as he gets down from his car, Vijay can be seen greeting the person who opened the door for him.

Proving his humble nature once again, the Dahaad actor was warmly greeting the paparazzi with a victory sign. He then posed for them briefly before entering the building. Vijay, with a wide smile on his face, bid adieu to the paps.

Vijay, recognised as one of the best-dressed male celebrities in Bollywood, looked back at his "fashion-forward" moments in 2024. Just days ago, he shared a video on his Instagram account featuring glimpses of his best-dressed moments from last year, and he is a true trailblazer.

When it comes to fashion, the IC 814 actor is someone who has consistently pushed boundaries with his bold and experimental style. Whether it's wearing colourful florals, eye-catching prints, extravagant ethnic outfits or effortlessly pulling off androgynous outfits, he is not afraid to think out of the box and embrace unconventional looks with ease.

In the caption of his post, Vijay wrote, "Rewind my fashion forward 2024. You can see... I was committed to serving looks in 2024. Owe it big time to everyone who helped me put these together! My hair make-up team, magazine editors, designers, photographers and stylists... esp @vrindaanarang." Speaking of his work front, Vijay Varma is expected to star in Ul Jalool Ishq and Matka King in 2025.

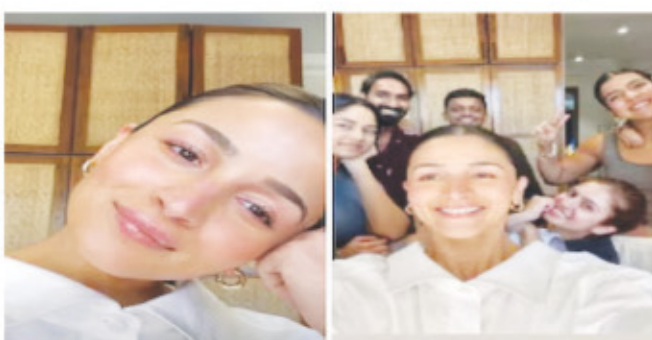
After Thailand Holiday With Family

Alia Bhatt

Is 'Back To The Grind'

After a refreshing holiday in Thailand with her loved ones, Alia Bhatt is back to work and sharing updates with her fans. On Tuesday, the actress took to Instagram to give a sneak peek into her busy day. In the first post, Alia showcased her flawless makeup look with a simple caption, "Back to the grind." In the next, she shared a picture with her team, writing, "With my team behind." These posts mark Alia Bhatt's return to her professional commitments after what appeared to be a much-needed break.

Alia Bhatt ushered in the New Year with her family on a



tropical getaway, sharing glimpses of the memorable trip. The pictures featured her husband Ranbir Kapoor, their baby daughter Raha Kapoor, her mother Soni Razdan, mother-in-law Neetu Kapoor, director Ayan Mukerji, and sister-in-law Riddhima Kapoor Sahni. In her heartfelt caption, she shared, "2025: where love leads & the rest just follows...!! Happy

New Year all." After a relaxing vacation, Alia Bhatt is gearing up for a busy work schedule. She is set to star in the upcoming spy thriller Alpha, alongside Sharvari, directed by Shiv Rawail. This film will further expand the renowned Yash Raj Films spy universe.

Additionally, Alia has Sanjay Leela Bhansali's much-anticipated Love and War in her lineup. Co-starring Vicky Kaushal and Ranbir Kapoor, the film was officially announced in January 2024.

The Instagram announcement read, "We Bring You Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Epic Saga 'Love & War.' See You At The Movies Christmas 2025."

