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EC orders transfer of AAP candidate's voter ID to Delhi: Kejriwal

Sanjay Kumar New Delhi, Jan. 13: The Election Commission of India (ECI) has approved the transfer of AAP leader Awadh Ojha's name from the voter



rolls in Greater Noida to Delhi, enabling him to file his nomination for Patparganj, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal said on Monday. The development came after a delegation of AAP, led by Kejriwal, met ECI officials to address the issue. "The good news is that Awadh Ojha's vote will be shifted and the commission has issued order to transfer his vote, and he will be able to file the nomination," Kejriwal said. Earlier in the day, Kejriwal alleged

irregularities in the electoral process, claiming that Ojha had filed Form 8 to transfer his vote on January 7—the official deadline. He also accused the Delhi Chief Electoral Officer of unlawfully advancing the deadline to January 6. Kejriwal said the move as an attempt to "deliberately debar" Ojha from contesting the upcoming elections, saying it was against the law. Kejriwal also made serious accusations against the BJP's candidate from the New Delhi constituency, Parvesh Verma, alleging distribution of cash, liquor and other items such as bedsheets, shoes and glasses to sway voters. He further alleged that local authorities, including the District Magistrate (DM), were complicit in covering up these actions. The AAP chief claimed that the Election Commission had assured him of appropriate action against the New Delhi DM following these complaints. The political battle between the AAP and BJP is intensifying and both parties are trading allegations, with assembly polls in Delhi just weeks away.

Maha Kumbh: Very special day for those who cherish Bharatiya values: PM Modi

Simmi Kaur Babbar New Delhi, Jan. 13: As Maha Kumbh began in the holy city of Prayagraj on Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi described it as a very special day for those who cherish Indian values and culture, saying the massive religious event embodies India's timeless spiritual heritage. "A very special day for crores of people who cherish Bharatiya values and culture! Maha Kumbh 2025 commences in Prayagraj, bringing together countless people in a sacred confluence of faith, devotion and culture. The Maha Kumbh embodies India's timeless spiritual heritage and celebrates faith and harmony," he said on X. The prime minister said that he was happy to see Prayagraj abuzz, with countless people coming there, taking the holy dip and seeking blessings. He wished the pilgrims and tourists a wonderful stay. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday hailed the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj as "Maha Kumbh of Unity" that resonated widely on social media with #Ekta\_Ka\_Mahakumbh trending during the opening day of the Mela. Users started sharing posts with the hashtag 'Ekta\_Ka\_Mahakumbh' in Hindi on social media platforms X and Instagram actively right since morning on Paush Purnima Snan Parv to celebrate

the event's spiritual and cultural significance. By afternoon, the hashtag topped trending charts, showcasing widespread public participation and the collective spir-



riences of the massive crowd during the Sangam Snan and the deep spiritual significance of the Sanatan faith. Adityanath also joined the conversation and his use of the hashtag triggered a surge of responses, quickly propelling #Ekta\_Ka\_Mahakumbh to the top of the trending charts. The hashtag was further amplified by influential figures and institutions, including former Amethi MP and BJP leader Smriti Irani, the government of India's MyGovIndia handle, Namami Gange, Gorakhpur MP Ravi Kishan, UP Agriculture Minister Surya Pratap Shahi and minister Sandeep Singh. The overwhelming social media response aligned with the message of unity emphasised by Prime Minister Modi and Chief Minister Adityanath, who described the Maha Kumbh as a "Maha Kumbh of Unity". Adityanath had recently reaffirmed in a press conference that those who question the Sanatan faith should witness the Maha Kumbh, emphasising that it transcends distinctions of caste, creed and sect, bringing all together in the spirit of Sanatan harmony. Alongside widespread engagement as social media users expressed their reverence for the sacred event. Many also extended congratulations and best wishes to Chief Minister Adityanath for his efforts in ensuring the grandeur and spiritual magnificence of this historic Maha Kumbh.

PIL filed for CBI investigation into alleged use of expired IV fluids in WB

ST Correspondent Kolkata, Jan 13: The Calcutta High Court will hear a public interest litigation (PIL) on Thursday seeking a CBI probe into the death of a woman at a government-run hospital after alleged administration of expired intravenous fluid. A public interest lawsuit (PIL) demanding a CBI investigation into a woman's death at a government-run hospital following the alleged administration of expired intravenous fluid will be heard by the Calcutta High Court on Thursday. (Samir Jana/Hindustan Times) A public interest lawsuit (PIL) demanding a CBI investigation into a woman's death at a government-run hospital following the alleged administration of expired intravenous fluid will be heard by the



Calcutta High Court on Thursday. Mentioning the matter before a division bench presided by Chief Justice T S Sivagnanam, the petitioner prayed for the constitution of a special investigation team to probe the alleged use of contaminated or expired intravenous fluid in West Bengal's Medinipur Medical College and Hospital. The petitioner's lawyer, Phiroze Edulji, informed the court that the company supplying the intravenous fluid had been red-flagged in March 2024 by another state government and banned the firm from supplying the product for three years. Edulji prayed that the investigation be transferred to the Central Bureau of Investigation from West Bengal Police to ensure impartiality and transparency. The division bench, also comprising Justice Hiranmay Bhattacharyya, said the matter would be taken up for hearing on Thursday. The court directed the petitioner's lawyer to notify the state Advocate General's office to ensure representation by the West Bengal government during the hearing. A woman died and four others fell critically ill after childbirth at the hospital allegedly due to the administration of expired intravenous fluid, prompting the health department to order an investigation. The state government has formed a 13-member panel to investigate the matter. Three of the four women were brought to Kolkata on Sunday night and admitted to state-run SSKM Hospital for further treatment.

Orange alert for isolated dense fog in Delhi-NCR

New Delhi, Jan 13: The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) predicted cold wave conditions and rainfall activity at isolated places in Delhi on Monday. Dense fog conditions are very likely in the Delhi/NCR region at isolated places and an orange alert was issued regarding the same. Morning walkers during a cold and foggy morning at Lodhi Garden in New Delhi, India. Delhi's maximum temperature on Sunday was 17.3 degrees Celsius, two notches below the seasonal average. The maximum and minimum temperatures in Delhi are expected to settle around 19 degrees Celsius and 7 degrees Celsius on Monday, respectively. A fresh western disturbance from Tuesday night will bring isolated to scattered rainfall/snowfall activity likely over Jammu-Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand over the next three days. The IMD said in its bulletin that the weather system will also bring isolated rainfall activity with thunderstorms and lightning over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, the Delhi-NCR region, and Uttar Pradesh on January 15 and 16. A gradual fall in minimum temperatures by 2-3 degrees Celsius is likely over Northwest & Central India during the next 48 hours and a gradual rise by 2-4 degrees Celsius during the subsequent 3 days.

Union Minister Hardeep Puri highlights vision for future energy at OIDB's golden jubilee celebration

Navdeep Singh Sahni

New Delhi, Jan 13: Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri on Monday commended the Oil Industry Development Board's (OIDB) significant contributions to India's oil and gas industry at its Golden Jubilee celebrations in New Delhi. Puri highlighted OIDB's crucial role in addressing key challenges in India's hydrocarbon value chain, ensuring consistent energy supplies, and supporting vital initiatives like skill development and policy reforms. He also outlined future goals to strengthen India's energy security. "OIDB has been pivotal in fueling the growth of the oil and gas industry in India. It has addressed key challenges in the hydrocarbon. Value chain in India in ensuring energy security, supporting initiatives such as skill development and policy reforms, thereby ensuring a consistent supply of energy for our needs," he said. The Minister also

praised the OIDB's financing support for various exploration and production projects, refining, and infrastructure develop-



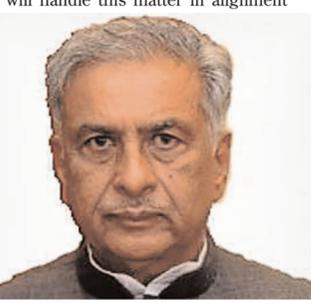
the reason we did not do better if you allow your eye to be off the ELP (Energy Leadership Program) chart." Looking ahead, Puri emphasised the need for OIIB to explore international collaborations, especially in the realm of technology and renewable energy transitions. "I think OIIB should explore international collaborations for technology and funding, particularly in renewable energy transitions. Because I think the focus now is not going to be just on availability and affordability that we would like to take as a given, but the energy transition, I think is the crucial part," he stated. Minister Puri also outlined key strategic directions for OIIB to remain at the forefront of energy innovation. He said, "Establish dedicated research funds focus on trafficking technologies, which can position OIIB at the forefront of innovation, particularly, I would add in the sustainability."

