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Guv Ravi unable to digest TN growing, his actions are 'childish': CM Stalin

Sanjay Kumar

Chennai, Jan. 11: Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi was unable to digest that the state was developing and his decision not to address the Assembly was



"childish", Chief Minister M K Stalin said on Saturday. The state Legislative Assembly has been witnessing strange scenes for the last few years after Ravi took over as Governor, he said.

Legislative Assembly at the commencement of the session. "But he appears to be keen on violating the rules in a planned manner," the CM said winding up the debate on the motion of thanks to the Governor for his address. In 2022, this Governor delivered his address without altering the speech. But in the following three years, he avoided delivering his customary address citing 'absurd' reasons, the Chief Minister said.

Dozen illegally built houses demolished in anti-encroachment drive in Jammu

Srinagar, Jan. 11: A dozen illegally built houses and four plinths were demolished in a major encroachment drive here on Saturday, leading to retrieval of 10 kanals of the land belonging to the Jammu Development Authority (JDA), a senior government official said.

Himachal committed to combat escalating drug crisis: CM Sukhu

Navdeep Singh Sahni

Simla, Jan. 11: The NDPS cases have risen by 340 per cent in the past decade from 500 cases in 2012 to 2200 cases in 2023 and the Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (PIT-NDPS) Act was invoked for the first time in Himachal Pradesh, said Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu.



invoked for the first time, he said. This act enables the detention of repeat offenders involved in drug trafficking. In June 2024,

three months preventive police detention of an accused Puneet Mahajan in the Kangra district was ordered under Section 3(1) of (PIT NDPS) Act. Puneet was accused in multiple cases under the NDPS Act and was earlier arrested five times in different cases. The challenges before us are immense, but with the

unwavering support of the people, dedication of our law enforcement agencies, and a compassionate approach to rehabilitation, we can create a drug-free state, he said. He stressed that individuals struggling with addiction are victims of illness and should not be criminalised. "Our approach must transcend punitive measures to include robust rehabilitation frameworks," he said.

Shiv Sena (UBT) to contest Maharashtra local bodies polls solo

Tejinder Kaur Babbar

Nagpur, Jan. 11: Amid a blame game over the Maha Vikas Aghadi's rout in the state assembly elections, key constituent Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) on Saturday announced to contest local bodies polls solo, a move raising question mark over the opposition bloc's unity.

three constituents of the MVA coalition. Raut said the INDIA bloc and Maha Vikas Aghadi alliances comprising Sena (UBT), Congress, and NCP (SP) were meant for Lok Sabha and assembly elections. "In an alliance, workers of individual parties don't get opportunities, and it hampers organisational growth. We will contest polls to the Mumbai, Thane, Nagpur and other municipal corporations, zilla parishads and panchayats on our strength," he told reporters.

for indulging in a blame game over the MVA's defeat in the assembly polls, Raut said those who don't believe in consensus



and compromise have no right to be in an alliance. He further claimed that the INDIA bloc didn't hold a single meeting after the Lok Sabha election results were declared. "We were not able to appoint even a convenor for the INDIA bloc. It isn't good. As the largest party of the alliance, it was the Congress's responsibility

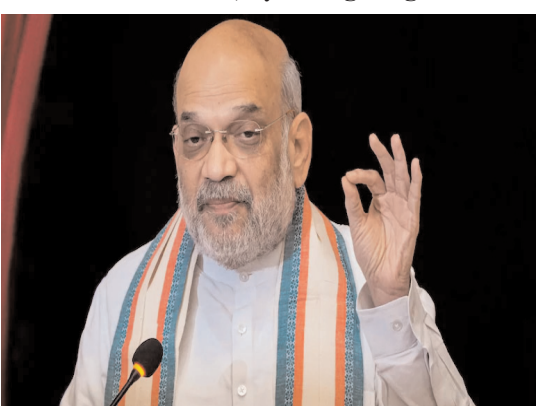
to convene a meeting," the Sena (UBT) MP said. NCP (SP) group leader in the legislative assembly, Jitendra Awhad, said they can't stop Sena (UBT) if it's keen to go alone. "If they wish to go alone, who are we to stop them? We can't take anyone forcibly. We need to stay together after the assembly poll defeat. I don't think that's the right decision. Poll prospects of all three MVA parties will be impacted," he said.

Dark web, cryptocurrency, drones continue to be challenge: Amit Shah

Naresh Malhotra

New Delhi, Jan. 11: Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Saturday that dark web, cryptocurrency, online marketplace and drones continue to be a challenge for the country and these have to be checked by strict measures. Chairing a regional conference on 'Drug Trafficking and National Security' here, Shah also asserted that the country will not allow even a single kg of drugs to be smuggled in or out of the country.

achievement. The Modi government has given a strong message of destroying the entire ecosystem of drugs through strict action," he said. The home minister said that in 2024, by seizing drugs worth Rs



16,914 crore, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and police across the country took the biggest action against drugs, which is a significant step in making a drug-free society. "No country can move forward on the path of development with a young generation suffering from drug addiction. It is our responsibility that

we all fight this challenge together and make all efforts to win this battle," he said. Shah said that during 2004-14, a total of 3.63 kg of drugs were seized while during 2014-24, altogether 24 lakh kg of drugs were seized - a seven-fold increase as compared to the previous decade. He said drugs worth Rs 8,150 crore were disposed off in 2004-14 but in 2014-24, drugs worth Rs 54,851 crore were destroyed - eight times more than the previous decade. The conference, organised by the NCB, aims to address the growing concern of drug trafficking and its impact on national security, with a special focus on eight states and Union Territories of northern India.

Raghubar Das rejoins BJP, vows victory in Jharkhand

Ranchi, Jan. 11: Former Jharkhand chief minister Raghubar Das on Friday rejoined the BJP here and asserted that the party will return to power in the state. Das had earlier resigned from the post of Odisha governor on December 24 last year to return to active politics after the party's debacle in the assembly elections, in which it failed to dislodge the JMM-led coalition from power in the state. Das was given a warm welcome into the saffron fold at the BJP's state headquarters in the presence of the party's state unit president Babul Marandi, working president Ravindra Rai, Union minister Sanjay Seth, and hundreds of supporters.

president to booth level workers, made their honest effort but we did not get the desired results. We should not be disheartened by the results. We will come back soon," Das said. "The party faced a major setback in the 2024 Jharkhand assembly elections, managing to win only 21 seats, despite an all-out blitz. The JMM-led alliance stormed to power for the second consecutive term, winning 56 seats in the 81-member assembly. "People of Jharkhand have given their mandate to the alliance government. We respect the mandate and hope the government will fulfill the promises made to the people. We will give two-three months to them to fulfill their promises. If the government fails to do it, we will launch our struggle on the streets," he said. Das, who was the first non-tribal chief minister of Jharkhand from 2014-2019, was appointed the governor of Odisha on October 18, 2023 after the party's defeat in the 2019 assembly polls in the state.

1st anniversary celebrations of Ram Lalla idol consecration ceremony begin in Ayodhya

ST Correspondent

Ayodhya, Jan. 11: The first anniversary celebrations of the Ram Lalla idol consecration ceremony in Ayodhya started on Saturday with a large number of devotees reaching the holy city to take part in events. Religious and cultural programmes will commence in the Ram Temple complex starting Saturday. The anniversary celebrations began with the recitation of Yajurveda. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will perform the 'abhishek' of Ram Lalla. The grand aarti of the deity will take place around 12.20 pm, followed by an offering of 56 dishes to the deity. The court of Ram Lalla is decorated with flow-



ers. Anup Mishra, a local resident who has reached the temple to witness the anniversary celebrations, said, "We were not able to reach the Ram Janmabhoomi when the Pran Pratistha was done in January 2024, but this time we are fortunate enough to reach the court of Ram Lalla on the first anniversary." Another devotee, Sarla Maheshwari who has come from Bhopal, said, "We reached Ayodhya two days ago to take part in the anniversary celebrations, and felt excited that today we will see the deity." Scheduled from January 11 to 13, the celebrations aim to include common people, who were unable to attend the historic ceremony last year, alongside around 110 invited VIPs, according to the temple trust. A German hangar tent has been installed at the Angad Teela site, capable of hosting up to 5,000 people. Common people will have the opportunity to witness the grand event, which include classical cultural performances, rituals, and daily Ram Katha discourses at the pavilion and Yagnashala. "The trust has decided to invite common people who could not attend the initial consecration ceremony last year. They will be allowed to join all three days of events at Angad Teela," Champat Rai, the general secretary of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust had earlier said. The trust also said that invitation letters have been distributed to guests, including the 110 VIPs, many of whom missed the original pran pratistha ceremony on January 22, 2024.

Kerala HC mulls ban on plastic bottles in hill stations

KOCHI. Kerala High Court on Friday observed that it will issue an order banning the sale and use of plastic bottles in hill stations across the state, emphasising that such a measure is essential in Kerala. The court also directed the state government to explore alternative mechanisms for providing drinking water in hill stations.

A Division Bench comprising Justice Bechu Kurian Thomas and Justice Gopinath P made



the observation when a suo motu case registered in connection with the outbreak of fire at the Brahmapuram waste treatment plant came up for hearing. The court said it will issue an order in this regard taking a cue from the Madras High Court directive, if the government does not take any steps to stop the supply of water in plastic bottles at hill stations. The court noted plastic water bottles had started circulating in these hill stations. On the illegal dumping of medical waste in Tirunelveli from Kerala, the government submitted that it had decided to control the illegal cross-border transport of waste. The police and MVD have been directed to strengthen their squad work at border areas to check the illegal transport of waste across the border.

Kozhikode's Kappad beach retains Blue Flag certification, but local community reaps no benefits

Awarded by the Denmark-based Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), the certification signifies that the beach meets stringent international standards for cleanliness, environmental sustainability and safety.

KOZHIKODE. Kappad beach in Kozhikode, has once again earned the prestigious Blue Flag certification, marking the fourth consecutive year it has achieved this honour. Awarded by the Denmark-based Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), the certification signifies that the beach meets stringent international standards for cleanliness, environmental sustainability and safety.

This recognition places Kappad beach in an elite category of environmentally conscious and well-maintained tourist destinations, however, locals remain

sceptical about the tangible benefits of this accolade. The Blue Flag certification is awarded to beaches that meet 33 criteria under categories such as environmental education and information, water quality, safety and services, and proper waste and environmental management. Kappad beach underwent significant development in 2020, including installation of solar-powered lights, bio-toilets, and disabled-friendly pathways, to comply with these requirements. While the Blue Flag certification is undoubtedly a feather in Kappad Beach's cap, the challenge lies in translating this recognition into tangible benefits for the local community.

Residents argue that the Blue Flag status has not translated into increased tourist footfall. While beaches like Varkala, Kovalam, and Marari have witnessed a steady influx of both domestic and international tourists, Kappad remains relatively underwhelming in attracting visitors. According to them, many potential tourists, even within India, are unaware of the Blue Flag certification and its significance. There has been minimal effort to promote Kappad beach as a Blue Flag destination, especially in global



markets. Moreover, limited public transport options and absence of direct rail or air connectivity make it challenging for tourists to visit Kappad. While the beach is clean, locals point out the lack of sufficient restaurants, accommodation options and recreational facilities that would entice travellers to stay longer. "We were hopeful that the Blue Flag certification would bring more tourists, but nothing has changed," says Rameshan Nair, a fisherman and long-time resident of Kappad. "We still struggle to find customers for our boats and stalls. The government needs to promote the beach better." Meenakshi Amma, who runs a small tea shop near the beach, believes the certification has done more for environmental preservation than for

economic upliftment. "The beach looks better, no doubt, but tourists don't come in big numbers. If they did, we'd all benefit," she said.

Kappad beach holds historical significance as the site where Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama first landed in India in 1498. Despite the rich heritage, the beach has failed to capitalise on its historical and ecological appeal. Neighbouring states like Goa and Karnataka have successfully leveraged such certifications to boost tourism. For instance, Karnataka's Padubidri beach, another Blue Flag-certified site, has gained popularity due to aggressive marketing campaigns and improved tourist facilities.

According to experts, without strategic investments in tourism promotion and infrastructure, the beach risks remaining a hidden gem, admired from afar but seldom visited. They suggest a multi-pronged approach to maximise the potential of Kappad beach by launching targeted campaigns highlighting the beach's Blue Flag status and historical importance, and introducing shuttle services from Kozhikode city and nearby airports. They emphasised ensuring local participation in tourism activities will help boost the economy.

DVAC books home department official in DA case linked to son's gold smuggling

Customs probe revealed substantial cash deposits in the accused's bank account

CHENNAI. The Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) on Thursday registered a corruption case against a section officer in the Tamil Nadu Home Department for possessing disproportionate assets, suspected to have been amassed using proceeds from gold smuggling, involving her son, an Indigo Airlines staff member in Chennai. The DVAC's FIR alleges that S A Shahira Banu, an assistant section officer in the Goondas section of the Home, Prohibition and Excise Department, possessed disproportionate assets worth Rs 21.27 lakh during the check period between September 2021 and August 2024. The case stems from a letter dated August 9, 2024 by Chennai Customs to the Tamil Nadu government, following a probe into a smuggling case where 12.6 kg of gold worth Rs 8.5 crore was smuggled by Barkatullah, an Indigo Airlines staff member, at Chennai

airport with the assistance of a Sri Lankan passenger, Abdulla Jomu Jaljahan. The case was detected on June 8, 2024. Barkatullah, a junior colleague of Banu's eldest son Syed Mohammed Kareemullah in Indigo Airlines' Customer Service division, allegedly concealed the smuggled gold in his office. According to sources, Kareemullah was identified as one of the masterminds behind the smuggling racket, which used Sri Lankan transit passengers to smuggle gold and hand it over to airport staff. Employed by the airline since 2021, Kareemullah has been absconding since the customs investigation began and is under scrutiny for allegedly smuggling large quantities of gold. Sources in the Tamil Nadu government stated

that the customs investigation revealed substantial cash deposits in Banu's bank accounts, raising suspicions about her involvement



and awareness of her son's illegal activities. Preliminary investigations revealed that Banu was unable to provide explanation for properties she had acquired, despite being required to declare such transactions as a government employee.

The DVAC probe found that prior to the check period, Banu had purchased two parcels of land in Madurantakam and three two-wheelers.

During the check period, she and her family were found to have acquired a plot of land worth Rs 39.24 lakh in Chitlapakkam near Tambaram, a car, and significant bank deposits. DVAC calculated the total value of disproportionate assets during the check period to be Rs 21.27 lakh. Approval to register the case was granted by Tamil Nadu government

on November 6, 2024.

Unearthed hidden wealth

During the check period, Banu and her family were found to have acquired a plot of land worth Rs 39.24 lakh near Tambaram, a car, and significant bank deposits

Karnataka ASHA workers call off strike after CM announces Rs 10,000 monthly honorarium, incentives

BENGALURU. ASHA workers from across Karnataka on Friday withdrew their indefinite strike after Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced a fixed honorarium of Rs 10,000 per month, effective from April, and that the government would consider their other demands.

The CM, after a detailed discussion with health department officials and representatives of the ASHA Union, confirmed that workers will get a fixed honorarium of Rs 10,000 per month. Additionally, workers will be granted incentives for the extra tasks they undertake as part of their duties. Another major outcome of the meeting was the provision of three months of paid leave in the event of hospitalisation due to serious illness. Other decisions included the assurance of monthly leaves for ASHA workers and a commitment to review retirement compensation in the coming days. The announcement was made by Health Commissioner Sivakumar KB at Freedom Park, where the ASHA workers had been sitting in protest since Tuesday.



The government also promised to increase the budget allocated for the workers and assured the members to involve the association in the pre-budget discussions for further planning.

The workers, who had been demanding better pay and working conditions for the last eight years, confirmed that they will return to work on Saturday. They highlighted that this represents a significant step forward in recognising their contributions to the healthcare system.

Uncertainty ends, DMK to contest Erode (East) bypoll

CHENNAI. The ruling DMK will contest the upcoming bypoll for Erode (East) Assembly constituency as part of the alliance it leads. The poll, scheduled for February 5, was necessitated by the death of Congress leader EVKS Elangovan last month. Interestingly, the announcement came from the Congress, which not only won the seat in 2021 as part of the DMK-led alliance but also contested the previous bypoll in 2023, which happened because of the untimely death of its MLA and Elangovan's son Thirumahan Everaa.

In a statement, TNCC president K Selvaperunthagai said the decision for the DMK to contest was taken after it was sought by Chief Minister and leader of INDIA bloc in



Tamil Nadu MK Stalin, keeping in mind the short period of time left for the election to the Assembly in 2026. Selvaperunthagai said the decision was taken unanimously after serious

discussions between TNCC and AICC leadership. Selvaperunthagai appealed to everyone to work together to ensure the victory of INDIA bloc's candidate from the DMK with a wide margin so as to protect the Constitution and safeguard democracy.

TNIE was the first to report that there were strong indications that the ruling party was keen to contest this time instead of giving it to its ally Congress. DMK functionaries from the region had appealed to the leadership on the need for the ruling party to register a thumping victory ahead of the 2026 election. Local functionaries of the DMK already began their poll work in full swing since last week, as reported by TNIE on Wednesday.

Another factor that appears to have contributed

to the decision is the lack of a clear favourite candidate from the Congress. While Elangovan's other son Sanjay Sampath's name was floated, party sources said that he himself showed hesitancy to contest and lacked unanimous backing of the party.

DMK sources said that VC Chandrakumar, a party spokesperson, seemed to be a frontrunner to be announced as its candidate. Once a fan of late actor Vijayakant, Chandrakumar first got elected as an MLA from Erode (East) in 2011 as a DMK candidate. He was also the party's whip in the Assembly from 2011 to 2016. After quitting DMK, he launched Makkal DMDK and unsuccessfully contested from the same constituency as part of an alliance with the DMK in 2016. He later joined the DMK.