Council speaker questions CID probe into Ravi-Hebbalkar row

Tejinder Kaur Babbar

New Delhi, Jan 13: Legislative council speaker Basavaraj Horatti has expressed reservations about the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) being tasked with probing the altercation between Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLC CT Ravi and minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar during the recent winter session in Belagavi. Horatti conveyed his concerns in a letter addressed to state home minister G Parameashwara. "The House has the sovereign power to discuss, conclude, and decide on incidents within its premises. It is unclear why this case has been handed over to the CID. The speaker holds the authority to maintain discipline in the House, and any decisions regarding its proceedings are final," Horatti wrote on Saturday. He criticised the move, describing it as a potential constitutional conflict that undermines the powers vested in the legislature and the speaker. "Both the executive and the leg-

islature must respect each other's roles and avoid unnecessary clashes. I trust you will handle this matter in alignment



with the Constitution and preserve the sovereignty of the House," he added. The issue stems from an incident on December 19, the last day of the Belagavi winter session. During a heated debate, Hebbalkar accused Ravi of using obscene language against her. Following her com-

plaint, Ravi was arrested the same evening at Suvarna Vidhana Soudha, where the session was held. He was later released on directions from the Karnataka high court. The state government handed over the case to the CID to ensure a thorough investigation. Speaking to the media on Sunday, Parameashwara defended the decision. "We will examine the speaker's letter and consult legal advisors before proceeding. The law applies equally to everyone, and the CID's involvement aims to prevent unnecessary confusion," he said. Meanwhile, the CID is investigating multiple facets of the case, including an anonymous threat letter addressed to Ravi. Chikkamagaluru superintendent of police Vikram Amathe confirmed the registration of a case concerning a letter threatening Ravi and his son. "An anonymous letter has been received, and an investigation is underway to trace its origin and verify its content," Amathe said. The letter reportedly

demands Ravi's apology for his alleged use of derogatory language against Hebbalkar, warning of harm if he fails to comply within 15 days. Police sources suggested that the letter does not explicitly name Hebbalkar, but is believed to be linked to the legislative council incident. The controversy has sparked a political war of words. Reacting to the threat letter, deputy chief minister DK Shivakumar dismissed it as fabricated. "Ravi has become a 'drama master.' He should have apologised for his remarks against a woman minister instead of weaving lies," Shivakumar said. Union minister Pralhad Joshi criticised the state government for its handling of the case. "This is vengeance by the government. They should identify the culprits behind the letter within hours and take swift action," he said. Ravi has denied the allegations and claimed police misconduct during his arrest. He has also written to the governor seeking additional security, citing concerns for his safety.

My heart says PM Modi will very soon fulfil J-K statehood restoration promise: Omar Abdullah

Naresh Malhotra

Srinagar, Jan. 13: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah Monday praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his efforts in bridging the gap between "Dil (heart) and Delhi" and holding assembly polls in the Union Territory while exuding confidence that the statehood restoration promise would soon be fulfilled. Addressing a gathering after the prime minister inaugurated the 6.5-km Z-Morh tunnel renamed 'Sonamarg Tunnel' in the Ganderbal district, the chief minister began his speech by paying tributes to the seven people who died in a terrorist attack near the tunnel site on October 20 last year. He said terrorism will be defeated to ensure peace and development besides safeguarding democracy in Jammu and Kashmir. "Prime minister, when you came to Srinagar for a programme after getting a third term (in office), people started believing your words. You talked about three important things which included your efforts to bridge 'Dil ki duri aur Delhi se duri', and you have proved it by your

work. "This is your second function in Jammu and Kashmir within 15 days after inaugurating (virtually from Delhi) the separate Jammu Railway Division (on January 6)," Abdullah said. In the presence of PM Modi, the Jammu



and Kashmir chief minister said, "You also promised (assembly) elections within four months and you stayed true to your words. People got an opportunity to take part in the voting and today I am participating in this pro-

gramme as chief minister." Referring to Modi's speech during his visit to Srinagar on International Yoga Day last year, the chief minister said, "My heart says that very soon, you will fulfil your third promise to the people of Jammu and Kashmir which is the restoration of statehood to the Union Territory." The chief minister's statehood remark in the presence of the prime minister was welcomed by the audience with a round of applause. This was Prime Minister Modi's first visit to Jammu and Kashmir after the formation of the Omar Abdullah-led government nearly three months ago. Abdullah said the inauguration of projects like the 'Sonamarg Tunnel' tunnel would definitely bridge the gap between Jammu and Kashmir's "dil' (heart)" and Delhi. He said the biggest positive of the election was that there was no complaint of rigging, misuse of official machinery or repoll anywhere and "the credit for it goes to you,

your team and the Election Commission of India". The chief minister said people, including his colleagues, ask him about statehood restoration. "I tell them that the prime minister kept his promise of elections and so my heart says that very soon, you will fulfil your third promise as well and Jammu and Kashmir will once again get the status of a state." Abdullah read out the names of the seven victims in last year's terror attack near the tunnel and said they sacrificed their lives for this project and the development of Jammu and Kashmir and the country. "I belong to a political regime whose thousands of leaders and workers have been killed in the last 35 years because we were... Not ready to see the country being divided," the chief minister said. He said the prime minister's presence in the tunnel inauguration programme is a testament to the fact that those who carried out the attack do not want the development of this region and the country. "They do not want a peaceful atmosphere and democracy. But they can never be successful. They will always have to face defeat here and we will never allow them to cause any

harm to democracy," he said. Abdullah said there were many challenges in building the tunnel and the work on the project was also halted. "The people of Jammu and Kashmir have been waiting for this tunnel for a very long time. Because of this tunnel, the people will not have to come to the lower parts. We will be able to develop Sonamarg as a tourist destination and this tunnel will also facilitate speedy work on the under-construction Zojila tunnel (to provide all-weather connectivity to Ladakh)," he said. He thanked Prime Minister Modi for visiting Kashmir in the cold weather and said, "We hope that you will come again and again, and join in our happiness." The two-lane bi-directional road tunnel between Gagangir and Sonamarg in Ganderbal district in central Kashmir has been built at a cost of over Rs 2,700 crore. It is equipped with a parallel 7.5-metre-wide escape passage for emergencies. Situated at an altitude of over 8,650 feet above sea level, the tunnel will enhance all-weather connectivity between Srinagar and Sonamarg en route to Leh, bypassing landslide and avalanche spots.

## NEWS BOX

## Kerala's widest single-pillar flyover in Kasaragod set to open in February

**KASARAGOD.** The widest single-pillar flyover in Kerala is now in its final phase of construction. Concrete work on the 1.13 km-long, 28.5 metre-wide project with 29 spans has been completed. The overbridge, which extends from Kasaragod fire station, near Karandakkad, to the Ayyappa temple, near the new bus stand, is expected to ease traffic congestion in the city.

With the completion of concrete work on the final span, construction has entered the final leg. The bridge is expected to be opened to traffic in February, after the removal of slabs. Construction is being carried out by the Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society (ULCCS) Ltd. "We should be able to open the bridge in February, based on the completion of the approach road," a ULCCS official said.

"One of the main challenges of constructing a single-pillar flyover is maintaining engineering precision, and the bends in the Kasaragod project added another level of difficulty. Nearly 95% of the construction work has been undertaken. The final stage, involving surfacing and installing protective railings, is all what is left," the official said.

"The bridge is a testament to modern urban aesthetics and a showcase of engineering prowess. The monumental project is poised to dramatically transform the landscape of Kasaragod. The single-pillar design allows for more space under the bridge. The structure will not only alleviate traffic congestion in Kasaragod but also serve as a catalyst for the district's overall development," the official said.

A single-pillar bridge is more expensive compared to regular double-pillar bridges, and more complex, the ULCCS official added.

## Record passports issued in Karnataka, thanks to demand from Tier 2, 3 cities

**BENGALURU.** The desire to travel abroad from residents of Karnataka, particularly those in the Tier 2 and 3 cities, has kept the Regional Passport Office extremely busy last year. It has broken all past records with 8,83,755 passports issued in 2024.

"This figure bests our previous high recorded in 2023 by 34,000 passports thereby recording a 4% increase. What is driving the growth is the surge in applications received from the Tier 2 and 3 cities in Karnataka," Regional Passport Officer, Bengaluru, Krishna K told The New Indian Express. Karnataka has 23 Post Office Passport Seva Kendras (POPSKs). "Post Covid-19, we have witnessed a surge in applications from POPSKs in these cities. An average of 700 to 800 applications are submitted to us through them daily," Krishna added. Post-Covid-19, international travel has bounced back and hence the demand for passport services has been growing steadily, he said. There is a surge in Indians travelling abroad for work, education or for sightseeing purposes.

Krishna said 4,88,509 men, 3,95,236 women and 10 transgenders were issued passports in 2024. Interestingly, a 100-year-old person was among those who got their passport last year. Eight individuals in the age category of 96-99 and 8,668 people in the 76-95 years category too got them, reveals data. The maximum number of passports - 3,88,453 - were issued to those in the age category of 16-35. Surprisingly, the highest number of passports were issued in a single month - 78,416 - happened in February which had the least number of days. Among other services rendered by the Passport department is the issuance of Police Clearance Certificates (PCCs), a mandatory requirement to work in certain countries. Revealing a trend of the most sought after countries job-wise, Kuwait was the most sought after workspot with 7,284 PCCs issued.

## Private hospitals halt Aarogyasri services over Rs 1,200 crore dues

**HYDERABAD.** With talks between the Aarogyasri Trust and the empanelled private hospitals becoming inconclusive, small and medium hospitals resorted to calling off Aarogyasri services for beneficiaries for four days, including EHS and JHS, despite the Trust stating that the services would continue as usual. By Sunday, 368 hospitals across the state had joined the strike, demanding the government release dues amounting to over Rs 1,200 crore, which have been pending for more than a year.

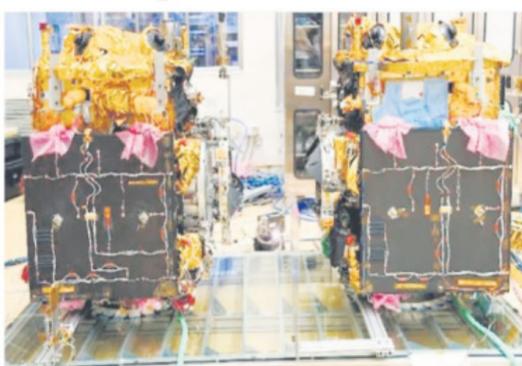
While members of the Telangana Aarogyasri Network Hospitals Association (TANHA) had met with Aarogyasri Trust CEO Shiva Shankar Lotheti earlier in the week, the talks reached a deadlock, as the association refused to accept the assurances given by the Trust. The CEO had assured the clearing of the dues, but the members said that mere words would not make them return to their jobs. TANHA state president Dr. Vaddiraju Rakesh told, "The major concerns and demands we have proposed to the Trust are: redrafting of the unilateral MoU between hospitals and the Trust, revision of both Aarogyasri and EHS/JHS packages based on a scientific approach, regular payment of dues, clearing of pending dues, cancellation and deduction of approved packages by up to 30%, and a redressal mechanism for our grievances."

## ISRO to reassess strategy after space docking trial put on hold, yet again

**BENGALURU.** What looked like an inevitable achievement in the early hours of Sunday, was put on hold by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) scientists, who are closely observing and controlling the two spacecraft of the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) mission. After bringing the two spacecraft - SDX01 and SDX02 - as close to 230 metres on Saturday evening, at 3:11 am Sunday, the ISRO team posted on 'X' that the two satellites were close to each other and were spotted from an inter-satellite distance of 105 metres. Later, at 5:17 am, ISRO noted that the Chaser and Target spacecraft were clearly visible 15m apart, and posted, "We are just 50 feet away from an exciting handshake."

The news brought cheer among space science enthusiasts who are hoping for a successful maiden docking mission by ISRO. At 6.19am, the ISRO team shared the news that the two SpaDeX satellites had been put on hold position at 15 metres, along with photographs of the craft clearly visible at close range.

However, at 7:06 am, the scientists decided to put on hold the docking exercise until further analysis. They said they were successful in bringing the spacecraft just 3m from each



other. However, the scientists did not divulge the reason for moving the spacecraft away from each other to a 'safer distance', after they were close to complete the docking experiment, which is crucial for future Gaganyaan and Bharatiya Antariksh missions.

ISRO took to X to say: "A trial attempt to reach upto 3m from 15m is done. Moving back the spacecraft to safer distance. The docking will be done after analysing data further."

**SpaDeX mission taken up at cost of Rs 370cr** Many experts, however, are speculating the reasons. While some said the two were not

aligned accurately for the docking to take place, others said the distance between the two was much more than what the scientists had announced and assumed. Some others speculated errors in calculation.

The docking of SDX01 and SDX02 was initially scheduled to take place on January 7. However, after reaching close to 500m, the drift was noted to be more than what was expected, post non-visibility period, and the mission was postponed.

On January 9, when ISRO had planned the docking, the scientists noted that the two spacecraft were at

a distance of 225 metres, and that the distance between the two was shrinking and they were slowly moving to the set target. But later they found the two 1.5 kilometres apart, following which the mission was put on hold. The SpaDeX mission, launched by ISRO's PSLV-C-60 rocket on December 30, is being undertaken at a cost of Rs 370 crore.

## Successful docking

A successful docking is when the two spacecraft lock into each other for easy transfer of supplies, equipment and even astronauts. Before this, the docking of SDX01 and SDX02 was twice postponed on January 7 and January 9.

## Andhra govt paid aid to Tirupati stampede victims' families

**VISAKHAPATNAM.** The families of four devotees from the erstwhile combined Visakhapatnam district, who lost their lives in the stampede near Vishnu Nivasam in Tirupati on January 8, have been provided financial assistance. Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha handed over cheques for Rs 25 lakh each to the bereaved families as ex gratia in Visakhapatnam and Narsipatnam on Sunday. Speaking on the occasion, the Home Minister assured the victims' families of continued support. "We have collected the necessary details to provide a contract job in the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) to one family member of each victim, and free education to their children. Though we cannot bring back the lives lost in the stampede, we are committed to standing by the families, and assisting them in every possible way," she



said. The stampede occurred as hundreds of devotees jostled to secure Vaikunta Dwara Sarva Darshan tokens, in which six people were killed. Among the deceased, four were from the erstwhile Visakhapatnam district. They

included 33-year-old K Santhi from Gandhi Nagar in Kancharapalem, 47-year-old G Rajini from Maddilapalem, and 38-year-old S Lavanya from Thatchetlapalem, all residents of Visakhapatnam city. The fourth victim, 55-year-old B Naidu Babu, hailed from Boddepalli in Narsipatnam of Anakapalle district.

On Thursday, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu announced an ex gratia of Rs 25 lakh to each of the families of deceased, along with a contract job for one from each family, Rs 5 lakh compensation for two critically injured pilgrims, and Rs 2 lakh compensation to 33 injured pilgrims.

TTD Board member, TDP State president and Gajuwaka MLA Palla Srinivasa Rao, AP Co-operative Oil Seeds Growers Federation Chairman Gandhi Babji, and MLA P Vishnu Kumar Raju and others were present.