CAG slams Karnataka government for poor monument conservation, fund misuse, staff shortages

BENGALURU. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has rapped the Karnataka government over preservation and conservation of monuments and antiquities. Non-utilisation of funds, encroachment of monuments, delay in digitisation, poor preservation, acute staff shortage and inadequate civic amenities are among the key issues, the CAG cited in its report. The report, "Performance Audit on Preservation and Conservation of State Protected Historical Monuments and Antiquities in Karnataka," was tabled in the state Legislative Assembly on December 12, 2023.

Article 49 makes it binding on the state to protect every monument or place of object of artistic or historic interest from spoliation, disfigurement, destruction, removal, disposal or export as the case may be, the



report stated. The shocking aspect was the inadequacies in utilisation of funds allocated for five years from 2017. The

report said, "As against the budget allocation of Rs 146.81 crore, the department utilised only Rs 81.58 crore towards core activities such as preservation and conservation. The remaining amount went towards administrative, maintenance and grants to heritage authorities." The primary function is to conserve and maintain heritage sites and only a small outlay needs to be spent on administration. However, 30% had been spent on administration, the report said.

'Encroachments around monuments'

A sum of Rs 23.16 crore remained unspent, including Rs 7.9 crore meant for conservation works. Even after five years, the digital documentation of antiquities is in progress at the museum and the art gallery in Bengaluru. As against the budget allocation of Rs 13.3 lakh for e-documentation of all antiquities during the three financial years (2017-2020), the department incurred an

expenditure of only Rs 1.19 lakh during 2018-2019. There has been rampant encroachment on sites around monuments, the report said.

Though the department of archaeology conducted village-wise survey in 19 taluks under Samrakshane Scheme and identified 9,552 monuments, the same was not mentioned on the website. Conservation of 239 paintings of Roerich at the Museum and Venkatappa Art Gallery in Bengaluru has not been completed as the expert committee responsible for clearance of payments has not been reconstituted by the government (until June 2022).

Shortage of caretakers

Caretakers are responsible for the maintenance of protected monuments, including clearance of vegetation, cleaning, dusting, sweeping and regulating visitors. During a joint inspection, it was found that 72 monuments had no attendants, the report said. Moreover, there is a shortage of manpower (53%) in the

technical wing. As against 53 sanctioned posts, it has only 27. Thirty posts are vacant.

"The technical posts are essential for the upkeep of ancient monuments," the report said. "Though the department requested the government to fill vacant posts, it took no action," the report said.

Responding to the report, Ravi Korisetar, archaeologist and adjunct professor at the Institute of Advanced Studies, said, "The annual grants earmarked should be utilised by the Department of Archaeology, Museums and Heritage, for conservation, excavation and public outreach activities. A Joint inspection of seven museums and one art gallery in six districts revealed the following instances of non-compliance. The government had given its response to each of these aspects, but the report said they were not satisfactory. CAG has recommended long-term, medium-term and annual conservation plans to protect and conserve the identified monuments.

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News box

Noida's air quality improves, but remains in 'poor' category

Noida. City's average air quality index showed a marginal improvement at 240 on Friday, from 259 recorded a day ago, but remained in the 'poor' category. While a thick fog shrouded the city in the morning, in some pockets, the AQI improved to 'moderate' level as the day progressed. CPCB's data for air quality monitoring stations showed that at 4pm, the AQI at Sector 125 station was 195, which is in the moderate category. During the same period, the average AQI at Sector 1 station was 282 and Sector 116 was 224, both in the poor category. The readings of Sector 62 station were not available. In Greater Noida, the average AQI was recorded at 214, down from Thursday's 270. Knowledge Park V, which covers Greater Noida West, recorded 242 in the poor category, and Knowledge Park III recorded 175 in the moderate category. Ghaziabad too saw a marginal improvement with an AQI of 293 (poor), from 332 (very poor) recorded the previous day. Indirapuram recorded 327 and Vasundhara recorded 305—both in the very poor category—while Loni recorded 258 and Sanjay Nagar recorded 222—both in the moderate category. Delhi's AQI deteriorated to 397 on the day, from Thursday's 357, both 'very poor'. A bulletin issued by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) on Friday stated wind was blowing from the southeast with a speed of less than 6 kmph until evening. It dropped below 4km during the night.

Jewar CHC to start C-arm X-ray & ultrasound facilities soon

Noida. A new C-arm X-ray facility will soon be inaugurated at the Jewar community health centre (CHC) in January. After the district hospital, Jewar will be the only govt CHC in the district where patients will get the facility of a C-arm X-ray machine in addition to ultrasound, officials said. Both machines were provided to the hospital through a CSR project at a cost of around Rs 35 lakh. These machines were installed by the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI), and a demo on how to operate them was given earlier in Dec, last year. "Earlier, patients used to visit either district hospitals or private hospitals for ultrasound. However, the distance from Jewar to Noida is very far. Thus, this facility will be a boon for all the residents of Jewar and nearby districts," said a senior official at the CHC. According to doctors, at least 10 pregnant women visit Jewar Community Health Centre every day for check-ups and delivery. However, due to a lack of facilities so far, many cases, especially those that were complicated, were referred to district hospitals or other private hospitals. "Now we can easily diagnose with the help of the machines," said a doctor at the CHC. The facility will be available free of cost. "Many times, accident victims have to undergo surgery if they have fractures in their arms and legs. With the help of a C-arm machine, surgeons can get information about the exact condition of the bone while performing bone surgery, which increases the success and quality of the surgery. This facility was also only available at the district hospital until now," a doctor said. Meanwhile, the general X-ray machine, which was installed by the state govt in the CHC in May last year, is now in use. "In the first week, the X-ray facilities were started, and we have already received several responses from the patients. The other two machines will also start soon," said the official.

8 months gone, repairs on Hero Honda Chowk flyover set to start next week in Gurgaon

Gurgaon. Brace for a jam at the congested Hero Honda (HH) Chowk as one side of the HH Chowk flyover will remain closed to traffic for the completion of repair work from the next week. Traffic on one side of the flyover will be restricted for over a month. Traffic coming from the Jaipur side and heading towards Delhi will be diverted through Dwarka Expressway. This comes after DCP (Traffic) Virender Vij held a meeting with the officials of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) on Friday regarding the repair of the damaged portion of the Hero Honda flyover. The portion of the flyover has been damaged for the last eight months, affecting traffic movement and compromising the safety of commuters. Recently, traffic police commented that in case of any untoward incident due to the damaged flyover, police would register a case against National Highways Authority of India (NHAI). On Friday, DCP (Traffic) Virender Vij inspected the flyover and NHAI claimed it would take around a month to complete the repair work. During the meeting, NHAI officials said they would need at least a month to complete the repair work. "During the repair work, traffic on one side of the Hero Flyover will be restricted," the DCP said. The DCP (Traffic) said a board would be installed for traffic diversion for vehicles coming from the Jaipur side and heading towards Delhi. The cut under the flyover will also be closed. The DCP said traffic coming from the Jaipur side and heading towards Delhi will not use the flyover and instead use the surface road. Vehicles going to Delhi from Jaipur will be diverted through Dwarka Expressway to reduce the traffic flow at Hero Honda Chowk. Traffic coming from Basai Chowk and Hingiri Chowk heading towards Manesar via Hero Honda Chowk will use the underpass, take a U-turn in front of Hero Company and head towards Jaipur. The damage was first seen in May last year when a 20-metre portion of the flyover sank in, prompting NHAI to cordon off one lane and deploy marshals there. An expert committee subsequently recommended hiring a specialised agency to assess any structural problems and repairs.

2 Airtel managers held for issuing virtual numbers to cyber fraudsters abroad in Gurgaon

Gurgaon. Two Airtel managers were arrested for allegedly issuing virtual phone numbers to Indonesian and Chinese cyber fraudsters. Site inspection manager Neeraj Walia and his senior at Airtel's office in the city, Hemant Sharma, were apprehended following a complaint by a victim of cyber fraud. Officials at Airtel said the two employees were suspended. Probe into the case began last week when a woman alleged she lost Rs 10,000 to fraudsters who contacted her with a work-from-home offer. The number used to call her had an STD code of Gurgaon. "The victim was initially paid Rs 200 for posting hotel reviews on a webpage. Later, she was added to a Telegram group and instructed to transfer money to various bank accounts. This was a prepaid task, for which she was promised high returns," said cyber inspector (east) Amit. Although the victim's virtual account showed funds were increasing after each transfer, the fraudsters allegedly blocked

access to all transactions when she attempted to withdraw the money. A joint team of city police and personnel from Indian cybercrime coordination centre (I4C) traced the virtual phone number to a sham company — Ekamdarsh Services Pvt Ltd — whose documents showed the address somewhere in Dundahera. When cops visited the address, they found no such company. Probe revealed the virtual number used to call the victim was issued by Neeraj and Hemant. "Neeraj handled site verification, which is a must for issuing phone numbers at Airtel. Hemant was his team leader. They issued a DID (direct inward dialling) virtual landline number to the fake company, violating TRAI regulations," said ACP Priyanshu Diwan, who led the investigation. The cops later came to



know that the duo had issued around 530 virtual numbers to one Indonesian company. Several such numbers were provided to Chinese cons as well. Virtual phone numbers are issued by telecom providers to companies and call centres that need to make multiple calls to customers in a day. For instance, the number that flashes on your cellphone screen when you get a call from — say Uber or Zomato — is a virtual number. These numbers,

however, can be issued to agencies based within the country only. "We came across evidence in a WhatsApp group, which showed that the accused issued virtual phone numbers to several other companies without proper verification. We are currently investigating the legitimacy of these companies and how these numbers were used," the ACP added. For now, police have seized two mobile phones from the Airtel managers and registered a case under BNS sections 318 (4) (cheating), 319 (cheating by impersonation), and 61(2) (criminal conspiracy). A spokesperson for Airtel said, "We have suspended the two employees and a show cause notice has been issued to them based on our preliminary investigation. For us, compliance to the code of conduct is a prerequisite to all we do."

GMC to have new app to streamline governance, interdepartmental work

Ghaziabad. The civic corporation is set to get a 'My GNN portal', an integrated platform that can consolidate information from all departments into a single interface, by the end of Jan. The unified system aims to enhance interdepartmental coordination for faster execution of tasks. "We are working to modernise the corporation's functioning through technological upgrades. 'My GNN portal', to be unveiled in the final week of Jan, will lead to better efficiency in municipal governance by swift access to departmental information", said GMC commissioner Vikramaditya Singh Malik. He added that the portal testing and staff training is complete. "The project monitoring system has digitised files across all departments. This system enables efficient tracking of project costs and timelines. It allows both officials and the public to access real-time updates on project status, expenses, and progress", said the GMC chief. The

portal will have 10 modules to address various issues: project monitoring system, legal case management system, accounts and budget management system, mutation management system, payment management system, income challan management, rented management system, user charges management system, and 311 mobile app. The legal case management system has made all departmental cases available online. The system sends automated reminders to concerned advocates before due dates. The accounts and budget management system maintains online records of the corporation's income and expenditure, featuring automated alerts for budget overruns and digital balance sheets. "The property tax management system and mutation management system simplify transfer procedures. Citizens can monitor their applications online and access property tax ledgers and historical receipts digitally. The payment management system benefits

corporation contractors by eliminating the need for physical visits to raise bills. Contractors can now submit their invoices through the online platform, making the process more efficient and convenient", said an official. The income challan management enables online tracking of daily treasury deposits at GMC, simplifying the process for depositors and account management. The rented management system oversees properties owned by GMC. It features an alert mechanism for timely notifications about rent deposits, making it convenient for tenants whilst enabling straightforward monitoring by officials. "Through the user charge management system, residents can now pay online for door-to-door waste collection services. The existing 311 app will continue to effectively address issues across all departments of GMC and the city. Its contribution to serving both civic body and community interests deserves recognition," the GMC official added.

Boy (13) out for morning walk hit, dragged by speeding Jaguar in Greater Noida

Noida. Murari Singh and his son Neeraj were out for a morning walk on Thursday. On their way back home, Murari stopped at a dairy shop to buy milk, while the 13 year old continued to walk. It was their every day routine. Murari reached home a few minutes later but Neeraj didn't. As time passed, Murari started to look for Neeraj in all possible places the boy could be. Murari finally went to the local police station and found out that his son was hit by speeding Jaguar as he was walking on a service road near Stellar Jeevan Society and had been taken to a private hospital with severe head and chest injuries. Two eyewitnesses later told the boy's father that Neeraj was dragged a few metres after the car hit him from behind. "Neeraj's condition is serious, and he is in the ICU. He sustained severe injuries to his head and other parts of his body. The police told me they were alerted on the emergency helpline number, following which Neeraj was taken to the hospital. We are from Jewar and moved to Noida Extension to provide better education to our children in 2019," said the boy's father, who works at a private company. A case, meanwhile, has been registered against the Jaguar's driver Honey (22), who had fled after the crash, under sections 281 (rash driving) and 125 (acts that endanger the personal safety or life of others, causing grievous hurt depending on the severity of the harm caused) of BNS. He was arrested later on Thursday and the car seized. Earlier, a 64-year-old man who had gone out to buy milk was hit by an unidentified white car on the streets of Sector 53. The elderly man died on the spot. The fatal accident that was recorded in the CCTV camera showed the man was crossing the road when a speeding white car approaching from the other side crashed into him, sending him airborne a few feet. After a 48-hour search that involved scanning around 400 CCTV camera clips, police traced the Audi and a 24-year-old man — Luv Kumar — who was driving the car was arrested.



Loan recovery centre run by handlers from China busted in Noida

Gurgaon. Cybercrime cops from the city raided a call centre in Noida and arrested 15 persons for allegedly threatening and verbally abusing people while attempting to recover loans disbursed through various apps, many of them illegal. The police action followed a complaint by a private firm employee, who alleged that he borrowed Rs 10,000 through a loan app but was forced to pay four times the money within seven weeks because of harassment by recovery agents early last year. A case, however, was registered this Jan 7 for cheating and extortion at Cyber police station (east). Police analysed the man's phone calls with the recovery agents and UPI transactions, which led them to the

call centre in Noida Sector 2 on Jan 8. "The accused admitted that they were working as loan recovery agents for various illegal Chinese apps. They were hired by Dialback Pvt Ltd, which operated the call centre" said inspector Amit of Cyber police station (east). Among the arrested 15 was Harman, the operational manager of the centre. He is likely to be questioned along with two Airtel managers who were taken into police custody for issuing virtual numbers to several sham companies without proper verification. ACP Priyanshu Diwan said Dialback worked in collaboration with an NBFC company registered in Gujarat, which issued the loan to the

victim. "Vaishali Securities provides instant loans ranging from Rs 5,000 to Rs 60,000 for periods of 7, 15, or 21 days through different instant loan applications. Dialback has been handling recovery operations on its behalf," he added. According to police, though Dialback is registered in India, it operates from China and Indonesia, with its employees receiving instructions from these countries. Most of the loan apps for which it handles recovery aren't available on official platforms but are embedded in social media advertisements. Users unwittingly click on such links and end up downloading malicious files.

UP cop marries rape survivor day after she accuses him of rape and death threats

A 28-year-old police constable married a 25-year-old woman, a day after she accused him of raping her a second time and threatening her. The previous rape case registered in 2023 is being heard in a court in Mainpuri. A possible agreement between the two led to the marriage.

Noida. Arendra Bargoti, a civil engineer-turned-farmer, is among hundreds of Moradabad cultivators who have started of four bestsellers," Bargoti said. He went on to add that the focus was to make farmers "self-reliant". "By creating value-added products from our own crops, we can participate in the farm-to-table movement, where the farmer isn't just growing the crop but also creating the end product. This not only ensures better income but also connects us directly with

consumers," he said. Vedik Agro, another FPO from Saharanpur, runs on a similar model. Working with 400 farmers from Baliya Khedi village of Saharanpur, 24-year-old Ravikant Tyagi started the FPO in 2023 with jaggery-based products — brown sugar, sesame jaggery, jaggery infused with ginger and black pepper. The group has since diversified into selling preservative-free pickles, chutneys, ghee and multi-grain flour. In two days of the exhibition, which concludes on Friday, the FPO secured an order to supply 10 tonnes of pickles to a Canadian retailer. Talks are currently underway with an Australian bakery owner who is interested in getting monthly supplies of rice flour and refined sugar. Tyagi, who is pursuing a postgraduate degree in agriculture, said the FPO is more than a business. "It's about empowerment. Our manufacturing



is mostly done by women at home. We have a small setup for jaggery production, and no large unit yet," he said. Vedik Agro's turnover was Rs 7 lakh in 2024, and is projected to touch Rs 20 lakh this year. Tyagi, too, gives credit to the FPO scheme. "Govt's support has been instrumental. We've created opportunities for our community and

hope to expand further," he said. At Indus Food 2025, Russian exhibitor Elena Lashchenko of Golden Flax brought to the table a variety of lentils, grains and seeds — reflective of the growing demand of healthy staples across global markets. Explaining the dramatic turn of events within a matter of hours, police sources said that an agreement was possibly reached at the local thana after talks between the two sides with the accused agreeing to marry her. It is not known whether there was any pressure on the woman from her family. After marrying her "tormentor", the woman said, "Yes, it has been done... Let's see what happens next." The accused cop added, "There was a misunderstanding. So, she filed a police complaint against me. Now a compromise has been made and we decided to stay together after our wedding. There are no more disputes between us now."

NEWS BOX

Biden backs Kamala Harris for next presidential polls: Competent to run again

WASHINGTON. Vice President Kamala Harris is competent to run for presidency again in four years, outgoing US President Joe Biden said Friday, noting that the decision on this would finally be on her.

"I think that's a decision she might think she's competent to run again in four years. That'll be a decision for her to make," Biden told reporters at a news conference here. Biden made history in 2020 by appointing Harris as the first ever Indian



American, African American and woman as the Vice President of the country. In the summer of 2024, after a disastrous presidential debate with Donald Trump in Atlanta, Biden withdrew from the race and went ahead to endorse Harris for presidency. Harris soon became the Democratic Party's presidential nominee. However, Harris lost to Trump in the November 5th presidential election. Harris has not announced her future plans yet.