## DMK's victory is already written in by-election, says Chandrakumar

**ERODE.** DMK Erode-East constituency candidate V C Chandrakumar said that DMK's victory is already written in the upcoming constituency election. Speaking to reporters here on Sunday after attending a consultative meeting of the INDIA alliance parties, Chandrakumar said, "People of Erode-East constituency are ready to win DMK in the by-election. DMK's victory is already written. The schemes implemented during the last four years by the DMK government will be the party's protagonists in the



election. In addition, campaign strategies will also strengthen our victory. We will win by a margin of at least 1.2 or 1.3 lakh votes." He added, "I will carry out the tasks left by the late former Congress MLAs. I will work with Minister S Muthusamy to fulfill the projects required by the people of the constituency. A solution will be found to the traffic issues on the main roads in the constituency. During our campaign, we will listen to the people's grievances and find appropriate solutions."

Earlier on Saturday some of the DMK functionaries who were not allowed to contest in the by-election expressed their displeasure on social media. In response to a question raised by reporters regarding this, Chandrakumar said, "There is nothing wrong in them expressing their opinions. We are in solidarity."

## Kerala police purge 28,724 websites, block 21,000 social media accounts in 2024 cyber fraud crackdown

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM.** The state police purged 28,724 websites and 21,000 social media accounts involved in financial fraud from cyberspace in 2024, official documents have revealed. The websites were removed after the cyber police wrote to the domain registrar highlighting the portals' role in scamming people. The removed websites included e-commerce sites, trading websites, fake job portals and sites that hosted malicious applications, enabling fraud by stealing login credentials and data theft.

The social media accounts connected to the scams were mostly identified on Meta and X, and were removed after the cyber police issued notices to the platforms.

This apart, the police also blocked close to 36,000 bank accounts that were found involved in organised cyber scams. The accounts were used by both domestic and international fraudsters to move

funds swindled from their victims. Sources said hundreds of the bank accounts blocked were found to have been used by rackets operating from Southeast Asian countries such as Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. They



included current bank accounts, used for channelling swindled cash.

A majority of the accounts was found acquired by scammers through fraudulent ways, including paying the account holder a fixed amount as commission for each transaction. The state police had earlier wrote to the Reserve Bank of India and the Ministry

of Home Affairs seeking their intervention in preventing misuse of the bank accounts by cybercriminals. State Police Chief Shaik Darvesh Saheb had urged the MHA and the RBI to rein in the unfettered use of current accounts of

Indian banks from other countries. He had also sought a cap on the number of electronic gadgets using which digital transactions could be done. He had suggested that credibility scores be introduced for each account as it would enable users to identify fraudulent accounts.

**13,877 SIM cards blocked** The police action also resulting in the blocking of 13,877 SIM cards that were used by scammers to

contact the potential victims. This apart, 20,482 smartphones were permanently locked after it was found that they were used to place scam calls. The Department of Telecom locked the phones by blacklisting their International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI), unique to each phone, by acting on the state police's request.

## 283 areas in Nilgiris district landslide-prone

**CHENNAI.** A nine-member technical expert committee has identified 283 locations in the Nilgiris district prone to landslides due to the heavy rainfall during the southwest and northeast monsoons, revealed an affidavit submitted on Friday by the Nilgiris collector Lakshmi Bhavya Tanneeru before the southern bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT). The committee was constituted to carry out the study in Nilgiris district and approve road-widening projects only after stringent evaluation, it said. The judicial body had sought reports from the district administrations of Nilgiris, Dindigul and Coimbatore in the aftermath of the Wayanad landslide tragedy that claimed 254 lives and injured several others in Kerala on July 30. To prevent landslides and soil erosion in



the Nilgiris — known for its hilly terrain and ecological fragility — the administration has implemented slope stabilisation techniques, including soil nailing, on key roads such as the Coonoor-Mettupalayam stretch of NH 67 (now NH 181). Similar measures were adopted on state highways, including critical

locations along the Ooty-Kotagiri-Mettupalayam route.

Besides completed projects, new works are in progress under the Comprehensive Road Infrastructure Development Programme (CRIDP) 2024-25, flood restoration initiatives, and special repair schemes. The government has allocated funds, with preparatory estimates in progress for additional locations, mentioned the affidavit. A further complicating factor to all the efforts is encroachment. In the Nilgiris, encroachments in Wellington Town were removed in March 2023, and actions were taken to identify and clear illegal structures in areas such as Burliar, Marapalam, Mel Gudalur, and Thorapalli.

## In this Kadapa temple, men perform puja, no entry for women

**KADAPA.** A rare and intriguing tradition unfolds every year in Thippayapalle, a village in Pullampet mandal of Kadapa district. On the Sunday before Sankranti, the village celebrates a grand festival dedicated exclusively to men. This unique event revolves around the Sanjeevaraya Swamy temple, where men take centre stage in offering prayers and preparing a traditional dish, Pongal, for the presiding deity.

Men, irrespective of where they live, return to their native village for the occasion. They come together to cook Pongal and offer it as Naivedyam to Lord Sanjeevaraya as per the tradition that has been passed down for generations. Women, however, are strictly prohibited from entering the temple or consuming Prasadam.

The age-old custom dates back to hundreds of years. According to locals, a wandering sage once lived in the village and accepted food only from men. Before leaving, he installed a sacred stone and instructed the villagers to worship it as Lord Sanjeevaraya. He also laid down specific rituals, including the exclusion of women from temple activities. The villagers, believing the sage to be a divine incarnation, continue to honour these practices to this day. Interestingly, the temple does not have a sanctum sanctorum. Instead, devotees worship inscriptions on the sacred stone as the embodiment of the deity. Another popular belief suggests that the stone was installed by a Brahmin to counter the misfortunes and poor harvest that once plagued the village. Since then, the villagers claim, prosperity has returned, reinforcing their faith in the tradition.

On the festival day, men bring cooking ingredients in baskets from their houses and prepare pongal within the temple premises. After offering it to the deity, Prasadam is distributed among the men. Women can only witness the proceedings from outside the temple premises. Speaking about the tradition, Subbarayudu and Srinivasulu, local residents, explained, "We believe these rituals keep evil forces at bay and protect the health and prosperity of our village. Which is why devotees from neighbouring villages, apart from locals, flock to the temple during the festival."

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## NEWS BOX

## Man dressed as firefighter caught looting homes in Los Angeles amid deadly fires

**World.** Los Angeles Police on Sunday arrested a man impersonating a firefighter while robbing homes in fire-stricken Los Angeles. This arrest comes amid a surge in looting-related crimes as wildfires rage across the region. Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna confirmed that at least 29 arrests were made on Sunday (January 12), according to the New York Post. Of these, 25 arrests occurred in the Eaton Fire area, while four were reported near the Palisades Fire region. "I saw a gentleman who looked like a firefighter, and I asked if he was OK because he was sitting down. I didn't realize we had him in handcuffs. He just got caught burglarising a home," Sheriff Luna recounted the incident.

Authorities also revealed that two arrests were made for curfew violations near Vice President Kamala Harris's residence in Brentwood early Saturday. In response to the rising crime, 400 National Guard troops have been deployed to the affected areas to enhance security and deter looting.

The Los Angeles Police Department Chief Jim McDonald emphasised that the 6 pm to 6 am curfew remains in effect through Monday. At least 24 people have died, and 16 others were reported missing due to the wildfires in Los Angeles as firefighters raced to contain the inferno for the sixth day on Monday. Over 12,000 structures have been destroyed due to the wildfires so far, according to officials.

## Zelensky Offers To Exchange North Korean Soldiers With Captive Ukrainians

**Kyiv, Ukraine.** Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Sunday he was ready to hand over captured North Korean soldiers to Pyongyang in exchange for the return of Ukrainian POWs held in Russia. Zelensky's offer came hours after South Korea's National Intelligence Service confirmed Ukraine's announcement from the previous day that it had captured two North Korean soldiers.

Kyiv said Saturday they had been wounded fighting Ukraine's troops in Russia's Kursk region, but at the time did not provide any proof of their nationality. But on Sunday, the NIS told AFP it had "confirmed that the Ukrainian military captured two North Korean soldiers on January 9 in the Kursk battlefield in Russia." In a post on X Sunday, Zelensky said: "Ukraine is ready to hand over Kim Jong Un's soldiers to him if he can organize their exchange for our warriors who are being held captive in Russia." There would "undoubtedly be more" North Korean soldiers captured by Kyiv, he added.

"For those North Korean soldiers who do not wish to return, there may be other options available," said Zelensky. "In particular, those who express a desire to bring peace closer by spreading the truth about this war in Korea will be given that opportunity."

### Russia-North Korea ties

Ukraine, the United States and South Korea have accused nuclear-armed North Korea of sending more than 10,000 soldiers to help bolster Russian forces. Neither Moscow nor Pyongyang has acknowledged that North Koreans have been deployed to fight against Ukraine. The two countries have boosted their military cooperation since Russia launched its 2022 invasion of Ukraine. "There should be no doubt left in the world that the Russian army is dependent on military assistance from North Korea," said Zelensky. The Ukrainian president posted a video of an interrogation of the two North Korean prisoners of war, one of whom is lying in a bunk bed and the other is sitting up in bed with a bandage around his jaw.

One man can be heard speaking to a Ukrainian official through an interpreter, saying in translated comments that he did not know he was going to fight in a war with Ukraine and that his commanders "told him it was just training".

In translated comments, one of the men says he wants to return to North Korea. The other says he will do what he is told but, if given the chance, wants to live in Ukraine.

### 'Significant losses'

South Korea's confirmation Sunday added weight to Kyiv's account, confirming details released by Ukraine the previous day.

## Three killed in Israeli Airstrike In Lebanon

**Beirut.** Three people were killed in an Israeli airstrike that targeted a group of people near the Shebaa Farms in southern Lebanon, a Lebanese military source said. The source, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Xinhua on Sunday that an Israeli drone fired an air-to-ground missile at the Bastra area south of the town of Shebaa, resulting in the fatalities.

The Israel Defense Forces said in a statement on Saturday that its air force had identified and attacked three "suspects" near the Israeli-annexed Shebaa Farms area, Xinhua news agency reported. Lebanon's General Directorate of Civil Defence announced on Sunday it had retrieved two bodies in the Lebanese town of Khiam, the bodies and remains of eight people in the town of Naqoura, two bodies in the village of Biyyadah, and one body in the village of Tayr Harfa.

Meanwhile, Israeli warplanes launched airstrikes on Sunday night, targeting areas surrounding Baalbek city in eastern Lebanon for the first time since the ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel went into effect on November 27, 2024. Lebanon's National News Agency (NNA) reported that the raids hit the town of Jenta in the Baalbek-Hermel district, but did not provide information on whether there were any casualties. Meanwhile, in southern Lebanon, Israeli warplanes conducted six intense airstrikes targeting several areas, according to NNA.

The ceasefire, brokered by the US and France, was meant to end nearly 14 months of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah. The terms of the agreement include Israel's withdrawal from Lebanese territory within 60 days, with the Lebanese army taking over security along the Lebanese-Israeli border.

# Drugged, gang-raped, burned alive: 5 cases reveal horror of UK grooming gangs

**World.** A girl from Rotherham in England had been raped from the age of 13 to 15 and believed her mother would be the next victim. A 15-year-old was told at all times that she was a bullet away from death. Sometimes beaten with claw hammers, other times brutally raped and silenced. Several white girls in the UK were befriended by young Muslim men and then passed on to older men who would become their boyfriends. What followed was gang rapes and several degrees of other forms of violence. These stories of grooming gangs, operating in the UK since the 90s, could send a chill down anyone's spine. The grooming gangs and their nefarious activities made headlines due to the remarks by Tesla boss, Elon Musk, who called out UK Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, for not acting against them.

These grooming gangs had a pattern: girls as young as 10-year-old girls in Rotherham, Oldham and other areas were lured by



Pakistani-origin men, then taken to older men who would control and manipulate them. These young girls would then be gang-raped by these men and their relatives and friends for years. The authorities also did not act when these women reported their abuse as they allegedly tried to avoid hurting cultural sensitivities in the UK.

Investigations by counties, accounts by survivors and media reports have revealed the extent of sexual abuse and violence used by the members of the grooming gangs, who were predominantly Pakistani

men. However, people are demanding a probe across the UK to find out the real extent of the crimes of these gangs. Here are five cases that reveal the horrors perpetrated by grooming gangs in the UK.

### 1. THE HUSSAIN BROTHERS WHO TRAUMATISED MANY

Jessica (name changed), 14, was first abused by Arshid Hussain, 24. At first, he was gentle and kind to her, but what gradually followed were many forms of manipulation—control, isolation, and coercion. "It became like the only person in my world was him," she told the BBC. He even convinced her that her family members, who were trying to help her, were against her and were jealous of her. She believed in what he said.

But then there was anger and violence. There were times when she felt that he would kill her at any moment. Raped, tormented, and scared, Jessica and many women like her had lost all hope. Many people who were

victimised by the Hussain brothers—Arshid, Bannaras Hussain, and Basharat Hussain—were scared of what they could do to them. They had locked up a girl for several weeks, and she had to "pay her way" out, according to a Guardian report. The victims even had long-term impacts from the abuse. One girl only undressed in the dark because she had started hating her body, suffered from depression, and had eating disorders. This has been seen in many victims of grooming gang abuses.

### 2. LOUISE, ABUSED BY OVER 100 MEN

A girl, Louise (name changed), who spoke to Sky News, described how she had been raped by more than 100 men in Telford. "He would take me around the corner of the restaurant, and he would have sex with me," she said. "Then he would pin me down so all the rest of the restaurant workers could do it to me."

## Blue Origin Or SpaceX? Amazon Boss Bezos On Musk's Influence On Trump

**Washington.** Jeff Bezos said he does not think SpaceX CEO Elon Musk will use his close ties with US President-elect Donald Trump to undercut his space company Blue Origin, adding he feels "very optimistic" about the incoming administration's space agenda. "Elon has been very clear that he's doing this for the public interest and not for his personal gain. And I take him at face value," Bezos, founder of Blue Origin which rivals SpaceX in the space industry, told Reuters in an interview on Sunday.

Bezos spoke with Reuters in Cape Canaveral, Florida where he will watch the debut launch of Blue Origin's New Glenn, a 30 story-tall rocket that is expected to chip away at SpaceX's market dominance and kick start Blue Origin's long-delayed entrance in the satellite launch business. Musk, who spent more than a quarter billion



dollars to help elect Trump, has had the president-elect's ear on space matters. Last month he said the US should send missions straight to Mars instead of going to the moon first, fueling industry concerns of a major shakeup to NASA's space exploration program.

"My own opinion is that we should do both - we need to go to the moon and we should go to Mars," Bezos said, when asked if he was concerned about

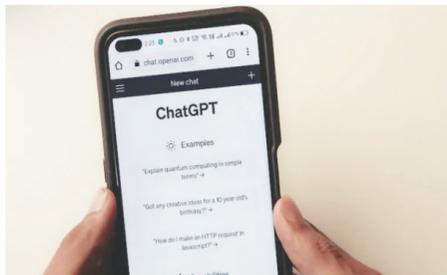
changes to NASA's moon program. "What we shouldn't do is start and stop things. We should continue with the lunar program for sure," Bezos said. Trump in his second term as president is expected to make sweeping changes to NASA's moon program and focus heavily on sending missions to Mars. Amazon has donated \$1 million to Trump's inauguration fund and will stream the event on its Prime Video service. Bezos, Amazon's founder and executive chairman, has met with Trump but told Reuters "We really haven't talked about space."

Blue Origin, founded by Bezos in 2000, has a \$3 billion contract with NASA to land humans on the moon later this decade after missions by SpaceX's Starship, Musk's fully reusable rocket in development that is designed to put humans and cargo on both the moon and Mars.