Rudy Giuliani held in contempt of court over 2020 Georgia election lies

World. Former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani has been held in contempt of court for the second time in a week after continuing to spread false claims about two Georgia election workers, Wandra "Shaye" Moss and her mother, Ruby Freeman. The pair previously won a \$148 million defamation case against him. US District Judge Beryl Howell in Washington, DC, ruled on Friday that Giuliani had violated orders prohibiting him from making defamatory remarks about Moss and Freeman. The judge ordered Giuliani to review trial evidence from the case and warned that he could face jail if he continued to flout the court's instructions.

The lawsuit stems from Giuliani's claims that Moss and Freeman engaged in election fraud during the 2020 presidential election. These accusations led to severe harassment and threats against the two women. "Mr Giuliani began lying about the plaintiffs in December 2020 and refused to stop, even after being repeatedly told his claims were baseless, malicious, and dangerous," said their lawyers, reported by Associated Press (AP).

During the hearing, Giuliani laughed and shrugged off the judge's remarks. Judge Howell, who was appointed by President Barack Obama, described his actions as "outrageous and shameful." She added, "This takes real chutzpah, Mr Giuliani."

Before the hearing, Giuliani criticised Judge Howell in a social media post, calling her "bloodthirsty" and biased. After the court session, he referred to the proceedings as a "farce" and called the judge "completely prejudiced", AP reported.

Although the judge did not impose an immediate fine, she warned Giuliani he would face daily fines of \$200 if he failed to confirm compliance within 10 days. This ruling follows a December 2023 jury decision, awarding Moss and Freeman \$75 million in punitive damages and an additional \$73 million in other damages. The pair testified that Giuliani's false claims caused them to live in fear, with Moss saying she rarely leaves her home and suffers from panic attacks. Giuliani's legal troubles continue to mount. Earlier this week, another judge in New York held him in contempt for failing to provide evidence in a separate case involving his Palm Beach property. He is also facing criminal charges in Georgia and Arizona related to efforts to overturn the 2020 election results.

India-US relationship where it stands today a significant achievement of Biden administration: Sullivan

World. The India-US relationship as it stands today is a significant development of the Biden Administration, the outgoing National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Friday, acknowledging there were bumps on the road like the alleged assassination plot of an American citizen by an Indian government official.

"I think the US-India relationship and where it stands today is a significant achievement of this administration. The US, Japan, Philippines, trilateral. The overall health and integration of the relationships among our allies and partners in the (Indo-Pacific) region. ... and that is what we are passing on to the next team," Sullivan told reporters during a round table in the Roosevelt Room of the White House. Sullivan, who returned from New Delhi early this week during which he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, and NSA Ajit K Doval, denied any role for the US in a regime change in Bangladesh and hoped the issue of accountability concerning alleged Pannun murder case would continue during the next administration.

"We had to manage the aftermath of the fact that there was this effort to assassinate an American citizen. We have worked through that. We are continuing to work through that, and we've done that in a way that I think shows the maturity and depth of our bilateral relationship, while also standing up for our principles and our values," Sullivan said in response to a question.

Mark Zuckerberg orders removal of tampons from men's bathrooms at Meta: Report

World. Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg has made sweeping changes to the company's policies in recent days. Among the reported shifts was the removal of tampons from men's bathrooms in the tech titan's offices, according to The New York Times (NYT).

Facilities managers across Meta's Silicon Valley, Texas, and New York offices were instructed to remove tampons and sanitary pads, which had been provided for non-binary and transgender employees who might require them, two employees told NYT.

The move is seen as part of a broader effort by Meta to reshape its internal and external policies to align with the new political regime's values, a process described in the NYT article 'Mark Zuckerberg's sprint to remake Meta for the Trump era'. Earlier this



week, Zuckerberg announced the company would end its fact-checking practices and lift restrictions on speech across its platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, to "restore free expression". "Our content moderation practices have gone too far," Zuckerberg

admitted. By Friday, Meta had ended major diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programmes and removed transgender and non-binary themes from its Messenger app, according to employees. The policy overhaul also loosened rules to allow posts containing statements of hatred against certain races, religions, or sexual orientations, as well as claims about mental illness based on gender or sexual orientation.

According to the NYT report, the changes have sparked internal discord. On Workplace, Meta's internal communication platform, employees in the @Pride group, which supports LGBTQ+ issues, voiced concerns. At least one employee announced their resignation, and others indicated plans to leave. Alex Schultz, Meta's chief marketing officer, reportedly defended the moves in a post to the @Pride group, saying that issues like

transgender rights had become politicised. Looser restrictions on speech in Meta's apps would allow societal debate, Schultz wrote, citing Roe v Wade, the landmark abortion rights law overturned by the US Supreme Court, as an example of issues being politicised instead of fostering public discourse.

In an interview with popular podcast host Joe Rogan, Zuckerberg denied that the changes were made to appease the incoming Trump administration but admitted that the election influenced his thinking. "We got to this point where there were these things that you couldn't say that were just mainstream discourse," the Meta boss said.

The changes have been met with approval from President-elect Donald Trump and conservatives, but also from President Joe Biden, and concerns from LGBTQ+ advocacy groups about increased harassment online and offline.

Malaysian Doctors Fined Rs 11 Crore After One Left For Drinks, Leading To Woman's Death

World. Two doctors in Malaysia have been ordered to pay 6 million ringgit (Rs 11.42 crore) to the family of a woman who bled to her death after one of them left the hospital to grab a drink, according to a report in South China Morning Post (SCMP). The High Court in Klang ruled that the two doctors, identified as Muniandi Shanmugam and Akambaram Ravi, as well as three nurses on duty were responsible for the death of Punitha Mohan, who was admitted to the Shan Clinic and Birth Centre in Klang, Selangor, in 2019, shortly after delivering her second baby. Of the Rs 11 crore in damages, Rs 95 lakh was for the dead woman's pain and suffering, Rs 1.9 crore for each of her two children, and Rs 57 lakh for each of her parents.

Delivering the verdict, Justice Norliza



Othman said the two specialist doctors had failed to ensure that Ms Mohan was out of danger as she began to experience severe bleeding after her placenta was removed. Justice Othman added that although the nurses were not qualified by the health ministry, they were tasked with monitoring the patient's condition. "The deceased's mother found that her daughter was bleeding heavily, and the nurses tried to

stop it by using cotton. The patient was later transferred to Hospital Tengku Ampuan Rahimah Klang (HTAR) in critical condition," read the verdict.

Justice Othman added that the "tragic incident could have been prevented" if the two doctors had acted swiftly by "transferring her to HTAR and closely monitoring the patient's condition". "Instead of leaving her in the care of nurses while Dr Ravi went out for a drink. This level of neglect is unforgivable as it contributed to the death of a healthy mother," the judge said.

The judge pointed out that the two doctors failed to consider common complications associated with childbirth, such as eclampsia and placenta-related issues leading to postpartum haemorrhage (PPH).

Hush money case: US judge sentences President-elect Donald Trump, declines to impose jail term

NEW YORK. A judge sentenced Donald Trump to an unconditional discharge Friday for covering up hush money payments to a porn star despite the US president-elect's last-ditch efforts to avoid becoming the first felon in the White House. The judge spared Trump prison or a fine even though the 34 counts of falsifying business records on which he was convicted in May 2024 carried potential jail time.

Instead New York judge Juan Merchan handed down the mildest criminal sanction available, an unconditional discharge -- a relatively uncommon measure. "Never before has this court been presented with such a unique and remarkable set of circumstances," said Merchan.

"The only lawful sentence that permits entry of a judgment of conviction without encroaching on the highest office of the land is an unconditional discharge." Trump attended his sentencing virtually, with the judge, lawyers and media packed into the scruffy Manhattan courtroom that was the backdrop to the trial's high drama,



legal wrangling and vitriolic personal attacks by the divisive Republican. "This has been a very terrible experience. I think it's been a tremendous setback for New York and the New York court system," Trump said before the discharge was passed.

"It was done to damage my reputation, so I would lose the election." The former president appeared on screens in the courtroom with two large US flags behind him, wearing a red tie with white stripes and looking on impatiently as the brief proceeding unfolded.

Ahead of the sentencing, prosecutor Joshua Steinglass said Trump had been convicted of a "premeditated and continuous deception." "The verdict in

this case was unanimous and decisive and it must be respected," he said. The trial saw Trump forced to look on as a string of witnesses testified that he had fraudulently covered up illicit payments to porn star Stormy Daniels in an effort to stop her disclosing their tryst ahead of the 2016 presidential election, which he ultimately won. Trump had sought a suspension of the criminal proceedings after a New York State appeals court dismissed his effort to have the hearing delayed. But the Supreme Court ruled that the sentencing could proceed. Prosecutors opposed the effort to stave off sentencing, 10 days before Trump is due to be sworn in for a second term, arguing it was wrong for the apex court to hear the case when the mogul still had avenues of appeal to pursue in New York.

First presidential conviction
An unconditional discharge is a measure without any sanctions or restriction that nonetheless upholds the jury's guilty verdict -- and Trump's infamy as the first former president to be convicted of a felony.

Joe Biden Was Asked If He "Regrets" Not Running For Re-Election? He Says...

Washington. Outgoing US President Joe Biden on Friday said that he would have defeated Republican Donald Trump in the 2024 US presidential elections, but he decided to withdraw from the race mid-way for the sake of the unity of his Democratic Party. During a press conference at the White House, he was asked by a journalist, "Mr President, do you regret your decision to not run for re-election? Do you think that that made it easier for your predecessor to now become your successor?" "I don't think so. I think I would have beaten Trump, could have beaten Trump and I think that Kamala (Harris) could have beaten Trump, would have beaten Trump," Mr Biden responded.

"It wasn't about - I thought it was important to unify the party and when the party was worried about whether or not I was going to be able to move even though I



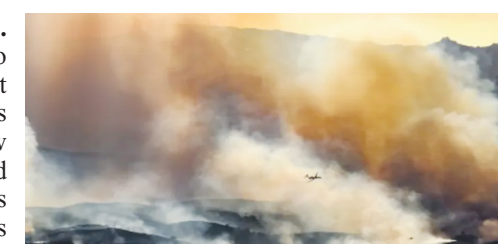
thought I could win again, I thought it was better to unify the party," he added. He also said it was the "greatest honour" of his life to be the US president.

"But I didn't want to be the one who caused a party that wasn't unified to lose an election. And that's why I stepped aside. But I was confident she could win," he said. The 82-year-old leader withdrew from the US Presidential race against Donald Trump after his disastrous performance at the presidential debate in June. Following a lot of criticism from his own party leaders, Mr Biden decided to withdraw from the race mid-way and endorsed his running mate Vice President Kamala Harris to be the Democratic Party's presidential candidate.

Ms Harris, however, lost to Mr Trump and the November 5 elections resulted in a clean sweep for the Republican Party, which not only recaptured the White House, maintained its majority in the House of Representatives but also got a majority in the Senate. "Kamala Harris Competent To Run Again In Four Years" Joe Biden said Kamala Harris is "competent" to run for the presidency again in four years, adding that the decision on this would finally be on her. "I think that's a decision she might think she's competent to run again in four years. That'll be a decision for her to make," he told reporters. Mr Biden made history in 2020 by appointing Ms Harris as the first ever Indian American, African American and woman as the Vice President of the US.

"We Need Answers": Los Angeles Residents Ask Cause Behind Raging Wildfires

Los Angeles, United States. Californians on Friday demanded to know who is at fault for the vast devastation caused by the raging Los Angeles wildfires, as a strict curfew went into force to prevent looting and lawlessness. At least 11 people died as flames ripped through neighborhoods and razed thousands of homes in a disaster that US President Joe Biden likened to a "war scene." While Angelenos grapple with the heart-rending ruin, anger has risen over officials' preparedness and response, particularly for a series of false evacuation alarms and after hydrants ran dry as firefighters battled the initial blazes. Governor Gavin Newsom on Friday ordered a "full independent review" of the city's utilities, describing the lack of water supplies during the initial fires as "deeply troubling."



Nicole Perri, whose home in the upscale Pacific Palisades burnt down, told AFP that officials "completely let us down." "They let us, the ordinary people, burn," added Nicholas Norman, across the city in Altadena. Meanwhile, as fears of looting grow, a sunset-to-sunrise curfew took effect in evacuated areas.

Around two dozen arrests have already been made across Los Angeles, where some residents have organized street patrols and kept armed watch over their own houses. "If we see you in these areas, you will be subject to arrest," Los Angeles

Police Department chief Jim McDonnell said. Violators face up to six months in prison or \$1,000 fines, he said.

The National Guard has been deployed to bolster law enforcement.

'Devastating'
Five separate fires have so far burned more than 37,000 acres (15,000 hectares), destroying around 10,000 buildings, California's fire agency reported.

The Los Angeles County medical examiner's office confirmed an additional fatality on Friday, bringing the overall death count so far to 11. "It reminded me of more of a war scene, where you had certain targets that were bombarded," said Biden, as he received a briefing on the fires at the White House.

Winds calmed Friday, providing a much-needed if fleeting window of opportunity for firefighters battling blazes around the clock for a fourth consecutive day. At the biggest of the blazes, in Pacific Palisades

and Malibu, firefighters said they were starting to get the fire under control, with eight percent of its perimeter contained.

"Braveheart" actor Mel Gibson was the latest celebrity to reveal his Malibu home had burned down, telling NewsNation the loss was "devastating." Meanwhile the Eaton fire in the Altadena area was three percent contained, with fire chief Jason Schillinger reporting "significant progress" in quelling the blaze. A third fire that exploded Thursday afternoon near the wealthy Hidden Hills enclave, home to celebrities like Kim Kardashian, was 50 percent surrounded. But emergency chiefs warned the situation is "still very dangerous" and reprieve from the intense gusts that spread embers will not last. "The winds have died down today, but... are going to increase again in the coming days," said Deanne Criswell, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Andhra issues tenders for Palnadu water grid project

GUNTUR. In a major relief for the drought-prone Palnadu region, the State government has invited tenders for the long-awaited water grid project. This initiative promises to end the decade-long struggle for safe drinking water faced by nearly eight lakh people across 363 villages in 11 mandals, including Macherla, Veldurthi, Durgi, Karampudi, Gurazala, Machavaram, Piduguralla, Dacheppalle, Vinukonda, Nuzendla, and Bollapalli in Palnadu district. Despite being located near the Nagarjuna Sagar, the region has grappled with severe drinking water shortages due to the failure of successive governments to address the crisis. Many residents have been forced to walk long distances to fetch water or rely on unsafe groundwater, which contains high levels of fluoride, causing serious health issues in the region. Efforts to launch the project date back more than a decade when veteran Congress leader Kasu Krishna Reddy initially pitched the idea and reportedly prepared designs during Kiran Kumar Reddy's government. However, the project stalled and remained on hold until now.

The Rs 1,200-crore project, funded jointly by the Union and State governments, aims to draw water from Nagarjuna Sagar and pump it to Vijayapuri South, ensuring safe drinking water for the region. The State government has issued tenders, which can be submitted online between January 10 and 24. Narasaraopet MP Lavi Krishna Devarayulu has played a pivotal role in securing necessary approvals and expediting the project. Although schemes like the Jal Jeevan Mission and AMRUT are progressing to provide tap connections to every household, the declining groundwater levels and high fluoride content necessitated the water grid project to ensure a sustainable and safe water supply for the people of Palnadu.

Wild animal fear: Forest fringe villages in Kerala face matchmaking crisis

-Frequent news reports about wild animal attacks have created a stigma that has been discriminative and has devastated their lives.

KOCHI. The social stigma attached to gender bias, casteism, mental illness and poverty has been deeply rooted in our culture. However, the families living on forest fringes are facing another challenge. Frequent news reports about wild animal attacks have created a stigma that has been discriminative and has devastated their lives. "The families are not ready to discuss the issue, but people are selling their landholdings at modest rates and migrating to towns nearby. But there are poor families with small landholdings who have no other option but to battle the wild animals and live in poverty. Who will dare marry off their daughters to areas where elephants

and tigers roam freely," asks Catholic Congress global director Fr Philip Kaviyil.

Real estate value has crashed, he says. "It is not a simple issue. During Christmas, I visited a hamlet in Kannur where people said wild elephants are roaming the village day and night. However, they don't want to discuss the issue in public as it will affect their social lives. People have stopped venturing out after nightfall. Churches in forest fringe areas witnessed a lean crowd for Christmas midnight mass due to a fear of wild animals," he says. More than the decline in land value, it is the social impact of the wild animal menace that has devastated lives, says Rajesh, a farmer in Wayanad. "As the news about wild animal attacks spreads, people stop visiting us and reject marriage proposals. People are ready to sell off their land and migrate but the prices have hit rock bottom. We will not be able to purchase a house with the price offered for our landholdings," Rajesh says.

The forest department has installed AI cameras, digital display boards and sirens in 12 hamlets to alert villagers about the presence of wild animals. "After a few months, the digital display in a village was found damaged. During the probe, the villagers said the digital display and siren were stopping outsiders from visiting the village. They said people are refusing marriage proposals and the land value has declined," says a forest officer.



The human-wildlife conflict is more a socio-cultural, economic and political issue which requires a deep debate, says Chief Wildlife Warden Pramod G Krishnan. "There are 750 human settlements surrounded by forests in Kerala. Those living in such settlements have to pass through forest stretches to reach the outside world. Among the eight deaths reporting to be from wild elephant attacks during the past nine months, five occurred inside the forest. People should be cautious while moving through forest areas," he says. Kerala has a 16,000km-long forest boundary and it is impossible to barricade the entire area, the officer says. "A rail fence costs Rs 2.5 crore per km while the hanging solar-powered fence costs Rs 8 lakh per km. The human-wildlife conflict in Kerala is a complex issue and it needs a multi-faceted solution. We have to improve habitat quality and reduce human-wildlife interactions. Looking from a Kerala perspective, I feel the human-wildlife conflict is not just an ecological issue, as

livelihood is involved. It needs to be addressed with stress on the human angle," Pramod says.