## UK Tech Minister Says Children Should Be Allowed To Use ChatGPT For Homework

**World.** Britain's Science and Technology Secretary Peter Kyle has said that children should be allowed to use ChatGPT to help with their homework. During an interview on BBC, Mr Kyle was quizzed whether it was "okay for kids to use ChatGPT to do their homework?" as the UK attempts to build a framework regarding the future of artificial intelligence (AI). He responded: "Actually with supervision and used in the right way, then yes, because ChatGPT and the AI technology that is using language is already being used across the economy."

"I am of an age where I remember this conversation about calculators. We need to make sure that kids and young people are learning how to use this technology and integrate it into their learning development," he added when pressed if it was the correct approach. ChatGPT is an online AI-



powered large language model (LLM) that enables users to have human-like conversations and much more with a chatbot. The rise of AI chatbots in the last couple of years has raised questions regarding the learning structure in schools and colleges where more and more students are simply relying on such programs to complete homework and pass examinations.

However, as per Mr Kyle, the use of ChatGPT could 'turbo-charge' the minds of the children. "There are kids with real outlier talents. Using ChatGPT and other AI assistance could

really turbo-charge [them] and give them a challenge they're not getting in other places."

### AI action plan

The British government under Prime Minister Keir Starmer will be launching its AI Action Plan this week. Mr Starmer's administration has been largely optimistic regarding the technology with its ministers claiming that if AI is "fully embraced", it could bring £47 billion to the economy every year. With the private sector set to invest £14 billion in the field as well, it could bring around 13,000 jobs. Though the complete details of the AI plans are not yet clear beyond rumours of a "sovereign AI team", it is already evident that the Labour Party is taking a stance that is radically different from its Conservative predecessors.

As per Mr Kyle, the Labour administration will implement a "course correction" on AI safety, after former PM Rishi Sunak placed an overbearing amount of attention, spooking the public in the process.

# Biden speaks to families of 3 Americans detained in Afghanistan since 2022

**Washington D.C.** US President Joe Biden spoke on Sunday with the families of three Americans detained in Afghanistan by its Taliban rulers since 2022, and emphasised his commitment to bringing home Americans wrongfully held overseas, the White House said. Biden's administration has been negotiating with the Taliban since at least July about a US proposal to release the three Americans - Ryan Corbett, George Glezmman and Mahmood Habibi - in exchange for Muhammad Rahim al-Afghani, a high-profile prisoner held in Guantanamo Bay, Reuters reported last week, citing a source familiar with the discussions. Efforts to secure the release of the Americans continue, a second source familiar with the initiative said on Sunday.



Corbett and Habibi were detained in separate incidents in August 2022 a year after the Taliban seized Kabul amid the chaotic US troop withdrawal. Glezmman was detained later in 2022 while visiting as a tourist. Ahmad Habibi, Mahmood Habibi's brother, who was on the call on Sunday, welcomed the discussion with Biden. "President Biden was very clear in telling us that he would not trade Rahim if

the Taliban do not let my brother go," he said. "He said he would not leave him behind. My family is very grateful that he is standing up for my brother." The Taliban, which denies holding Habibi, had countered the US proposal with an offer to exchange Glezmman and Corbett for Rahim and two others, one of the sources told Reuters last week. The White House noted that Biden has brought home more than 75 Americans unjustly detained around the world, including from Myanmar, China, Gaza, Haiti, Iran, Russia, Rwanda, Venezuela and West Africa. His administration also brought home all Americans detained in Afghanistan before the US military withdrawal, it said.

"President Biden and his team have worked around the clock, often in partnership with key allies, to negotiate for the release of

Americans held hostage or unjustly detained abroad so that they can be reunited with their families, and will continue to do so throughout the remainder of the term," it added.

A Senate intelligence committee report on the agency's so-called enhanced interrogation program called Rahim an "al Qaeda facilitator" and said he was arrested in Pakistan in June 2007 and "rendered" to the CIA the following month. He was kept in a secret CIA "black site," where he was subjected to tough interrogation methods, including extensive sleep deprivation, and then sent to Guantanamo Bay in March 2008, the report said. Biden last week sent 11 Guantanamo detainees to Oman, reducing the prisoner population at the detention center in Cuba by nearly half as part of its effort to close the facility as the president prepares to leave office on Jan. 20.



the incoming administration to lay the groundwork for an Iwaya visit. Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar will attend the inauguration at the invitation of the Trump team and meet members of his incoming administration, his ministry said in a statement.

Penny Wong, foreign minister of fellow US Pacific ally Australia, said on Sunday she would also attend the inauguration, calling it "an important opportunity to discuss how we can advance the benefits of our strong economic and security partnership and expand our cooperation". She has said Australia's centre-left Labor government was confident of its alliance with the United States, its biggest security partner, under the incoming Republican administration. Australia, India, Japan and the United States, which form the Quad security group, have started making arrangements to hold a four-way foreign ministers' meeting in Washington following Trump's swearing-in. Japan's Nikkei business daily said. China has objected to the Quad grouping as an effort to encircle Beijing and ramp up conflict, while the four member nations say they are like-minded democracies seeking to bolster stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

NEWS BOX

**Tension flares after miscreants cut udders of three cows in Bengaluru's Cottonpet**

**BENGALURU.** Tension flared up in the Cottonpet area in Bengaluru West on Sunday morning after unidentified miscreants inflicted injuries on the udders of three cows on Pension Mohalla Road behind Vinayaka Theatre. A large number of people gathered as the news spread, leading to tension. The police said the incident came to light early on Sunday morning when a local resident noticed a pool of blood at the place where the cows were tied to a post on the roadside. He found injuries on the udders of three cows and alerted the cow owner, Karna, who stays 500 metres away from the spot. Karna immediately informed a veterinary doctor and also called the police. The police visited the spot, recorded statements. Based on Karna's complaint, a case was registered under Section 325 (mischief by killing or maiming animals) of BNS and Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

A senior police officer said that over six cows were tied on the roadside and of them, three had injuries. "While two cows had slash marks on their udder, the other's udder was mutilated. It is suspected that the accused used a blade to inflict injuries," he said. The police are analysing CCTV footage and are said to be questioning some suspects.

The incident sparked outrage among local residents, while right wing activists rushed to the spot and protested. Leader of Opposition R Ashoka, Bengaluru Central MP PC Mohan and others visited the site and spoke to Karna. The police had a tough time managing the crowd. A Karnataka State Reserve Police platoon was deployed.

**CM assures action**

CM Siddaramaiah said cattle abuse is a crime and perpetrators would be punished. He was speaking to the media at Hoovina Hadagali in Vijayanagara district after a mass marriage function.

**AP transport dept slaps Rs 1 crore fine on private bus operators for charging excess fare**

**VIJAYAWADA.** The Andhra Pradesh Transport Department has slapped a fine of around Rs 1 crore on private travel bus operators for violating rules, and charging exorbitant fares from travellers during Sankranti festival season. Following complaints from public on the exorbitant fares, State Transport Commissioner Manish Kumar Sinha directed the RTA to initiate action against the private bus operators, who resorted to encashing the festive rush.

Acting on the Commissioner's instructions, transport officials have cracked the whip on private bus operators, and registered over 800 cases in the past two days for charging exorbitant fares and violating the RTA norms. As many as 50 teams were deployed in all the districts on Saturday for conducting surprise inspections. They checked passenger documentation, permits and adherence to fare regulations. Dedicated enforcement squads were also posted at specific locations to ensure continuous monitoring of private buses. The RTA raids on private bus operators will continue till January 19. "Cases have been registered against private bus operators charging exorbitant fares by creating artificial scarcity of tickets during Sankranti season. It has been detected that the majority of private bus operators are collecting exorbitant fares. Notices have been served on the errant bus operators, besides slapping fines on them for violating RTA rules," a senior official said. Speaking to TNIE, Manish Kumar Sinha said private bus operators have been directed to strictly adhere to RTA norms and other safety regulations, and avoid charging exorbitant fares from travellers.