From Urulanthanni in Kothamangalam to Chinnakanal in Idukki and Vadakkanaid in Wayanad, people are fleeing the forest fringes because of the wild elephant menace.

"The social stigma caused by the elephant menace is a reality and the stories of the struggles of farmers are heart-wrenching," says Kerala Independent Farmers Association chairman Alex Ozhukayil. "There are multiple reasons for the increasing elephant menace, including forest degradation caused by the destruction of grasslands and the growth of invasive species."

He says a lack of fodder drives elephants to human habitations where there is easy availability of food. "The elephants are road openers in crop raid. An adult elephant needs 200kg of green fodder a day, but it will go on a rampage and destroy 1,000kg of crops. Smaller species like Indian gaur and sambar deer follow the elephant herds to feed on the left over fodder," Alex says.

The forest department should create a 100m-wide Human Sensitive Zone along the forest boundary to increase visibility which can help spot the wild animals from a distance, he says. "This will help reduce human casualty. Hanging solar fences are ineffective in stopping wild animals as creepers spread and cause short circuit," he adds.

Pongal rush: Omni bus operators in TN release fare list; 850 buses to ply daily

CHENNAI. Omni bus operators have been issued a stern warning not to charge exorbitant fares for the Pongal season. In this situation, the operators' association has released a list of fixed fares. Meanwhile, Transport Minister S S Sivasankar



directed the RTOs and motor vehicle inspectors to penalise the omni buses that fleece commuters. A Anbalagan, president of the All-Omni Bus Owners Association, in a press note, said they have warned

their members against exploiting the festival season demand by charging higher fares. "We have released a list of maximum fares to be collected for each route, covering non-AC seater and sleeper buses, as well as AC seater and sleeper berths. So far, a total of 1.42 lakh commuters have booked tickets," he said. A total of 850 buses are expected to be operated daily to cater to the festival rush.

The state transport corporations have also commenced the operation of special buses from KCBT, CMBT, and MMBT. An official said, "About 1.9 lakh commuters have reserved tickets for travelling in government buses so far."

1.42 lakh commuters
A Anbalagan, president of the All-Omni Bus Owners Association said they have warned their members against exploiting the festival season demand by charging higher fares. "We have released a list of maximum fares to be collected for each route, covering non-AC seater and sleeper buses, as well as AC seater and sleeper berths. So far, a total of 1.42 lakh commuters have booked tickets," he said

One-year-old boy, woman injured in stray dog attack in Coimbatore; admitted to hospital

COIMBATORE. A one-year-old boy and a 50-year-old woman suffered deep bite injuries after they were attacked by a stray dog, suspected to be affected by Rabies, at Kaliyapuram near Thirumalaiyampalayam on the outskirts of the city on Thursday night. The victims were admitted to the Coimbatore Medical College Hospital for treatment and given anti-rabies injections. Their condition is stable.



A stray dog entered Kaliyapuram on Thursday evening around 6.15 pm. When 1.5-year-old Mukhil Aadhav, son of C Vijayakumar, came out of the house to play, the dog pounced on him and started to bite him. Hearing his screams, his mother and grandmother rushed out of the house and chased away the dog using sticks and rescued the child. By then, the dog had bitten off flesh from his forehead. He was rushed to Madukkarai GH where first-aid was given. He was admitted to Coimbatore Medical College Hospital

(CMCH)," the boy's uncle C Ramkumar said. Later, around 7.30 pm, the dog attacked S Muniyammal (50) of Jallimedu village, which is nearby, while she was walking on the road. She sustained injuries on her right cheek, head and left forearm and was admitted to the CMCH. The boy and the woman were given RIG (rabies immune globulin) injections and ARV (anti-rabies vaccine). Their health condition was stable. The child is set to undergo a surgery soon, said sources. People from both the villages searched

for the dog throughout the night, but could not locate it. On Friday, a resident, Ramkumar from Kaliyapuram, petitioned Thirumalaiyampalayam Town Panchayat seeking action to control the stray dog menace. "A similar situation arose three months ago when a stray dog bit several people and other dogs. That time we urged the local body to initiate measures to prevent dog bites, but they failed. The authorities should take action for the safety of the public before the situation becomes more dangerous," Ramkumar told TNIE.

The panchayat president Kavita Uthayakumar forwarded the petition to the Collectorate and said they have sought assistance from the district administration for the dog sterilization and vaccination measures. "We don't have such facilities in the town panchayat, and have sought help from the district administration. We hope measures will be taken as soon as possible," she said.

Families flee Karnataka's Chamarajanagar villages over alleged microfinance harassment

MYSURU. Hundreds of families have fled their homes in Chamarajanagar district owing to the alleged harassment by private microfinance companies for not repaying their loans. Many villagers said agents of lenders allegedly harassed the defaulters for not paying monthly installments and also not clearing their loans on time. In some cases, children have discontinued their studies and joined their parents to work in farms and plantations in neighbouring districts and states, fearing the alleged harassment by the agents, they said. Mohan, a student, has appealed to the government to allow him to sell one of his kidneys to clear the loan taken by his father. The agents abused his mother in foul



language whenever they visited their house, he alleged. The agents also visited the houses of defaulters at night and allegedly harassed them in the presence of their children, the villagers said. People from Heggawadipura alleged that the microfinance companies disbursed loans at 24% interest. A few companies were run by some trusts. Companies from neighbouring

Tamil Nadu also operated in the district. The companies lend money not only to individuals, but also to women's self-help groups, they said.

Children of a few defaulters said that their parents sometimes spoke about committing suicide as they were unable to repay their loans. Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner Shilpa Nag has appealed to the defaulters not to leave their villages.

She said the defaulters may approach her or the assistant commissioner for help. They may also approach tahsildars or local panchayat officials. Four teams have been formed to visit villages and submit a report. The district administration has plans to hold special panchayat meetings to educate people, she said.

18-year-old reveals more than 60 people sexually abused her over five years

PATHANAMTHITTA. In a shocking revelation, an 18-year-old girl has said she was sexually abused by more than 60 people over the past five years in Pathanamthitta. She revealed the ordeal to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) members, who in turn informed the police. According to the police, the initial investigation indicated that there are more than 60 accused, as stated by the girl. Elavumthitta police have so far arrested five accused in the case - Subin, 24, S Sandeep, 30, V K Vineeth, 30, K Anandu, 21, and Sreeni alias S Sudhi Sreeni, 24, all residents of Chennerkara in Pathanamthitta. The girl identified 40 others who abused her from the photos on the mobile phones of the arrested persons. Police said when the girl was 13, Subin, a neighbour and the son of her father's friend, lured her by showing obscene visuals on his



mobile phone. He also took the girl's nude pictures on his phone. When the girl was 16, Subin took her to a secluded place in their locality and assaulted her sexually. He also recorded videos of the act on his phone. This was followed by regular sexual abuse, the police said.

The probe revealed that the visuals were shared among Subin's friends, who also abused her sexually. The girl, whose academic performance suffered following the repeated abuse, revealed the matter first before a women

empowerment collective during a counselling session.

'More accused to be identified as investigation progresses'

Considering the seriousness of the case, the collective informed the CWC. Following this, the girl, along with her mother, narrated the entire incident to CWC members. According to the police, the case, a rarest of rare among the POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act) cases due to the number of accused involved, will include SC/ST Act as the girl belongs to a scheduled caste community. A case has also been registered at the Pathanamthitta police station in connection with the incident. Police said more accused are likely to be identified as the investigation progresses in different stations. Among the accused, Sudhi is currently in jail in a POCSO case registered by the Pathanamthitta police earlier.

Karnataka HC orders re-exam for KPCL posts; calls post-test qualifying marks unfair

Setting a 50-mark minimum qualifying score after conducting the Kannada language test, despite the notification prescribing a maximum of 150 marks, is neither fair nor transparent, the HC observed.

BENGALURU. The Karnataka High Court has directed Karnataka Power Corporation Limited (KPCL) to re-conduct the Kannada language test for Junior Engineer (Mechanical) and Assistant Engineer (Mechanical) posts under the Hyderabad-Karnataka and Non-Hyderabad Karnataka quotas, citing the unilateral prescription of minimum qualifying marks post-exam as a substantive eligibility alteration.

"While the recruitment notification clearly prescribed a maximum of 150 marks for the Kannada

language test, the subsequent unilateral fixation of a minimum of 50 marks as qualifying marks after the examination that had already been conducted cannot be considered a fair or transparent action. It falls squarely within the first category Eligibility Criteria for Candidates Seeking Employment and not the second category, which pertains to the method or manner of selecting suitable candidates. By introducing this qualifying criterion after the fact, KPCL has effectively changed the rules of the

game," the court said. Justice Sachin Shankar Magadam passed the order recently while allowing the petition filed by Geetha Chavan from Vijayapura district as her candidature was rejected on the ground that she scored 36 marks in the Kannada language test as against a minimum of 50 marks, which was fixed after conducting the examination which is contrary to the regulations Karnataka Power Corporation Limited Service (Cadre, Recruitment, Probation, Promotion and Seniority) Rules, 1988.



Why China has made new units in Aksai Chin

China has just announced the creation of two new counties in Xinjiang: He'an and Hekang. These counties will cover the entire Aksai Chin plateau, including the 38,000 square km area claimed by India. Hongliu (Dahongliutan) is being announced as the capital of He'an and Xeyidula (Shahidullah) of Hekang. On December 27, 2024, Xinhua reported that the decision to create two new counties out of Hotan (Khotan) and Pishan counties had been approved by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council. The move comes after the Indian and Chinese troops completed the disengagement process along the LAC on October 28, 2024. The reason for Khotan's division is not clear. Gaustana or Godaniya, which translates to 'land of the cows' in Sanskrit, is Hotan's original name. It was called Ling-yul by the Ladakhis and Yu-ten by the Chinese. Before the Chinese arrived here in the ninth and tenth centuries, Khotan was an important point on the Silk Road, with a flourishing Indian culture. It was the centre of the ancient Buddhist Saka Kingdom. Khotan was ruled by Mirza Abu Bakr Dughlat before Gazi Sultan Syed Khan established the Yarkand Khanate in 1510. Khotan became a county in 1913 after the collapse of the Qing Empire. In 1919, the Karakax/Moyu county was separated from Khotan. In 1933, Muhammad Amin Bughra, a local Amir, declared Khotan an Emirate. The People's Liberation Army entered Hotan on December 22, 1949. In 2013, a Muslim uprising in Hanerik resulted in the death of hundreds of people. The greater part of Aksai Chin, which includes the picturesque Aksai Chin Lake or Amtogor Tso, will be included in the new He'an county, with Hongliu as its capital. Southeast of the Lingzi-Thang plains is Surigh Yilganing Kol, also called Salikyaili Genzhi Tso, from where Indian nomads collected salt until the 1950s to trade with other areas. India's claims line encompasses the strategically crucial Tianshuihai, which is also called by Ladakhis as the Thalda Basin or Maphothang. Tianshuihai is situated east of the Lakh-Zang range and northwest of the Aksai Chin Lake, which separates the Aksai Chin plateau from the Lingzi-Thang plains in the south and the Kunlun plains in the north. The 1962 clash between India and China took place in these locations. Tianshuihai and Tianwendian are major military sites in the PLA area, which is traversed by China's G315 and G219 highways.

The LAC is situated near Hongliu town, which is also called Dahongliutan. The place was earlier a barren stop for trucks travelling on the G219 highway. The area has become a hot spot for rare metal mining due to the abundant resources of lithium, rubidium, beryllium, tantalum and niobium. The Chinese have been developing infrastructure to make use of the abundant pegmatite resource in Dahongliutan, which is believed to have more than 2 million tonnes of lithium. It's possible that Hongliu's new administrative town is being constructed to promote mining. There are almost no villages in the region. It is inevitable that Aksai Chin, which is uninhabited, will eventually be subjected to a colonising mission. With large-scale investments by China in infrastructure and mining, Han migrants could enter the area claimed by India. China is possibly aiming to turn this deserted and prone-to-war frontier area into an economic outpost by connecting it to the global network as part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

It appears that the Hekang county, with Xeyidula (Shahidullah) as its capital, is being created from the current Pishan/Guma county. From here, the Karakash (Black Jade) river flows north into Khotan and becomes closer to Karakoram. Shahidulla in the Karakash Valley was a vital point of entry and location for the British, Russian, Chinese and Kashmiri empires during the Great Game. The Hindu Tash region in the Kunlun range was the extent of India's dominance at that time. Sumgal (meaning "three fords" in Ladakhi), which used to be the main route between Karakash and Khotan, is located between the Hindu-Tash mountain and the Aksai Chin plains.

Women defence officers are not cosmetic appendages

Now the real battle for women officers is to be prepared for gender-neutral norms, where they will be called on to deliver equal performance in all aspects of military service

When the annals are compiled of how women entered the forbidding portals of the Indian armed forces, at first hesitantly, then with more confidence when they found that the judiciary was prepared to call the system's bluff, the names of a handful of courageous women will be right up there. Smartly dressed women leading parades at Rajpath, flying aircraft or serving in militancy-infested areas are seen as India's pride. They are frequently brought out on display during ceremonial occasions as evidence that women do have an equal opportunity of employment as enshrined under the Constitution.

Few, however, know of the odds they have battled to reach there. They have battled gender discrimination, patriarchy, prejudice, stereotypes and humiliation only because, as an honourable judge notes, "they were women."

The recent controversy over a leaked letter by a Corps Commander to his superior officer, the Eastern Army Commander, that contained adverse comments about the performance of eight women commanding officers under him give us a rude insight into what the Army's top brass really thinks about having women working alongside them in command and other assignments. The worthy general did not feel the need to do a similar evaluation of the 40-odd male commanding officers in his command. Be that as it may, the women corps will probably dismiss the general's slights with a wry smile because it is just one among the many hurdles they have overcome. The trajectory of women's participation in the armed forces has been charted in an anthology, appropriately titled 'In Her Defence'. It tells the story through essays and commentaries by jurists and academics. Edited by military lawyer Navdeep Singh and Shivani Dasmahapatra, it also busts several myths or 'urban legends', as advocates like to call the falsehoods that have grown around the issue. Chief among the falsehoods is that women have been clamouring for entry into frontline combat arms like the infantry or the armoured corps — areas that are barred for them as a matter of policy.

They have never done so. In fact, even the Supreme Court, which has pushed for gender parity in the armed forces, has desisted from interfering in the government's decision to keep women away from combat arms because "it was 'conscious of the limitations of security and policy.' So, what were the

fight about? They began with something as basic as a permanent commission. A government notification of January 30, 1992 first made women eligible to become officers in some cadres, like the Army Postal Service, the Judge Advocate General's Department (JAG), the Army Education Corps (AEC) and some branches of the Army Ordnance and Army Service Corps. A year later, they began to be inducted into the Signals and Intelligence Corps as well as the Corps of Engineers, the Electrical and Mechanical Engineering and the Regiment of Artillery.

They were initially commissioned for five years and later, their service was extended to 14 years under the Women Special Entry Scheme, a Short Service



Commission (SSC) scheme. There is an SSC scheme for male officers, too, and some of them get permanent commission (PC), depending on their performance. In 2003, an advocate, Babita Puniya, through a public interest litigation (PIL) in the Delhi High Court, demanded that women appointed as SSC officers should be considered for PC, like their male colleagues. During the PIL's pendency, the government announced PC prospectively to women officers in only the JAG and AEC. Those commissioned earlier were excluded. Two serving officers, Major Leena Gaurav and Major Sandhya Yadav, joined the battle. The landscape of gender equality within the armed forces was about to change. In a landmark judgement, on March 12, 2010, the Delhi High Court, while upholding the women's contention, held that if women officers were deprived of PC while male officers were granted the opportunity for the same, it would be a violation of the principle of equality protected by the Constitution. The judgement was challenged before the SC by the Central government, but the SC did not

stay its operation. The government dug in its heels for nine years, till February 2019, when it granted PC to SSC women officers in eight branches, with the caveat that they will be employed only in "staff appointments".

Another obstacle still lurked around the corner.

The SC found that the government's proposal to grant PC to women officers envisaged only those who had been in service for less than 14 years. Was it the women's fault that they had finished serving for 14 years and had to go home, while the government resisted implementing the Delhi High Court's 2010 order to grant them PC? The SC again cracked the whip and said that it was the Union government's failure to comply with the high court order, which had not been stayed by the SC. This forced the reluctant government to give PC to all women who had been employed as SSC officers and also opened the doors for them to assume command assignments.

But, hold on to the slow claps.

Around the same time, 17 SSC women officers of the Navy were also fighting it out for PC. One of the objections of the government before the courts was that as officers are required to serve on ships, it could not permit women to get PC because "there is an absence of toilet facilities for women" on board Naval ships!

Now that gender parity has been achieved, the real battle for women officers is to be prepared for gender-neutral norms, where they will be called on to deliver equal performance in all aspects of military service. For all these years, women officers have largely been seen as cosmetic appendages, handled with kid gloves and kept away from hard tasks, contributing to much angst among the male colleagues. Lt Col Anila Khatri pointed out recently how she was feted for doing 89 para jumps while male officers with more than 3,000 jumps found no mention. If viewed objectively, beyond the prism of women's rights, Lt Gen Rajeev Puri — whose letter created the controversy — was pointing out just that. He has recommended that there should be a policy on gender neutrality that covers postings and selections. "Gender neutrality lays emphasis on equality in dealing and progression irrespective of gender," he said in his letter.

Politicising Vcs

Politicising Vcs



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.