**SRSP canal breach inundates SC colony in Mannemappally**

**KARIMNAGAR.** Sudden flooding inundated the Scheduled Caste (SC) Colony of Mannemappally village in Thimmappur mandal early on Sunday. The incident occurred when the bund of the Sriramsagar Project (SRSP) D-4 canal breached near the Peechupally cross regulator, causing water to gush into the colony and submerge houses. Former sarpanch Medi Anjaiah alerted irrigation authorities about the situation. Superintending Engineer (SE) of Irrigation Circle-2, P Ramesh, along with staff and local police, rushed to the site. Manakondur MLA Kavvampally Satyanarayana also visited the area to assess the situation and check on the affected residents.

SE Ramesh explained to the media that water was being released into the SRSP canal system from the Thotapally reservoir. He suspected that downstream villagers or farmers had released excess water from the main canal into a minor canal. This led to an overload, causing the bund to collapse. "The canal has a designed capacity of 200 cusecs, but it was overwhelmed by a flow of 300 cusecs, which caused the breach," Ramesh stated, noting that the ongoing release of water from reservoirs into canals for the Rabi crop season contributed to the situation. Restoration work on the breached bund is currently underway, but the SE emphasised that full restoration cannot be completed until the canal is emptied of water.

**Free dhotis, sarees for Pongal at many ration shops in Tirunelveli, Tenkasi yet to reach beneficiaries**

**TIRUNELVELI/DINDIGUL.** A section of ration card holders in several parts of Tirunelveli and Tenkasi districts alleged that they were not provided with the free dhotis and sarees promised for Pongal, whereas in Dindigul the PDS shops are left with just half stocks required for distribution.

While blackboards displaying messages indicating lack of stock have been put up at the ration shops in Tirunelveli's Udayarpatti and Thirugnanasambanthar Street, ration card holders urged the authorities concerned to prioritise the distribution. "Officials should prioritise distributing dhotis and sarees to elderly and impoverished people instead of using the token system," said A Manohar, a ration card holder in Tirunelveli.

Another beneficiary claimed that she had not received clothes for the second consecutive year in Tirunelveli. "Last year, the ration shop staff promised I would get them after Pongal, but I never did," she said. Besides, allegations are cropping up about the misuse of the clothes meant for free distribution in the previous years. A devotee, A Shanmugavel, highlighted spotting dhotis, meant for Pongal distribution, being sold at Kerala's Padmanabhaswamy Temple some days back. It may be noted that similar incidents have been reported since 2015. Further, a large quantity of dhotis and sarees purchased for Pongal 2024 distribution was muddled during the December 2023 floods in Tirunelveli. These clothes were found stored



at the Palayamkottai Tahsildar office last month.

Speaking to TNIE, CITU District Cooperative Workers Union Secretary (Dindigul) Sadiq Ali said, "We believe just 50% of the sarees and dhotis arrived at PDS shops through the civil supplies department in Dindigul." Condemning the poor state of distribution, several customers also staged a protest in Nilakottai taluk on Friday. An official from the Civil Supplies Department (Dindigul) said, "We received only a few lakhs of sarees and dhotis from the state government, and we immediately distributed them among the PDS

shops throughout Dindigul district. We expect more numbers within two days, and the whole process of distribution in the district will be completed in one week." When contacted, M Murugesan, Joint Registrar of Cooperative Societies (Tirunelveli region), told TNIE only 57% of the dhotis had reached shops in the district as of Sunday morning. "Distribution will continue until January 30, and we will ensure that all beneficiaries receive their allotment," he added. Meanwhile, an official, on condition of anonymity, said that around 59% of the beneficiaries across Tamil Nadu received dhotis and sarees as of Sunday.

**Stray dog menace escalates in Tiruchy's Manapparai, residents seek action**

**TIRUCHY.** The stray dog menace has been steadily increasing in all the 27 wards of the Manapparai Municipality, posing a threat to public safety. Residents allege that the municipality has failed to take any action to control the stray dog population. On Friday night alone, over 15 individuals were bitten by stray dogs within the town limits.

CCTV visuals from a petrol bunk on Friday shows a staff being chased and attacked by dogs on the bunk premises itself. Around 100 people took treatment for dog bites in the last 10 days both in the GH and in nearby PHCs, said health department sources in Manapparai. One among them, T Nagaraj, a 56-year-old flower vendor from Ramalingam Street, was severely bitten on his leg by a stray dog.

Frustrated by the inaction of municipal authorities, Nagaraj lay down at the entrance of

the Manapparai Municipality office on Saturday, demanding immediate measures to curb the menace.

Speaking to the , Nagaraj said, "The stray dog problem in Manapparai has worsened significantly. I can't do business peacefully. Despite repeated complaints to the municipality, no action has been taken." S Ilayaraja, a bike mechanic from Park Road, has been shaken after an attack by a pack of dogs at night.

"I fell off the bike as they surrounded me. I sustained severe injuries," he recalled. There is an alarming presence of stray dogs in key locations such as the Manapparai Government Hospital, municipality office, bus stand, Sub-Registrar Office, Poonga Road, Ramalingam Street etc., stated M Rajashekar, a resident of Vidathilam Patti in Ward 1. He said "For a

population of over 1.5 lakh people at least 10-15 dogs can be spotted in every ward.

The cost incurred by the civic body to curb the stray dogs has drastically increased due to various guidelines. It has silently stepped away from animal birth control procedures and follow-up treatment. "Vaalkai Saravanan from Sethurathanapuram said dogs roamed freely, both day and night.

"They are a danger to school children, many of whom run in fear and fall, sustaining injuries. I managed to escape unharmed from a pack of 10 dogs recently," he shared. When contacted A Geetha Michaelraj, Municipality Chairman, told, "As the Blue Cross rules are severe, it has become hard to manage the situation. Yet all necessary actions are being taken by our health inspectors in monitoring the stray dog population."

**Leopard, cubs spotted in Bengaluru's Banashankari VI Stage, residents panic**

**BENGALURU.** A leopard and its cubs were found prowling in the First Block of Banashankari 6th Stage recently, causing panic among residents. Videos of the animals have been captured by the CCTV cameras of an apartment and mobile phones of some residents.

The leopard is said to have entered from the Turahalli Forest which is adjacent to the area.

Prakash RM, a resident of Banashankari, said, "Some days ago, another resident told me that he spotted a leopard near his home.

I didn't believe him. But after I saw the CCTV footage from the apartment, I was convinced. Now, I am scared to go around the area post sunset." TS Mahesha, president of Banashankari 6th Stage Resident Welfare Association, said, "As Banashankari 6th Stage is adjacent to Turahalli Forest, leopards often venture into the residential area and then go back into the forest. We have complained to the Kaggalipura Forest Division about the leopard sighting."

Assistant Conservator of Forest Ravindra said, "So far, there is no photographic or CCTV evidence that a leopard with cubs has been sighted. We are checking the area to ascertain it. One leopard was sighted sitting on a rock in Turahalli Forest from the window of an apartment. That was around a fortnight ago and it was a male.

"Another forest official on the ground said that if a leopard with cubs is wandering, citizens are requested not to disturb them and not to panic. They will go back to the forest. "We request the residents not to pick up the cubs or to have any human imprint on them. We are combing the area for pug marks and any other signs," he added.

**88% in rural, 75% in urban Kerala die in hospitals, doubling European average: Study shows**

**KOCHI.** Around 88% of people in rural Kerala and 75% in urban Kerala spend their final moments in hospitals, as per a new study. This is nearly double the European average and points to the alarming rise in end-of-life healthcare expenses in the state. In sharp contrast, only 40% die in hospitals in other states.

"Kerala seems to be more medicine-centric than the US, where 80% of deaths occur in hospitals," said D Narayana, economist and former director of Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation (GIFT), who is now professor of eminence of School of Social Sciences, M S Ramaiah University of Applied

Sciences, Bengaluru. He collated the numbers on hospital deaths from the Sample Registration System Statistical Report 2020 by the Office of Census Commissioner 2024. The figure does not ensure quality of death even as it would see a massive rise in healthcare expenditure. "Most people wish to die at home. However, due to several reasons, they are not allowed to. Hospital stay

before death cannot ensure quality end of life. It also adds to healthcare expenditure," Narayana said, adding that the number of corporate hospitals in the state also contributes to the

"Healthcare awareness among eralites is high. Also, our health-seeking behaviour is advanced. This, along with the availability and universal and uniform distribution of healthcare



facilities, leads to a situation where relatives tend to seek medical help or ICU and ventilator support even if they know there is no hope," he said, adding that age groups of the persons dying in Kerala hospitals would give a clearer picture on the trend.