Alcohol intake entwined with cancer risk

It's critical to guard against industry lobbies that try to stall health-related regulations

The new year has begun with a new health warning. America's Surgeon General Vivek Murthy has released an advisory, pointing to a direct link between alcohol consumption and increased cancer risk. Alcohol consumption is the third leading preventable cause of cancer in the US. Alcohol, the advisory says, increases risk for at least seven types of cancer (breast, colorectum, esophagus, liver, oral cavity, throat and voice box), regardless of the type of alcohol consumed. As much as 16.4 per cent of the breast cancer cases in the US are attributable to alcohol consumption. For certain cancers, such as breast, mouth and throat, the advisory warns that "the risk of developing cancer may start to increase around one or fewer drinks per day". Even small amounts of alcohol can contribute to chronic conditions like liver cirrhosis. An individual's risk of developing cancer due to alcohol consumption, however, depends on several biological, environmental and social factors. The advisory follows the 2023 statement of the World Health Organisation (WHO) on the risks and harms associated with drinking alcohol, based on a systematic evaluation of scientific evidence. Alcohol is responsible for a substantial disease burden directly, and accounts for a sizeable number of alcohol-related road accidents. The WHO statement published in The Lancet Public Health concluded, "When it comes to alcohol consumption, there is no safe amount that does not affect health."

Back in the 1980s, the International Agency for Research on Cancer classified alcohol as a 'Group I carcinogen'. This is the highest-risk category of cancer-causing substances that includes tobacco, radiation and asbestos. Ethanol causes cancer

through biological mechanisms as it breaks down in the body. Therefore, any beverage containing alcohol (be it beer, wine or whiskey) poses a health risk. In its statement, the WHO pointed out that the risk increases substantially with the amount of alcohol going up. This evidence busts the myth that some alcoholic drinks, particularly red wine, are beneficial for health if consumed in moderation. For decades, the alcohol industry has propped up cardiologists to promote the idea that wine in moderation is good for the heart's health without any credible scientific study to back such claims. On the other hand, data from the WHO's European Region shows that half of all alcohol-attributable cancers are caused by what is generally considered 'light' and 'moderate' consumption like a bottle of wine or two bottles of beer per week. As per the WHO, there are no studies that demonstrate beneficial effects of light and moderate drinking on heart disease or diabetes or studies that outweigh the cancer risk associated with such levels of consumption. Carina Ferreira-Borges, an expert on alcohol and illicit drugs at the WHO, has said, "The only thing that we can say for sure is that the more you drink, the more harmful it is. In other words, the less you drink, the safer it is." When there is scientific evidence about the ill effects of a commonly produced and consumed commodity that also yields substantial revenue for governments, what are the available options to reduce the harm? The WHO's statement on alcohol distils available scientific evidence and also presents policy options available to governments. It is for the governments to act. One of the most obvious options to reduce alcohol consumption is to make people aware of the potential

harm through warning labels on alcohol bottles. This is among the measures Murthy has suggested for the US and what some European countries are planning to do. Murthy has also called for a reassessment of the guideline limits for alcohol consumption to account for cancer risk.



The warning labels under consideration by various countries are of many types — with messages against general harm to health, harms of excessive use and abuse and those for specific groups (underage people, pregnant women, etc.). For instance, the warning Ireland plans to introduce in 2026 says, "Drinking alcohol causes liver cancer". In 2019, India mandated more generic warnings that say "Consumption of alcohol is injurious to health" for hard liquor and "Be safe, don't drink and drive" for low-alcohol beverages. Apart from warning labels, restrictions on alcohol marketing are in place in India. Alcohol advertising is banned in newspapers, radio and television, though surrogate advertising continues in many ways, taking advantage of loopholes in advertising regulations. In recent years,

surreptitious advertising through social media and digital platforms is posing new challenges. Like in the case of warnings on tobacco labels, industry and pro-industry groups argue that health warning labels are of little use in reducing consumption. But available evidence — as reported in a recent review published in The Lancet — points out that warning labels on alcohol products are useful in many ways. They can enhance awareness of alcohol-related harms, contribute to the denormalisation of alcohol use and help people make informed decisions, thereby promoting public health. The effectiveness of health labels depends on their design and content. At present, there is no standardisation of health warning labels and the content is very general, which may not help people make informed decisions. India has implemented regulations on warning labels on alcohol products for about five years now. We are yet to know how effective this exercise has been. We need continuous research on the design and content of warning messages, and consumer feedback on the same. Unlike tobacco products, where health warnings occupy a good part of the packaging and are more graphic, warnings on liquor bottles occupy tiny space and are vague. Along with health warnings, additional measures like regulation of alcohol sale on highways, curbing sale to underage consumers and drunken driving need to be implemented more stringently. It is critical to guard against industry lobbies that are constantly trying to stall health-related and other regulations in India. We need more champions of public health like Murthy to reduce the healthcare burden due to alcohol. Remember, the first warning on tobacco's link with cancer, too, came from a Surgeon General in 1964.

Your job can indicate who You'll marry

Love and work — who knew the two were so intimately connected? Based on new research by Bloomberg Business, it turns out that your job could help you predict who you'll end up marrying. By scanning US Census Bureau data covering 3.5 million households, Bloomberg compiled this cool interactive chart that shows how people are pairing up by profession.

Here are the most common matchups for 23 jobs:

Elementary- and middle-school teachers

Female elementary-school teachers are most likely to marry male or female elementary- and middle-school teachers. Male elementary-school teachers are most likely to marry female elementary- and middle-school teachers or male education administrators.

Flight attendants

Female flight attendants are most likely to marry male managers or female flight attendants.

Male flight attendants are most likely to marry female flight attendants or male elementary- and middle-school teachers.

Physicians and surgeons

Female physicians and surgeons are most likely to marry male or female physicians and surgeons.

Male physicians and surgeons are most likely to marry female physicians and surgeons or male registered nurses.

Chefs and head cooks

Female chefs and head cooks are most likely to marry male chefs and head cooks, or female maids and housekeeping cleaners.

Male chefs and head cooks are most likely to marry female waitresses, or male chefs and head cooks.

Construction workers

Female construction workers are most likely to marry female construction workers.

Male construction workers are most likely to marry female maids and housekeeping cleaners or male business-operations specialists.

Secretaries and administrative assistants

Female secretaries and administrative assistants are most likely to marry male managers or female flight attendants.

Male secretaries and administrative assistants are most likely to marry male office and administrative-support supervisors.

Actors

Female actors are most likely to marry male actors or female designers.

Male actors are most likely to marry female actors or male TV, video, and motion-picture camera operators and



editors.

Lawyers and judges

Female lawyers and judges are most likely to marry male lawyers and judges or female computer workers.

Male lawyers and judges are most likely to marry female or male lawyers and judges.

CEOs

Female CEOs are most likely to marry male CEOs or female managers.

Male CEOs are most likely to marry female elementary- and middle-school teachers or male CEOs.

Maids and housekeeping cleaners

Female maids and housekeeping cleaners are most likely to marry male janitors and building cleaners or female chefs and head cooks.

Male maids and housekeeping cleaners are most likely to marry male waiters.

Registered nurses

Female registered nurses are most likely to marry male managers or female registered nurses.

Male registered nurses are most likely to

marry female or male registered nurses.

Truck drivers

Female truck drivers are most likely to marry female truck drivers.

Male truck drivers are most likely to marry female secretaries and administrative assistants or male managers.

Police officers

Female police officers are most likely to marry male police officers or female office and administrative-support supervisors.

Male police officers are most likely to marry female or male elementary- and middle-school teachers.

Marketing and sales managers

Female marketing and sales managers are most likely to marry male managers or female insurance claims and policy-processing clerks.

Male marketing and sales managers are most likely to marry female elementary- and middle-school teachers or male business-operations specialists.

Customer-service representatives

Female customer-service representatives are most likely to marry male truck drivers

or female business-operations specialists.

Male customer-service representatives are most likely to marry female or male customer-service representatives.

Artists

Female artists are most likely to marry male or female artists.

Male artists are most likely to marry female elementary- and middle-school teachers or male counselors.

Civil engineers

Female civil engineers are most likely to marry female hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists.

Male civil engineers are most likely to marry female or male elementary- and middle-school teachers.

Computer and information-systems managers

Female computer and information-systems managers are most likely to marry female database administrators.

Male computer and information-systems managers are most likely to marry female

elementary- and middle-school teachers or male production workers.

Psychologists

Female psychologists are most likely to marry male or female psychologists.

Male psychologists are most likely to marry female psychologists or male postsecondary teachers.

Musicians and singers

Female musicians and singers are most likely to marry male musicians and singers or female textile-machine operators.

Male musicians and singers are most likely to marry female musicians and singers or male retail supervisors.

Aircraft pilots and flight engineers

Female aircraft pilots and flight engineers are most likely to marry female registered nurses.

Male aircraft pilots and flight engineers are most likely to marry female elementary- and middle-school teachers or male human-resource workers.

Dancers and choreographers

Female dancers and choreographers are most likely to marry male welding, soldering, and brazing workers or female lawyers and judges.

Male dancers and choreographers are most likely to marry female dancers and choreographers or male secretaries and administrative assistants.

Unemployed people with no work experience in the last five years

Female unemployed people are most likely to marry male truck drivers or female licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses.

Male unemployed people are most likely to marry female unemployed people or male eligibility interviewers for government programs



Social mores limit women's Job choices

Misplaced societal moralities and a dominant patriarchal influence continue to force urban women to make stereotypical choices on their education as well as career. According to a gender report by leading recruitment consultant TeamLease, shared exclusively with TOI, the percentage of women being enrolled in higher education is greater than men at graduation level (arts, science, commerce and BE), but it is significantly lower in streams like B.Tech, BE and PhD.

With lesser proportion of women enrolling into technical, vocational and managerial education compared with men, the likelihood of them pursuing a worthwhile career in these fields gets diminished. On the other hand, the report states, rural women are entering the labour force in far larger numbers than urban women do. There is thus a sharper drop in labour force participation rate (LFPR) for urban women. The LFPR of

women in India is 25.5%, of which rural women constitute 30.02% and urban women, 15.44%. Rituparna Chakraborty, co-founder & senior VP, TeamLease, said: "While we are transforming, our society continues to be highly patronizing around the choices women make in their careers. Right from their young age they are conditioned to believe that only specific jobs are suitable for them, to believe that they need not work after marriage or after having children, notwithstanding the overall unfavourable ecosystem which strengthens the stereotypes." The demand for equal opportunity stems from this reality. "While in absolute terms there are more women in urban areas getting jobs, it's still poor relative to the number of women who are seeking

jobs vis-a-vis finding an employment," said Chakraborty.

Marital status is understood to be correlated with a decrease in workforce participation of urban women who cite marriage as a reason for taking breaks in career. "In the case of the rural women, marital status is much less a derailer as compared to the urban woman - as the need for financial security is more in case of a rural woman than an urban woman. It is only in cases where the urban woman's income exceeds the total cost of her enablers, that marital status becomes immaterial," said Saundarya Rajesh, founder-president, Avtar Career Creators & Flexi Careers India. Experts said the outdated societal attitude emphasizes gender roles and propagates bias. The TeamLease report said severe under-representation of women in the workforce in India is symptomatic of extreme inequality and archaic belief systems. However, the deficiency is not restricted to the sector level. As one digs further, one could go deep and wide and find the under-representation prevailing across functional domains and along hierarchies.

Co-working is the new corporate cool

Low rents, full facilities and flexible space is pushing away the conventional 'office' for city's entrepreneurs

Work with someone is getting a new flavour with this fad. Co-working, or using an office or other working environment by self-employed or working people for different employers, to share ideas and knowledge, is changing the way people function, across the globe. It's being hailed as the spotlight trend of 2016, and if you haven't tried it yet, here's more reason why you should. Pocket-friendly

The idea is a winner, alright! You're getting a formal work environment with a desk, chairs, use of a conference room, Wi-Fi, photocopy machine, printer and more, without really investing in an 'office' so to speak. The emergence of co-working spaces with low-cost memberships has become so appealing to small start-ups that a whole lot of entrepreneurs, consultants and others who want a flexible yet professional work environment are opting for this. Says Rhea Kulkarni, who decided to try this a few months ago, "I moved out of my old space as the rent was too high, and decided to co-work with a friend at Parel. It has brought a bunch of benefits like a clean working area, no need for rents and I have the flexibility to move out midway if things sour and I want to discontinue."

Adds another young entrepreneur Ritesh Sharma, who took his work of writing jingles and making web designs for corporates, into such a workspace. "For a startup like mine, I just needed a small area to work in, minus the hassle of spending on infrastructure. Here, I'm getting both ends — I have a focused environment and at times, its

also like an intellectual hub where we brainstorm with other co-workers over coffee," he grins.

Community driven

Like in all work-driven areas, the focus here are people. Says Preeti Dawane, co-director of a co-working space at Mount Mary, Bandra. "Entrepreneurs benefit from a community of like-minded folk and we have seen that there's a lot of bonding that happens, ideas spark off among strangers and it's a great feeling all around." Gargi Shah founder of such a space at Mulund had people working on everything from robotics to guitar sessions, apart from regular e-commerce and retail entrepreneurs. "I've been told people feel like they can live out of the space," she smiles. For Deepak Ratnani who started a 750 sq ft space in the suburbs, says, "There is a definite demand for this model and it's rising, especially among Gen Y; I guess the bottom line is the cost factor."

Key factors to its growth

- Economically viable
- No administrative hassles
- Brings about a new office lifestyle
- Advantages
- Fully air-conditioned
- Wi-Fi facility and other utilities
- Comfortable work desk/chairs
- Availability of conference rooms
- Recreation space



Delhi government faces flak for outsourcing recruitment amid Model Code of Conduct

The order, issued on Thursday, mandates the recruitment of 701 nursing and 762 paramedical staff through outsourcing, utilizing third-party agencies.

NEW DELHI. The Health and Family Welfare Department of the Delhi government has directed the recruitment of over 1,400 nurses and paramedical staff on an outsourced basis for its public hospitals, sparking controversy over alleged violations of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). The order, issued on Thursday, mandates the recruitment of 701 nursing and 762 paramedical staff through outsourcing, utilizing third-party agencies. This comes at a time when the MCC is in force in the city, prohibiting government departments from floating new tenders or awarding work orders without prior approval from the election authority. "...the MS/MD/HOD of the departments, including hospitals/medical institutions, are directed to fill the vacant posts of nursing and paramedical staff on an outsourced basis from any Central/State PSUs



such as ICSIL, NICS, BECIL, HLL, etc., by limited tender," the order copy accessed by this newspaper read. However, officials from the Chief Electoral Office, Delhi, flagged the move as a potential breach, citing the absence of any representation from the screening body before the order was passed.

The All India Government Nurses Federation (AIGNF) has strongly opposed the decision, criticising the government's preference for outsourcing critical healthcare positions. Anita Panwar, President of AIGNF, called the practice "dubious" and expressed concern over its long-term implications. "The government's decision to outsource nursing roles undermines the quality of healthcare and creates instability in the workforce. Outsourcing lower-level positions disrupts the feeder cadre necessary for promoting skilled staff to higher posts, which is vital for the smooth functioning of hospitals," Panwar said. She further pointed out that the practice violates a 2016 policy by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, which prohibits outsourcing of nurses in hospital setups. "These outsourced nursing officers may lack essential skills, compromising patient care standards. The Delhi government is obligated to adhere to central rules on service matters," she added.

JNU fines 2 students Rs 1.79 lakh for drinking, using hookah, allowing outsiders

New Delhi. Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has penalised two hostel students for allegedly allowing outsiders into their rooms, consuming alcohol, and using hookah, among other violations -- the combined fines amounting to Rs 1.79 lakh. The students have been asked to deposit the fines within five days, as per official notices issued to them on January 8.

The first notice read, "12 unknown individuals were found in your room consuming alcohol and creating a disturbance on the hostel premises in your absence. This behaviour constitutes a serious violation of hostel rules."

A fine of Rs 80,000 has been imposed on the student, including Rs 60,000 for unauthorised entry of outsiders, Rs 2,000 for drinking, Rs 6,000 for possessing an induction stove and heater, Rs 2,000 for hookah use, and Rs 10,000 for aggressive behaviour, interference in official matters and intimidation of hostel staff. The second notice alleges that on December 22 last year and January 5, several outsiders were present in another



student's room, where alcohol was consumed. It further claims, "The Warden Committee and security personnel attempted to open your room at that time, but you did not open the door."

The student was fined Rs 99,000 -- Rs 85,000 for allowing unauthorised individuals on two occasions, Rs 2,000 for drinking, Rs 2,000 for possession of a hookah, and Rs 10,000 for aggressive and disruptive behaviour. Both notices caution the students that failure to pay the fines within the stipulated time could result in further disciplinary action, including eviction from the hostel.

"Any future complaints or violations will result in your immediate eviction from the hostel without prior notice," the notices warn. Former president of Sutlej Hostel, Kunal Kumar, criticised the fines, calling them an act of extortion.

"In a university where the semester fee is on Rs 200, students are being fined amounts ranging from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1.5 lakh. These fines are being imposed on those who do not support the ABVP," he alleged. No immediate reaction was available from the hostel warden on the matter.

Man Dies By Suicide In Ghaziabad, Wife Kills Herself In Delhi Upon Learning

New Delhi. A man in Ghaziabad died by suicide. His wife, in Delhi following a fight with him, heard the news of her husband's death, and killed herself, police said. The couple were parents to a one-year-old girl. The incidents involve Vijay Pratap Chauhan, 32, and his wife Shivani, 28, who resided in the Loni Border area of Ghaziabad. According to the police, the couple had a history of marital discord.



Vijay and Shivani, who lived in Jawahar Nagar's G Block in Ghaziabad, had a heated argument Friday evening. Following the dispute, Shivani left their home and travelled to northeast Delhi. Vijay reportedly made a call to Shivani after she left, during which he allegedly told her that she would never see him again. Shortly after, Vijay's aunt, Meera, visited his home and discovered his body. He had hanged himself inside the house. She immediately informed Shivani of the incident. Upon hearing the news, Shivani took her own life by hanging herself from an electric pole near the Loni roundabout in northeast Delhi, approximately 8 kilometres from their residence.

Ghaziabad Police and Delhi Police are conducting parallel investigations into the incident. Both the bodies were sent for post-mortem examination. No suicide notes were recovered at either scene. A forensic team examined both locations. Police confirmed that there were no external injuries on Shivani's body apart from the marks consistent with hanging.

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Delhi polls: Dip in political clout, yet Jat votes matter

NEW DELHI. As the Delhi assembly polls draw closer, AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal has thrown down the gauntlet, accusing the BJP of betraying the Jat community for the past decade. Kejriwal's fiery allegations have sparked a political debate, underlining the significance of the Jat vote in the upcoming elections. Kejriwal claims that Jats in Delhi have been systematically denied reservations in central government institutions, unlike their counterparts in Rajasthan. He accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah of only remembering the Jat community during election season, sidelining their needs at other times. This newspaper spoke to several Jat leaders across the city to understand the community's deeper dynamics. Rajender Panwar, Jat Mahasabha chief, underscored the importance of the Jat vote. "Out of Delhi's 364 villages, 225 are Jat-majority. This sizeable voter base is not only influential but crucial for both the AAP and BJP in the upcoming electoral battle," Panwar said.

He further elaborated on the shifting dynamics, saying, "In the 2020 elections, AAP successfully increased its share of Jat votes compared to 2015. This shift was significant, as the Jat community's support had traditionally leaned towards Congress," he said. This shift has made the Jat vote a coveted asset for both parties. The stakes are particularly high with key figures like Kailash Gehlot, a former AAP leader and a notable Jat, now contesting under the BJP banner. His switch has added complexity to the electoral landscape.

Parvesh Verma, the BJP candidate from New Delhi, who also belongs to the Jat community, adds another layer to this political drama. His candidacy sets up a direct contest with Kejriwal, further intensifying the battle for Jat's support.

"We have been advocating for the development of rural villages through various protests over the past two and a half years, presenting our demands to the AAP government, but there is no progress," said Surender Solanki, chief of the Palam Khap. One of their key demands includes securing reservations for Jats in the capital. "Recently, we organised a Mahapanchayat at Jantar Mantar to express our frustration over the government's perceived neglect of rural issues, such as inadequate infrastructure, poor facilities, and lack of representation. We even issued a 15-day ultimatum for the government to address these concerns, yet nothing has changed," Solanki said.

Delhi Reported A Dip In Most Crimes In 2024, Except These...

New Delhi. Delhi recorded a slight decline in crimes including murder, robbery, rape, and molestation, last year as compared to 2023, data shared by the Delhi Police said.

According to the data, a total of 504 cases of murder were reported in the national capital - down from 506 in 2023. Incidents of robbery also witnessed a decline from 1,654 to 1,510 in 2024. There were a total of 33 incidents of riots reported in Delhi - at least 10 down from last to last year. Cases of crimes against women also witnessed a sharp decline last year. A total of 2,076 incidents of rape were reported in Delhi as compared to the previous year's 2,141 cases, 2,037 cases of molestation - at least 308 down from 2023, and 362 cases of eve-teasing were reported in 2024 compared to 281 in 2023, the data said. 29 incidents of dacoity were witnessed - the same as the previous



year.

However, there was a sharp rise in some incidents such as fatal accidents and burglary. While a total of 1,504 fatal accidents were reported last year - as compared to 1,432 from 2023, at least 29,011 cases of burglary were witnessed - over 400 cases more from the previous year.

Several incidents of gambling were reported in Delhi last year (3,556

incidents in 2024). Apart from these, officials said that cases related to the Excise Act saw a sharp rise last year. At least 6,443 cases were reported as compared to 5,951 in 2023. This comes as many Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders, including former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, were arrested in the excise policy cases.

Over 100 criminals arrested in 2024: Delhi Police

The Delhi Police arrested a total of 114 hardened criminals in 2024, including 40 parole jumpers and wanted offenders each. The other arrested criminals included 18 interim bail jumpers, nine proclaimed offenders, four carrying a reward on their head, and three non-bailable warrant evaders, officials said. Additionally, six criminals were on the run for over 10 years, while three had evaded arrest for eight years.

Delhi polls: Atishi dares BJP to name CM face, claims Bidhuri frontrunner

NEW DELHI. Senior AAP leader and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi on Friday challenged the BJP to reveal its chief ministerial candidate, stating that the BJP's likely choice is Ramesh Bidhuri. She urged Delhiites to decide whether they want a progressive, professional leader or someone whose reputation is built on "offensive behaviour".

"Who is the chief ministerial candidate of the BJP? If you go to any street, neighborhood, colony, or park in Delhi, this is the topic of discussion," the Delhi CM said in a press conference. She further said her party has already declared its chief ministerial face, and people know that if they vote for the AAP, Arvind Kejriwal will become the chief minister of Delhi. She claimed that BJP's core committee has decided to

make Ramesh Bidhuri their chief ministerial candidate, and soon an announcement could be made in this regard. Recently, the BJP MP sparked a massive controversy for remarks on Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi and Atishi's surname and background.

"So, if the people of Delhi press the lotus button, they will get Ramesh Bidhuri as their chief minister... in BJP, the person who uses the most indecent language and the most abuses progresses the fastest," she said.

Ramesh Bidhuri used abusive language in Parliament, words so indecent that no civilised person in this country would use them.

He abuses even his own party members. Everyone knows how he abused and physically assaulted Purvanchali leaders of his party, chasing them out

onto the streets," the 43-year-old CM added.

"And now, as a reward for his abusive behavior, his party is about to declare him as their chief ministerial face. Reliable sources say that the decision was finalised in today's CEC meeting and will be confirmed at the party's Parliamentary Board meeting this evening," she revealed.

Comparing Kejriwal and Bidhuri, the Chief Minister said, "The people of Delhi now have two options. On one side, there is Arvind Kejriwal, an IIT Kharagpur graduate, engineer, former IRS officer, and income tax commissioner... On the other side, there is Ramesh Bidhuri, who uses abusive language. The contrast is clear: the educated leader Arvind Kejriwal versus the abusive leader Ramesh Bidhuri."

Delhi polls: Yadav says Congress men 'harassed', seeks help from election office

NEW DELHI. Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav submitted a memorandum to the chief electoral officer (CEO) on Friday, seeking that written instructions be issued to the police to act in an unbiased manner during the electoral process and maintain discipline on polling day.

In his letter to the CEO, Yadav highlighted several issues related to the election process, focusing particularly on the lack of clear guidelines for local police regarding the display of party materials outside polling stations. He pointed out that during previous elections, Congress workers were often "harassed" by the police under the guise of enforcing the Model Code of Conduct, which he argued undermines democratic practices. The Delhi Congress chief also claimed that in the last elections that due to heavy turnout in many constituencies, long queues for casting votes due to poor management and interruption in voting for hours in casting votes were witnessed, which resulted into the harassment not only for voters but also to the elections machinery including political party workers till late night.

How toilets at home, cash in hand and literacy added 1.8 crore women voters

New Delhi. Small changes in everyday lives can provide a big boost to democracy. Implementation of women-centric social welfare schemes of sanitation, Mudra loans, literacy and housing, have helped crores of women to come out and vote in India, according to a new study. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections saw an additional 1.8 crore women voters compared to 2019, largely due to the rollout of women-focused welfare programmes, according to a report by SBI Research. The study used data from the Election Commission of India. A 1% rise in literacy contributed 45 lakh more female voters, while house ownership, particularly under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, added 20 lakh women to the voter turnout.

"We empirically establish that states have witnessed an incremental women voter turnout of 18 million (1.8 crore) in 2024 over 2019 primarily because of implementation of women-centric schemes, at least one or more, that also includes income transfer schemes,

literacy, employment like Mudra Yojana, house ownership under PMAY, sanitation are significant contributing factors for increased women voting. Electricity and improved drinking water are also emerging as contributors," the SBI report, released on January 9, noted. The SBI Research compared states that implemented women-centric schemes after 2019 with those that did not. It found a significant increase in female voter turnout in the states with such initiatives. On average, female voter turnout grew by 7.8 lakh in each of the 19 states that implemented the schemes, contributing to a total increase of 1.5 crore women voters. States that did not implement the schemes saw an average increase of just 2.5 lakh voters.

HOW WOMEN WELFARE SCHEMES



TRANSLATED INTO VOTER NUMBERSURGE

A 1% increase in literacy rate led to a 25% rise in female voter turnout, suggesting that of the 1.8 crore incremental female voters between the 2024 and 2019 general elections, approximately 45 lakh can be attributed to improvements in literacy. House ownership has also been linked to an increase of around 20 lakh

female voters, with 74% of the houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana being owned by women, either solely or jointly. Sanitation schemes have contributed to around 21 lakh more female voters in the 2024 elections, showing a crucial role in shaping socio-political priorities.

While electricity access and improved drinking water accessibility show a positive impact on female voter turnout, their effects are not statistically significant, the report noted. Despite the encouraging trends, the SBI Research report warned against unchecked expansion of welfare schemes. It recommended limiting welfare spending to 1% of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). Additionally, it also urged the Election Commission to implement a comprehensive absentee voting system for people who were unable to vote.

First jobs for Five Steps



Think positive

When completing several career-related education Kwashchans seem to come to mind. The first question is what happens to the job to be a Choose which company or sector. Many times we also take a Choose sector, but as soon as someone tells you that it has now been reduced salary package, our confidence is loose. We begin to explore space in the second field. Avoid such Kanfugn. Take the decision, stick to it.

Manage Your Time

Continue to strengthen their skills with job seekers. Future most of their time on social networking sites take over active youth. But the advantage of these networking sites can be used to make. Through these sites, they always land - abroad remain in contact with those who are Related to the field in which they want to make a career. Resumes on job sites by sending home several options you can find jobs.

Start from SMEs

For a fresher job is too difficult. Experience will have to start from somewhere. So what is bad from the beginning small space. Only get to learn something. Poketmni will also awaken interest for the work. But it does not last. Learn how to run a small kayak, would be perfect if the big boats can easily get to run. Little - Little Knowledge Experience in the field will be so strong that large companies will soon get the chance. Many careers are people who started small companies and large companies formed in good position.

Keep an eye on Target

Education for admission time period, we will fix that will bring at least how many per cent marks. Lets do the same target for creating jobs. Mind your favorite sector keep a very big company. Once the job has to decide of course. Always keep a few days later the Czech company's profile. The company's new? Who is the founder and chairman, etc. Knowledge is always necessary. Information on the sites of the companies also have jobs. Please apply as soon as jobs left.

Networking Is Must

Got to find jobs or jobs are to go forward, all personal relations with the ability to come to work. Social media networking is the best. You can also increase their contact its Use. Related to the field more and more people to make contact, to connect with Experienced seniors. Good relations became so maybe they Kwarryj Related to Your Field with Solv tell you about some better options. We can learn a lot from seniors. They always maintain contact.

Expert Talk

Goyal Brothers Publications, AGM - HRD Arun Kumar Sehgal believes that the first job will go to any company, so there will not be a matter of experience. Graduation will be asked about the basics of the subject or industry. Youth in search of jobs are the first to have the command on the first subjects.

JS Malik Shahi Exports recommend that job seekers HR head before Czech companies make profiles. Take Basic knowledge of the industry and try to make to people networking.

Design Your Career Innovation



Toy Making Careers for creatives

Toys are lovely children. There are thousands of toys Varaitij Modern Age. These children are so amused, you can opt to teach them many things. Play School Ira Sirkelne not only for today but also for studies needed Toys. That is a huge market of toys in the country and the world. According to experts in the toy industry's annual growth rate of 10 to 15 percent. Indian toy market is increasing rapidly.

Bright Career

Toys for children to design the creative and fun, you can select a career in this field. Toys designing the new trend in



ranging from 4-6 months half-year diploma courses are available. You can of course according to your interest. Plastics and metals in these courses with a variety of toy design is taught.

Skills

Besides creativity, drawing, sketching, etc., be proficient in computer knowledge is also essential. Toys designed for children, so the used items and make them take care of the safety of chemicals is necessary.

Institutes

- National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad
- National Institute of Design and Development, Vikas Marg, Delhi
- Toy Making Technology Institute, Salt Lake City, Kolkata

Expert byte

No area can only be developed when the professionals will be trained in large numbers. Young professionals from the toy making industry in India is growing rapidly. If something new passion, creativity, interest and ability to understand the mentality of kids, so

you can become successful. Ten years ago there were only opportunity in the foreign country, but today's opportunities in India's box. Today, many of the toy industry career options are in addition to NGOs.



this field is the Scientific Method. To pursue a career as a professional in this field today, many institutes are offering courses.

Courses

Designing Toy basic training and certificate programs

Education in the country - has come to change the writing Traditional Methods. Student or Teacher, the studies are focused more on the society, in terms of industry essential. Meta College, University of Delhi Concept was developed at the Cluster Innovation Centre CIC is a new face on the same concept.

Joint degree Concept

With Tech Innovative Cluster Innovation Centre, Mathematics and IT, BTech Humentij (Journalism, Historical Tourism, Arts and Design and counseling) and run courses such as Masters of Mathematics Education, Master of Mathematics Education at the University of meta studied under dual university program will. In addition to DU, Jamia Millia this particular course, students will be able to study with such top institutions. During this time, students will receive a joint degree. Obviously Inportes that it would be more than any other PG degree.

Czech Your Eligibiliti

For these courses, students individually to Eligibiliti. With such Innovative Mathematics and IT courses for B.Tech students must pass maths in 12th. Humentij

B.Tech candidates for the entry of any stream can take a while for the students to study for a Masters of Mathematics at the UG level Maths paper should be two.

Design Your Degree

CIC for the first time this system has been tried in the country in which the student has the opportunity to design their own degree. The CIC after admission in any college of DU for a student to study a specific subject may be. Additionally, the practical work-related activities will run in the CIC. The PG courses are being organized under the Meta University concept.

Society is used to study

Lest UG, PG students after the end of his studies, begin to think what is the point? So because of these programs, Blind Education, traffic, child labor, focusing on issues such as Slms and Mathematical their solution are found.

Solution of All Problems

Today we have around is no shortage of problems. But the question is that how it is resolved. Problems can be solved Cluster Innovation Centre.



Indian Economy Likely To Be 'A Little Weaker' In 2025: IMF MD

NEW DELHI. The Indian economy is expected to be "a little weaker" in 2025 despite steady global growth, IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has said. Georgieva also said she expects quite a lot of uncertainty in the world this year mainly around the trade policy of the US. In her annual media roundtable with a group of reporters on Friday, she said global growth is expected to be steady in 2025, but with regional divergence. Georgieva said she expects the Indian economy to be a little weaker in 2025. However, she did not explain it any further. The World Economy Outlook update week will have more details about it.

"The US is doing quite a bit better than we expected before, the EU is somewhat stalling, (and) India a little weaker," she said. Brazil was facing somewhat higher inflation, she said. In China, the world's second-largest economy, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was seeing deflationary pressure and ongoing challenges with domestic demand, she said.

"Low-income countries, despite all the efforts they are making, are in a position when any new shock can affect them quite negatively," Georgieva said. "What we expect in 2025 is to have quite a lot of uncertainty, especially in terms of economic policies. Not surprisingly, given the size and role of the US economy, there is keen interest globally in the policy directions of the incoming administration, in particular on tariffs, taxes, deregulation and government efficiency," Georgieva said.

Factory output growth hits 6-month high of 5.2% in November: Govt data

NEW DELHI. India's factory output, as measured by the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), rose to a six-month high of 5.2 per cent in November from 3.7 per cent in October, mainly due to a favourable base effect along with a pickup in manufacturing, capital goods, and consumer durables.

It had grown by 2.5 per cent in November 2023. Cumulatively so far in the financial year 2024-25, industrial growth has been recorded at 4.1 per cent during April-November as against 6.5 per cent in the year-ago period. Manufacturing, which accounts for 77.6 per cent of the weight of the IIP, surged to an eight-month high of 5.8 per cent in November from 4.4 per cent in October and 1.3 per cent in November 2023 primarily due to a pickup amid the festive season. "Quite clearly the needle appears to have turned during the festive season which is a good sign. The manufacturing sector in particular has fared well with growth of 5.8 per cent over 1.3 per cent last year. Besides the low base effect, there has been a revival of both capital goods and consumer durable goods," Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda said.

Mining output picked pace to 1.9 per cent in November from 0.9 per cent in October even though it was lower than 7.0 per cent growth in the year-ago period. Electricity output grew by 4.4 per cent in November from 2.0 per cent in October. It had grown by 5.8 per cent in the year-ago period.

On the basis of use-base classification, the primary goods output grew by 2.7 per cent in November as against 2.5 per cent in October and 8.4 per cent in the year-ago period. Capital goods segment, a key indicator of the investment sentiment, grew 9.0 per cent in November as against 3.1 per cent growth in October and a contraction of 1.1 per cent in the year-ago period.

Private insurers show 239% jump in motor commission payouts to Rs 16,578 crore

NEW DELHI. Despite concerns raised by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), private sector general insurers reported a 239 per cent jump in commission expenses in the motor insurance segment in fiscal ended March 2024. Interestingly, private insurers lagged behind public sector counterparts with a low claims ratio. Private insurers shelled out a whopping `16,578 crore to motor insurance service providers (MISPs) as commission during the fiscal ended March 2024 as against `4,890 crore in FY2023 while securing fresh businesses. Interestingly, public sector insurers kept away from the 'commission game' and reported only 31.59 per cent rise in commission expenses at `3,099 crore in FY2024 as against `2,355 crore in FY2023, according to the Annual Report of the IRDAI.

When it comes to incurred claims ratio, public sector insurers led with 99.57 per cent while private players were far behind with a figure of 73.30 per cent, according to the IRDAI report.

Incurred claim ratio refers to the total claim amount paid by the insurance company in ratio to the total premium amount collected in a financial year. For instance, if the incurred claim ratio of an insurance provider is 75 per cent, then it means that the insurer pays `75 towards claim payment for every `100 of premium collected and the remaining `25 is considered as profit for the insurance company.

Meanwhile, earlier this year, IRDAI had revealed its guidelines capping the commission for long-term motor insurance policies, aligning these policies with the standard one-year motor insurance policies. Insurers can now offer commissions within the expense of management for long-term policies. Total commission expenses incurred by private players for all categories, including health, motor, marine and fire, were at `26,235 crore in FY24 as against `10,192 crore. PSU players' expenses were at `7,359 crore (`6,340 crore). MISPs were reportedly charging high commissions of over 50 per cent for new private car insurance policies. What is significant is that high commission to MISPs will inflate the insurance premium being paid by the car buyers. If an MISP charge `45,000 insurance on a `12 lakh car, the same policy could cost just Rs 20,000 if taken from the market.

Investors lose Rs 6 lakh crore as midcap, smallcap stocks plunge

In the midcap segment, Hudco, IDBI Bank, Tata Elxsi, Paytm, and Oberoi Realty each declined over 5%. In small-caps, Aegis Logistics, Five-Star Business, IFCI, Itron, Navin Fluorine, and others lost ground.

NEW DELHI. Investors saw their wealth eroding by Rs 6 lakh crore on Friday as selling pressure brought down the domestic equity markets, with smallcap and midcap stocks bearing the brunt. Market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies dropped to Rs 431.16 lakh

crore from Rs 437 lakh crore in the previous session, a significant loss of Rs 6 lakh crore in a single trading session.

While benchmark indices BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty managed to end Friday with minor losses, supported by a more than 5% surge in index heavyweight TCS, broader indices like the Nifty Midcap 100 and Nifty Smallcap 100 tumbled up to 2.60%.

In the midcap segment, major decliners included Hudco, IDBI Bank, Tata Elxsi, Paytm, and Oberoi Realty, each shedding over 5%. In the smallcap pack, losers were Aegis Logistics, Five-Star Business, IFCI, Itron International, Navin Fluorine, Piramal Pharma, RailTel, and Zee Entertainment.

Year-to-date in CY25, the Nifty Midcap 100 and Smallcap 100 indices have



declined by 5% and 6%, respectively, reflecting a challenging period for these segments. The earnings of these entities are unable to match their premium valuation. The Sensex closed 241 points, or 0.31%, lower at 77,378.91, while the NSE Nifty50 ended the session at 23,431.50, down 95 points, or 0.40%.

"Markets continued its downward

trajectory as rupee scaling new lows due to strengthening dollar 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," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities.

Tapse added that with expensive valuations of Indian markets at large still a concern, investors would mostly resort to stock-specific activities. The selling pressure was so intense that 264 stocks, including blue chips such as Tata Steel, Coal India and Hero MotoCorp hit their 52-week lows during intraday trade. Of the 4,078 traded stocks, 3,239 closed down on Friday. Except for IT, all other sectors faced selling pressure, with pharma, banking, and realty leading the declines.

Low-base effect lifts industrial production to seven-month high

NEW DELHI. Industrial production increased to a seven-month high of 5.2% year-on-year in November 2024 as compared to 3.7% in October, thanks largely to a low-base effect.

In November 2023, industrial production has risen by a moderate 2.5%. Production by the mining sector in November grew at 1.9% y-o-y compared to 0.9% in October. The manufacturing sector posted output growth of 5.8% in November against 4.4% in October. Electricity generation grew by 4.4% year-on-year compared to 2% in October. Though sequentially, industrial production contracted by 1.2% in November as the effect of festive season waned earlier this year. Despite the November industrial

production growth largely attributed to low base effect, experts see this as a positive indicator. "November 2024 IIP adds to the recent spate of data that have



shown somewhat better growth, vis-a-vis Q2FY25. These include core industries, E-way bills, cement production, passenger vehicle sales among others, underscoring that Q2

indeed was a growth trough," says a QuantEconote.

The Second quarter GDP growth crashed to 5.4% resulting in the government moderating the FY25 GDP growth rate to 6.4%, which is lower than the RBI's 6.6% estimate. Economists at SBI have estimated an even lower GDP growth number for FY25 at 6.3%. As per rating agency Crisil, the festive season led to a rise in production of consumer discretionary products. Consumer durables saw strongest rise in index (13.1% in Nov) among major production sectors.

"The rise was seen across low and high value items including clothing, electronics, furniture and automobiles. Consumer non-durables grew much weaker (0.6%)," noted Dharmakirti Joshi, Chief Economist at Crisil.

Explained: Why Infosys has filed counter lawsuit against Cognizant

NEW DELHI. IT giant Infosys has filed a counterclaim against Cognizant in a Texas federal court, alleging anti-competitive practices and targeted poaching of its key executives, reported news agency Reuters. The Bengaluru-based firm accused its US-based rival of contractually restricting clients from awarding IT services to competitors and withholding software training, which Infosys claims hindered its ability to compete. The lawsuit comes after Cognizant's subsidiary TriZetto sued Infosys in August last year, accusing the Indian IT giant of misappropriating trade secrets related to its healthcare insurance software.

TriZetto's Facets and QNXT platforms, widely used by healthcare insurers to automate administrative tasks, were central to the initial legal dispute.

WHY HAS INFOSYS FILED COUNTER LAWSUIT?



In its counterclaim, Infosys accused Cognizant of deliberately recruiting its senior executives, including S Ravi Kumar, who was appointed CEO of Cognizant in 2023. Infosys claims this slowed the development of its competing software, Infosys Helix.

The counterclaim seeks three times the damages incurred, along with attorney fees, though the total amount has not been disclosed.

Responding to the allegations, Cognizant stated it would take firm action, maintaining that Infosys had improperly used its intellectual

property. "Cognizant encourages competition, but competitors cannot use Cognizant's IP to unfairly compete, as Infosys has done," the company said in a statement. Infosys declined to comment when approached by news agency Reuters. The dispute escalated with TriZetto's claim that Infosys had repackaged its proprietary data into an Infosys product under the guise of "Test Cases for Facets." Infosys countered by arguing that Cognizant's anti-competitive actions, including restrictive contract clauses, were impeding fair competition in the IT services sector. The case, filed in the US District Court for the Northern District of Texas, has drawn attention due to its potential implications for the competitive landscape of the global IT industry. With both companies accusing each other of misconduct, the legal battle is expected to intensify as it unfolds.

Union Budget 2025: High hopes as dark clouds loom over economy

NEW DELHI. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is set to present the Union Budget on February 1. While a slowdown in the ongoing financial year was anticipated, the steep downward revision in GDP growth for FY25 has surprised many. Concerns over economic growth have intensified, with India's GDP projected to slow sharply to 6.4% in FY25, according to the government's first advance estimates. This marks a significant drop from the 8.2% growth recorded in FY24 and represents the slowest expansion in four years.

INDIA INC SEEKS MAJOR REFORMS The corporate sector is pinning its hopes on the upcoming budget. Amit Modi, director of County Group, highlighted the real estate industry's pressing needs.

"One of the most long-standing demands is granting industry status to enable easier access to low-cost financing, which directly benefits consumers. Additionally, implementing single-window clearance is crucial for timely project completion and cost efficiency," Modi said. He further added, "Reintroducing GST input credits for residential real estate will stabilise costs. We also expect the home loan interest exemption to be increased to Rs 8 lakh annually to support first-time buyers, while Section 80C should either exclusively cover housing loan principal deductions or have its limit raised to Rs 5

lakh." **REAL ESTATE AWAITS RELIEF**

The real estate sector, grappling with challenges, anticipates significant measures to aid the middle class and the industry. Sachin Gawri, founder and CEO of RISE Infraventures, addressed the sector's expectations. "Real estate reflects India's economic progress, yet significant untapped potential remains. Budget 2025 should address high input costs by extending input tax credits and reducing GST on materials," Gawri said. He suggested revising the affordable housing definition to Rs 80 lakh, reintroducing a 100% tax holiday for such projects, and creating new land banks to boost supply.

"Combining home loan principal and interest deductions with a Rs 5 lakh cap would ease homeownership. Additionally, reducing the long-term capital gains holding period to two years, raising Section 54EC exemptions to Rs 1 crore, and expanding REIT benefits will spur investments," he added.

STARTUPS SEEK SUPPORT

The startup ecosystem, a critical driver of job creation, faces hurdles that need immediate attention. Sumit Singh, CEO and co-founder of DashLoc, outlined the



sector's expectations from the budget. "As the Union Budget 2025 approaches, it is crucial for the government to focus on bolstering the startup ecosystem by reducing regulatory complexities, which often hinder growth," Singh said.

He proposed establishing dedicated IT software parks to provide essential infrastructure and foster innovation. "Simplifying access to loans through banks and government-backed schemes will ensure startups can secure funding more efficiently, enabling them to scale and contribute significantly to the economy," Singh added.

HEALTHCARE DEMANDS INCREASED FOCUS

Although the world has largely overcome the Covid-19 pandemic, HMPV

infections have raised fresh alarms. The healthcare sector is calling for increased investments and policies to address systemic gaps. Dr Pravin Gupta, principal director and chief of neurology at Fortis Hospital, stressed the need for a roadmap. "We expect a clear plan to increase public healthcare spending. Strategic investments coupled with supportive policies can bridge the rural-urban divide and ensure access to critical care, especially in underserved regions," he said. Dr Ashish Chaudhari, managing director at Aakash Healthcare, echoed similar sentiments. "Reinstating the 150% deduction under Section 35AD of the Income Tax Act for new healthcare projects and providing tax holidays for a minimum of 15 years for new projects, alongside a 10-year tax relief for existing facilities, are key demands," Chaudhari said.

"These measures will ease the financial burden on healthcare providers and ensure cost savings are passed on to patients, making healthcare more affordable," he added. With stakeholders across sectors voicing their concerns and expectations, the Union Budget 2025 holds the promise of addressing critical issues and driving India's economic recovery.

Supreme Court relief to online gaming companies on GST issue

NEW DELHI. In a major relief to online gaming companies, the Supreme Court (SC) on Friday put a stay on GST show-cause notices amounting to Rs 1.12 lakh crore against these companies. The court has suspended all further proceedings under these notices until the matter is conclusively adjudicated. The court on Wednesday had agreed to hear the petition of these companies against GST department proceedings on notices served to them. The notices were issued against alleged tax evasion by these companies. However, the companies had moved courts against the notices disputing tax demand. As per lawyer Abhishek Rastogi, this stay not only provides immediate respite to gaming companies from potential coercive action but also safeguards the interests of revenue authorities. "By pausing proceedings, the



court ensures that the demands don't become time-barred during the course of litigation, preserving scope for legal clarity without procedural hindrance," says Rastogi, representing some of the gaming companies. These firms had moved court preempting recovery actions by tax authorities based on the notices. They argued that such actions could impact their operations, given contentious nature of the GST demands.

"The court's intervention addresses these apprehensions and ensures a fair hearing," says Rastogi. The court has directed the consolidation of cases involving a batch of gaming companies, with the next hearing scheduled for March 18, 2025. As per tax experts, this provides a timeline for stakeholders to present their arguments and for the judiciary to evaluate core issues in this controversy.

Shares of gaming companies Delta Corp and Nazara Tech surged by up to 15%. Delta Corp shares closed with 4.4% gain while Nazara shares ended with a fall of 3.7%. The dispute arose over taxability prior to the October 2023 amendment, which clarified that 28% GST would be levied on the threshold deposit amount.

NEWS BOX

Jannik Sinner doping case hearing fixed for April: CAS

New Delhi . World number one Jannik Sinner is set to face the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in a doping case hearing scheduled for April 16-17. The hearing will address the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) appeal, which seeks to impose a one-to-two-year ban on the Italian tennis star. Sinner, 23, tested positive for low levels of the anabolic steroid Clostebol in two separate tests conducted in March last year. In August, an independent tribunal cleared him after accepting his explanation of unintentional contamination. Sinner claimed the banned substance entered his system through a massage from a trainer who had used Clostebol to treat a finger injury. The tribunal ruled that the contamination was accidental, sparing him from suspension. Despite this, WADA filed an appeal with CAS in September, challenging the tribunal's decision. If the appeal is successful, Sinner could face a ban of up to two years. "No parties requested a public hearing, and it will be conducted behind closed doors," CAS said in a statement about the two-day hearing.

The CAS hearing will take place behind closed doors at its headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland. Neither party requested a public hearing. While CAS has not provided a specific timeline for its decision, a fast-track verdict may be requested to ensure the ruling is made before the French Open begins on May 25. The doping case has cast a shadow over Sinner's remarkable 2023 season, during which he won the U.S. Open. News of his positive test, initially kept confidential, was revealed after he successfully appealed against a provisional ban.

As Sinner prepares to defend his Australian Open title in Melbourne, he has faced scepticism from fellow players. Notably, Novak Djokovic has questioned whether Sinner received preferential treatment from tennis authorities.

In a statement on Friday, Sinner expressed frustration over the uncertainty surrounding the case, saying he remains focused on his preparation for the Australian Open but is eager for clarity. WADA maintains that the presence of Clostebol in Sinner's system constitutes a doping violation, regardless of the explanation. The agency is pushing for a suspension of at least one year to uphold the integrity of anti-doping efforts.

The outcome of the CAS hearing will be pivotal not only for Sinner's career but also for broader perceptions of fairness and consistency in tennis. If banned, Sinner risks missing key tournaments, including the French Open and Wimbledon. Conversely, a verdict in his favor would vindicate his claims of accidental contamination and allow him to continue his rise in the sport.

SA20: Durban Super Giants beat Pretoria Capitals by 2 runs in final ball thriller

New Delhi. After a terrific bowling performance in the opener of the SA20, the fans were in for some batting fireworks in the second game of the season. Playing at Kingsmead, Durban Super Giants and Pretoria Capitals produced a high-scoring final-ball thriller on Friday, January 10. Durban Super Giants held their nerve in a dramatic last-ball finish to defeat Pretoria Capitals by just two runs in an electrifying SA20 encounter at Kingsmead on Friday. Despite a blistering 89 from Rahmanullah Gurbaz and a strong 154-run opening stand with Will Jacks, the Capitals fell agonizingly short of DSG's 209/4, finishing their chase at 207/6.

Pretoria's chase got off to a flying start as Gurbaz and Jacks dominated the DSG bowlers, putting together a scorching 154-run opening partnership. Gurbaz was the standout, smashing 89 off just 43 balls,



including seven sixes. Jacks also played a key role with a quickfire 64 off 35 balls. The pair set the perfect platform for the Capitals, needing 56 runs off the final 47 balls with nine wickets still in hand.

However, the game took a dramatic turn in the 13th over when DSG spinner Noor Ahmad dismissed Gurbaz, breaking the partnership. The next over saw Chris Woakes dismiss Pretoria's skipper, Rilee Rossouw, for just 1. Noor (2 for 34) and Woakes (2 for 42) continued to build the pressure, removing Jacks and Senuran Muthusamy (8) in quick succession, reducing the Capitals to 183 for 4 in the 15.5 over.

Liam Livingstone, who was the Capitals' best hope, still had a chance to take his side home with 27 runs required from 25 balls and six wickets in hand. But a pivotal moment arrived when DSG captain Keshav Maharaj, the experienced spinner, removed Livingstone for 13. The pressure mounted further as Naveen-ul-Haq dismissed James Neesham for just 3, bringing the chase to a tense standstill.

Happy Birthday Rahul Dravid: Indian cricket's Mr. Dependable turns 52

← **Rahul Dravid, one of the most revered figures in Indian cricket, celebrates his 52nd birthday on January 11, Saturday. Wishes poured in for the superstar from the cricketing circles all across the world.**

New Delhi . Rahul Dravid, one of the most revered figures in Indian cricket, celebrates his 52nd birthday on January 11, Saturday. Known for his resilience, impeccable technique, and calm demeanour, Dravid earned the nickname "The Wall" for his ability to anchor India's batting lineup in even the most testing conditions. Born on January 11, 1973, in Indore, India, Dravid's cricketing journey began at a young age, with his father, Sharad Dravid, being a significant influence. Dravid made his first-class debut for Karnataka in 1991 and quickly established himself as a reliable and

consistent batsman. His breakthrough on the international stage came in 1996 when he debuted for India in both One-Day Internationals and Test cricket against England.

Dravid's career in Test cricket is legendary, with his immense patience and ability to occupy the crease for long durations. Over his 16-year Test career, he faced a remarkable 31,258 balls—a record that remains unmatched. His ability to weather the toughest challenges and wear down bowlers made him a central figure in India's success. His 210 catches, a record for the most catches by a non-wicketkeeper in Test cricket, further highlighted his all-around contribution to the team. Known for his unmatched concentration, Dravid spent a total of 44,152 minutes at the crease in Test cricket, a testament to his enduring commitment to the game.

In one of the most iconic innings of his career, Dravid batted for an incredible 740 minutes during his 270 against Pakistan in 2004, the longest innings by an Indian batsman. This match, along with his countless other memorable performances, solidified his status as one of the best Test cricketers in the world. He also holds the record for the most century partnerships in Test cricket, with 88, reflecting his ability to build partnerships

and support his teammates. In One-Day Internationals, Dravid was no less dependable. He scored 10,889 runs in 344 ODIs, including 12 centuries and 83 fifties,



and became one of India's most consistent middle-order batsmen. His partnership with Sachin Tendulkar in a world-record 331-run stand against New Zealand in 1999 remains one of the finest moments in ODI cricket.

Dravid's adaptability also extended to the Indian Premier League (IPL), where he played for the Royal Challengers Bangalore and Rajasthan Royals. Although his IPL career wasn't as illustrious as his international tenure, he contributed significantly to the teams he played for and continued to demonstrate his cricketing

acumen in the T20 format.

Post-retirement, Dravid transitioned seamlessly into coaching and mentoring. As the coach of the India A and U-19 teams, he helped develop young talent that would go on to represent India at the highest level. Players such as Rishabh Pant, Shreyas Iyer, and Sanju Samson have credited Dravid for playing an instrumental role in their development, ensuring his influence extended far beyond his playing days. Dravid's legacy is not just defined by his records, but also by his unwavering commitment to the game and his humble nature. He was especially known for his ability to perform in overseas conditions, scoring a substantial number of runs in victories abroad. He remains the only player to score a Test century in every Test-playing nation, a testament to his versatility and adaptability in varying conditions. Even after his playing days, Dravid's influence on Indian cricket has been profound. His remarkable consistency, dedication, and leadership qualities have inspired generations of cricketers, and his contributions to the game have been invaluable. As we celebrate Rahul Dravid's 52nd birthday, we honor not just his remarkable records but also the enduring impact he has had on Indian cricket, both on and off the field.

Ravindra Jadeja's Instagram story sparks speculation around India cricketer's future

New Delhi . Star Indian all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja has sparked widespread speculation after posting a cryptic image on his Instagram account. The picture, featuring his Test jersey, quickly went viral and has ignited curiosity among fans and cricket pundits. The Instagram story has left many guessing its meaning, with some interpreting it as a hint that Jadeja might be considering retirement from Test cricket.

Reactions poured in on X (formerly Twitter), where fans speculated on the significance of the post. While one user commented, "Any hint?" another wrote, "Happy Retirement Jaddu." The post comes after Jadeja retired from T20s following India's World Cup triumph in June last year. However, the spin-bowling all-rounder continues to be active in ODIs and Test cricket. While Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma faced criticism for their performances



during India's recent tour of Australia, Ravindra Jadeja was not spared either. The all-rounder struggled to make an impact in the Test series, which India lost 1-3.

Jadeja managed to pick up only four wickets across three matches and contributed 135 runs with the bat at an average of 27. According to a report, the veteran player's performance is under scrutiny, and the BCCI selection committee is considering

his future. The report further suggests that the selectors may now be inclined to move on from Jadeja as they look to rebuild the team. The timing of Jadeja's post has added to the intrigue as India gear up for a packed schedule. Starting January 22, the team will face England in five T20Is and three ODIs, followed by the Champions Trophy in Dubai under a hybrid hosting model. Squad announcements for the upcoming series are expected soon, and Jadeja's inclusion or exclusion could provide more clarity about his future. Reports suggest that the BCCI selection committee, along with head coach Gautam Gambhir, is contemplating transitioning to younger players ahead of the 2027 World Cup. According to the report, selectors are debating whether to retain Jadeja or opt for a fresh approach. "It's all about when the selectors decide the transition needs to kick in," a source stated.

ICC Cricket Committee looking to give leeway to bowlers on wides: Shaun Pollock

New Delhi . South African legend Shaun Pollock says the ICC Cricket Committee is working on giving bowlers "a bit more leeway on wides," as the current rule is "very strict on them," especially when batters make last-minute movements. Batters often make late movements across the crease to disrupt bowlers' line and length in ODIs and T20Is, which frequently results in wides. "I'm working on something. As a member of the ICC Cricket Committee, we're looking to provide bowlers with a bit more flexibility on wides. I think the current rules are very strict," Pollock told PTI on the sidelines of SA20. "If a batter jumps across at the last minute, it doesn't sit well with me. A bowler needs to know, from the start of their run-up, where they can bowl."

Pollock explained that the current rule, which



bases wides on the batter's position at the moment of delivery, is problematic. "If a batter moves and the wide is judged based on where they are at that moment, it's unfair. I'd like to see that changed slightly," he added.

The 51-year-old emphasised that bowlers must have clarity on their plans before their run-up. "Bowlers need to know exactly what's expected when they're running in. How can they be expected to change their game plan at the last second? They need a clear idea of their target," he said. "This is being discussed. We're working on it. It's important to give something back to the bowlers," Pollock added. Pollock also spoke about the growth of the SA20 league, comparing its rise to the IPL. "It has gone from strength to strength. This year, the Catch 2 Million competition was added, which has brought even more excitement," he said.

"I see young kids being encouraged to come to the ground, which is fantastic. With the current economic challenges, it's great to see families getting involved. The league has definitely gained momentum." He stressed the importance of the SA20 for South African cricket. "The game needed this injection—there's no doubt about it."

Hero-worshipping reason behind India's generational slump in Tests: Manjrekar

New Delhi. Former India cricketer Sanjay Manjrekar has blamed the culture of hero-worshipping behind India's awful slump in Test cricket. In his recent column in Hindustan Times, Manjrekar wrote that the slump that the Indian team is facing is nothing new. The former player highlighted that India faced a similar slump back in 2011-12 as well, losing 0-8 to England and Australia under the leadership of MS Dhoni.

Manjrekar termed the current lapse in form under the captaincy of Rohit Sharma, a generational slump. India lost two back to back series under the leadership of Rohit Sharma. First India lost their first ever home series against New Zealand (0-3) at home and then fell to Australia 1-3 away. Manjrekar pointed out the reason behind the losses and said that the icon-players were dragging the Indian team. "India are a sought-after cricket team that the world wants to eagerly host. They play a lot of matches in SENA (South Africa, England, New Zealand, Australia) countries, so it is fair to be judged to the highest standards.



This 'generational slump' is inevitable for all teams. It's what we know as the transition phase and among the best teams in the world, I believe it affects India the most," Manjrekar wrote in his column.

The one foremost reason behind this is the icon culture we have in India and the hero worship of certain players. Be it 2011-12 or now, it's the same scenario that gets played out — iconic players featuring prominently doing the opposite of what they did their entire careers, thereby dragging the team down with their diminished performances."

he added. Manjrekar cited the examples of Sachin Tendulkar and VVS Laxman, who had failed in the transition period of 2011-12, and compared their fortunes with Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, who simply have not turned up in the last 2 series for India.

"When India lost 0-8 to England and Australia, Tendulkar averaged 35, Sehwag 19.91 and Laxman 21.06. Only Dravid stood out and got runs in England (he averaged 76.83) but in Australia he too was given a harsh reality check (he averaged 24.25)," Manjrekar said.

"Thing is, when it comes to the big players, we as a country are just not able to stay rational.

Emotions run high and those in positions to take decisions on these players are influenced by this climate. Cricketing logic goes out of the window and then the selectors hope the player leaves on his own so that they don't look like the villains who brutally ended the career of a great who millions of fans worship. They just fear the backlash," the former batter concluded on the matter.

'One of a kind' Amanda Ribas says repeating Amanda Nunes feat will be a challenge

New Delhi. "One of a kind." This was the title UFC used to describe Amanda Ribas in an article as she continues her meteoric rise in the promotion. And there's good reason to give her that tagline as she has been a force to be reckoned in not just one, but two separate weightclasses. Ribas is currently the only fighter to be ranked in the top 10 in 2 divisions as well. The 31-year-old is ranked No.8 at strawweight and No.10 at flyweight and competes in both the divisions regularly. While her work inside the octagon has been incredible, what she does outside the cage makes her one of the most special talents. After securing a fight bonus for her win against Luana Pinheiro, Ribas decided to give away the money to build a facility to help rehabilitate young people who were struggling with drug abuse. The 31-year-old, who will be facing Mackenzie Dern at UFC Fight Night: Dern vs Ribas on 2



January 12, has now set her sights on getting to a title fight by 2025. While talking to Indiatoday.in exclusively, Ribas explained why it could be difficult to replicate the success of her compatriot Amanda Nunes and become a 2-division champion.

India Today: How easy is it to compete in two divisions at the same time and remain successful?

Ribas: It's awesome! At the beginning, I took

the opportunity to fight at flyweight because it was a huge chance. My first fight in flyweight was against Paige VanZant in Abu Dhabi. UFC gave me a great opportunity, and I kept doing well, taking on tough fights. Strawweight is my natural division, and I'm coming off two victories there. In flyweight, I've faced fighters with big names like Paige, Rose Namajunas, Maycee Barber, and others. Competing in both divisions has been amazing, especially ranking in both.

India Today: Which is the easiest weight class for you in terms of weight? Which one do you prefer?

Ribas: I prefer strawweight because I feel hungrier, not just for food and cut a lot of weight, but also hungrier in the cage. I feel stronger at strawweight because I'm taller there. At flyweight, I feel faster, but for now, I prefer strawweight.

India Today: Like your namesake Amanda Nunes, is your aim to be a double champion?

Ribas: That part is a little hard because, in flyweight, I need to adapt my body to gain some muscle. In strawweight, I need to be careful not to lose too much muscle. I trust my team and nutritionists to manage this, but it's a challenge.

India Today: Your father was your first coach and once stopped you from quitting the sport. How does he still keep you on your toes?

Ribas: Yes, he was and still is my coach. At the beginning, it was hard to adapt to calling him coach in the gym and dad outside. Now, we've found a balance. When we're outside the gym, it's just dad and daughter. Inside, it's coach and fighter. The best part is I can trust him completely because he wants the best for me, not for himself.



Alia Bhatt

And Ranbir Kapoor's Wedding Was The 'Toughest', Even Their Neighbours Got 'Annoyed'

Yusuf Ibrahim is a security consultant who has looked after several Bollywood weddings. However, do you know which one was the toughest to handle for him? Well, it was Alia Bhatt's wedding with Ranbir Kapoor. In a recent interview, Yusuf called Alia Bhatt's wedding challenging and tough and recalled what happened when hundreds of people gathered at the couple's Pali Hill residence to catch a glimpse of their wedding. He mentioned that over 350 media personnel were stationed outside Alia's wedding venue and that it was very difficult to deal with the crowd.

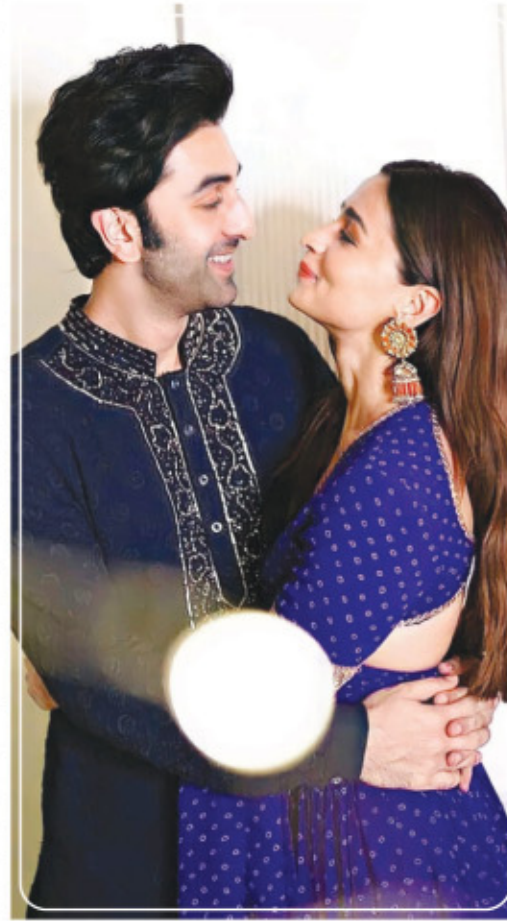
The toughest ever wedding we managed was that of Alia Bhatt. There were at least 350 people from media houses. At least ten people came from each company. Additionally, their fans had assembled outside their home. Same company sent four people from each of their regional channels. People had crowded the entire Pali Hill. Both ways leading to Pali Hill was filled with media and fans.

The crowd was so much that we had to attend to guests cars from down the road leading to their building. We had to run behind the cars. It got even more challenging because even the guests at the wedding were celebrities. The chaos was such that even the people residing in the building got annoyed and were immensely troubled," he told Siddharth Kannan.

Yusuf revealed how he managed his team during Alia's wedding and shared, "We were about 60 people in each shift and our shift was of eight hours each. We worked round the clock. It was crazy because the building has just one gate for both entry and exit, so everybody had to enter through the same gate. We had to escort all the relatives and friends through that crowded road. All of their guests were celebs. Press was crazy on that night."

"I had kept half of my boys in uniform and rest of them in civil dress so that they can manage it well and keep an eye on everybody without making them conscious.

They would update me that media is planning to climb the wall and so, I would instruct them to cover the walls. This is how we managed," he said. Yusuf also mentioned that while he knows Alia Bhatt from her debut film Student of The Year, he started working with Ranbir Kapoor only after Yeh Jawani Hai Deewani. "They trust me with my work," he said.



Saba Azad Wishes BF Hrithik Roshan On Birthday, Drops Unseen Loved-Up PICS: 'You Are The Light'



Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan is celebrating his 51st birthday today, and his ladylove Saba Azad has made the occasion extra-special for him! She took to her social media to share a romantic post, penning a short yet meaningful note for the actor. The highlight of her post were the unseen, mushy pictures of the couple that were an absolute treat for fans. Saba Azad took to her Instagram account to share a series of pictures with her beau Hrithik Roshan. The first picture appears to be from their vacation, and the couple is seen posing for a selfie at the beach. Saba is seen rocking a green and white striped bikini, with white-framed sunglasses over her head, while Hrithik is seen flaunting his chiselled body, with a towel wrapped around his waist. The next photo shows them enjoying a rickshaw ride, and they are all smiles in the lovely picture. Meanwhile, Saba shared some more love-soaked selfies from their dinner dates and vacations.

In her caption for her 'love' Hrithik, Saba Azad wrote, "Happy whirl around the sun my love you are the light...may joy envelop you forever and then some." Check out the post below.

Commenting on Saba's post, actress Richa Chadha wrote, "Happy birthday to Mr Ro," while Saif Ali Khan's sister Saba Pataudi commented, "Happiest Birthday to Hrithik. And U!;) Happy memories and moments together...." Many fans showered love on the birthday boy!

Sussanne Khan Wishes Hrithik Roshan

Meanwhile, earlier today, Hrithik Roshan's ex-wife Sussanne Khan also shared a wish for him. She posted a picture from their celebration featuring her, Hrithik, Saba Azad, Zayed Khan, actress Gayatri Oberoi, Arslan Goni, and others. She wrote, "Happy happiest birthday Rye.. and huggie celebrations for 25 years of KNPH (red heart emojis) and I know the bestttt of your talent and personality starts now...."

RJ Mahvash BREAKS Silence On Yuzvendra Chahal Dating Rumours: 'Have Been Patient Since 2-3 Days...'



Recently, Yuzvendra Chahal's picture with RJ Mahvash from their Christmas celebration went viral on social media. The picture fueled speculation about them, leading people to wonder if they are dating. Now, RJ Mahvash has finally addressed the rumours, lashing out at those linking them together. She expressed her frustration over the 'baseless' dating rumours that emerged simply because she was seen with a person of the opposite gender. She slammed the mindset behind such assumptions, and said that while she has been patient for a few days, she won't let her name be dragged into this. In her note on Instagram, RJ Mahvash wrote, "Some articles and speculations have been circulating around the internet. It's literally funny to see how baseless are these rumours. If you get SEEN with an opposite gender, so you are dating that person? I am sorry what year is this? And how many people are you all dating then? I have been patient since 2-3 days now but I won't let any PR teams drag my name into this to cover up other people's image. Let people live in peace with their friends and family in tough times." Check out her story below.

Their dating rumours surfaced at a time when Yuzvendra Chahal and Dhanashree Verma's divorce rumours have been making headlines. It all started after fans noticed that the two have unfollowed each other on Instagram. Yuzvendra has also deleted all photos featuring Dhanashree from his account, while Dhanashree still has a few pictures of him on hers. Amidst all this, Yuzvendra Chahal also addressed the speculations surrounding his personal life. As rumours about his divorce with Dhanashree emerged, the cricketer asked his followers to stop speculating over "matters that may or may not be true". He requested them to not indulge in these speculations as they have caused immense pain to him and his family.

On Wednesday, Dhanashree Verma also issued a statement addressing the rumours surrounding her marriage with Yuzvendra. She wrote that the past few days have been incredibly tough for her and her family and that it is truly upsetting to see the 'baseless writing, devoid of fact checking' and 'character assassination' of her reputation by faceless trolls. "I've worked hard for years to build my name and integrity. My silence is not a sign of weakness; but of strength. While negativity spreads easily online, it takes courage and compassion to uplift others. I choose to focus on my truth and move forward, holding onto my values. The truth stands tall without the need for justification. Om Namah Shivay," she wrote.

Shalini Passi

On Growing Botox Trend And Cosmetic Surgeries: 'Must Love Yourself'

Shalini Passi has been dominating the headlines following her appearance in Fabulous Lives vs Bollywood Wives. Her candid views on various topics also steal the limelight. In a recent chat, Shalini also shared her concerns about the growing trend of going under the knife. She said that the surgeries and botox trend are harmful to the bodies of young girls. Addressing the issues concerning botox trends and cosmetic surgeries among girls at a young age, she told Hauterrfly that it is not right. Shalini Passi explained, "Nowadays, I watch a lot of girls panicking during hormonal changes. These changes will happen for 2 to 3 years and later settle down. I've seen that it has become a trend among 18- to 19-year-old girls getting Botox, etc. It is wrong because your body has not developed yet. Even getting things done at the age of 22 is not right."



example, if this is my hair colour, it will stay that way. If my hair colour is black, then it's my grandmother's hair. Or, if this is my nose, then it's my father's nose. How can you not love your mother's skin? How can you not love your grandmother's eyes?"

Continuing, Shalini Passi also urged the younger generation to acknowledge the difference between the lifestyle they see online and in reality. An art collector, philanthropist, and socialite based in Delhi, Shalini was a new addition to the cast in Fabulous Lives vs Bollywood Wives, along with Kalyani Saha Chawla and Riddhima Kapoor Sahni, the sister of Ranbir Kapoor. Besides the three entrants, the show featured Bhavana Pandey, Maheep Kapoor, Seema Sajdeh and

Neelam Kothari. Despite a notable cast, Shalini captured the maximum attention for her larger-than-life personality and candid demeanour. The show is available for streaming on Netflix. On the personal front, Shalini Passi is married to Sanjay Passi, the multi-billionaire chairman of Pasco Group. The duo has a son, Robin Passi.



Further highlighting the importance of self-love, Shalini Passi advocated for the need to embrace one's natural features. She remarked, "If you don't love yourself, then others cannot love you. First, you must love yourself. You should know in your heart, 'I am okay with who I am.' For