Another reason cited by Dr Elamon is that Kerala has a strong public health system that enables even people from poor financial backgrounds to approach medical colleges or general hospitals. M M Abbas, general secretary of the Organic Kerala Charitable Trust, said it is evident from the Census Commissioner's report that healthcare is high towards the last year or the last quarter of one's life. "Especially high is the spending when death takes place in hospital. Does Kerala fall into this category of high bed and physician supply leading to a high proportion of death in hospitals," he asked.

**Alappuzha to make it to union government's water metro list after Edakochi, Kollam**

**KOCHI.** While the central government's move to include Kollam and Edakochi to its list of probable locations that can host water metro services opens avenues to further tap the state's inland water facilities, the Kochi Water Metro Ltd (KWML) plan to suggest Alappuzha's name could see Kerala becoming an even greater beneficiary of the transportation system.

The Union government has directed KWML to conduct a feasibility study of other possible locations for implementing the rban transport system. TNIE had, in November 2023, reported on KWML plans to introduce operations on Ashtamudi Lake. The service was proposed to be operated on three routes:



Munroe Island, Alappuzha and Varkala. The Union government's decision to include Edakochi and Kollam in the feasibility study group was based on the direction of the ministry of ports, shipping and waterways to

assess the potential for replicating the successful Kochi Water Metro model in 18 locations across the country. "We are exploring whether water metro terminals such as Kumbalam and Varappuzha can be converted into hubs, which will allow for extension of services to places such as Kodungallur and Chertala. This is part of the scope of the feasibility study," a senior KWML official said.

However, KWML authorities plan to suggest Alappuzha, instead of extending services to satellite towns, as many hurdles exist to linking them with Kochi. "Besides the issue of navigability due to shallow routes, travel time is a challenge. Otherwise we'd have to

operate fast ferries, which would result in protests by residents and fishermen. We'll suggest to the ministry the inclusion of Alappuzha," the official added.

The other cities currently under consideration include Ahmedabad (Sabarmati), Surat, Mangaluru, Ayodhya, Dhubri, Goa, Kolkata, Patna, Prayagraj, Srinagar, Varanasi, Mumbai, and Vasa. Interestingly, KWML had already carried out a feasibility study of Kollam. "We did the study after Kollam corporation evinced interest in replicating the Kochi Water Metro project. It will be submitted soon. Preparing reports on Edakochi and Alappuzha will takesome time," the official pointed out.

**Polavaram D-Wall works to begin after Sankranti**

**VIJAYAWADA.** The construction of a new Diaphragm Wall (D-Wall) at the Polavaram project, costing an estimated Rs 990 crore, is expected to commence after Sankranti. The delay is due to pending clearance from the Central Water Commission (CWC), which is reviewing recommendations from an international experts' panel on the plastic concrete composition for the wall. According to sources, the project contractors and officials submitted three different compositions of plastic concrete for evaluation. The panel, after an in-depth review, forwarded its recommendations to the CWC, which is likely to decide within three to four days.

Initially, Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu had announced that construction would commence on January 2, but technical requirements, including the final approval of the concrete composition, caused a postponement. Preparatory and investigative works for the project began in November. Project officials stated that the plastic concrete would be prepared onsite under the supervision of experts from Bauer, a German company. This self-hardening, waterproof material prevents water seepage in underground spaces. Unlike rigid concrete, plastic concrete's ductile properties make it resistant to cracking under pressure, ensuring its effectiveness in preventing seepage. A senior engineer explained that cracks in rigid structures allow water leakage, whereas ductile materials withstand pressure and maintain integrity.

The proposed 1,400-metre-long D-Wall addresses seepage issues, with bentonite being a critical component to enhance the concrete's plasticity and workability. The new wall will incorporate expert recommendations and be constructed six metres upstream of the existing structure, which was damaged by floods in 2019 and 2020. Project authorities revealed that the sub-surface wall will extend up to two metres into the rock strata beneath the riverbed, with depths ranging from 40 to 90 metres depending on the riverbed's geological composition. The CWC approved the wall's new design in late November, and construction will proceed in phases based on expert committee guidelines.

## SC verdicts hold out hope for India's vexed democracy

At a time when the nation's fractious political discourse is loaded with conflicting and competing perspectives on constitutionalism, the Supreme Court's role as the arbiter of constitutional conscience assumes heightened significance. Invested with a wide judicial review jurisdiction, the apex court has earned the nation's respect for its wisdom in charting the course of balanced constitutionalism in testing times.

This is so notwithstanding the occasional errors of judgment. The court's acknowledgment of its fallibility and a demonstrated willingness to correct itself has added to its weight as the ultimate forum for judicial justice. In the context of some of its past decisions perceived as equivocate and flawed for want of a clear statement, its recent pronouncements signal a welcome affirmation of liberty and human dignity as the nation's core constitutional values, holding out hope for India's vexed democracy in 2025. Some recent decisions that have quietly found their way into the lexicon of human rights jurisprudence and inspire confidence in the resilience of our constitutional institutions deserve mention. These include the *Surender Panwar* [2025] case, in which the Supreme Court declined to interfere with the observations of the Punjab and Haryana High Court terming the 14 hours 40 minutes' long custodial interrogation of the accused as "not heroic" and "against the dignity of a human being." The decision is a resounding judicial rejection of tortious custodial interrogation. It draws attention to the imperative of fair investigation in accordance with international human rights norms laid down by the UN.

The decision is particularly significant in the context of India's much-delayed ratification of the UN Convention Against Torture (UNCAT), which it had signed in 1997. While the Supreme Court has consistently treated all forms of torture as violative of the individual's right to dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution [DK Basu (1997), Tusharbhaj Rajnikantbhai Shah (2024) et al], it has been inexplicably ambivalent in nudging the government to legislate a comprehensive legislation against torture in line with the UNCAT as a necessary step towards the elimination of all forms of custodial torture. Having proclaimed the unconstitutionality of tortious investigative measures, the court is expected to proactively facilitate the enactment of a comprehensive legislation against torture. Its power to do so stems from the willing allegiance of the people to its commands anchored in legal integrity and reflecting the 'community's coherent conception of justice and fairness' (Ronald Dworkin, *Law's Empire*, 1986). Treading on the libertarian path a correction of past aberrations and restoring the constitutional balance, the highest court, speaking through Justices Abhay Oka and AG Masih in *Atharv Parvez* [2024] has ruled that the restrictions on bail under a stringent penal statute needed to be harmonised with powers exercisable under the constitutional jurisdiction. It affirmed that long incarceration of the accused without bail is an infraction of Article 21 and that the criminal law doctrine of presumed innocence of the accused is not displaced by the seriousness of the crime with which the accused is charged. The same Bench declared in *Parvinder Singh Khurana* [2024] that a stay of the order granting bail can be passed only rarely and for reasons indicated in the statute. The underlying premise of these judgments is the supremacy of the libertarian philosophy of the Constitution, reaffirmed in *Sidhant* [2024], in which the court granted bail to the accused despite stringent statutory conditions. It is hoped that the libertarian judicial approach will determine the fate of detainees, such as Umar Khalid, who has been in detention since September 2020. Another significant decision of the Supreme Court in *Urmila Dixit* [2025], that emphatically asserts the right to dignity and succour for the elderly, merits the nation's fulsome commendation for a compelling moral dimension. Authored by Justice Sanjay Karol, the judgment, in a purposive interpretation of Section 23 of the Maintenance and Welfare of the Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, declared that the 'tribunals under the Act may order eviction [of the donee/children] if it is necessary and expedient to ensure the protection of the senior citizen' and.

## Diversify MSP to empower farmers

A restructured MSP would broaden safety nets and encourage sustainable practices, empowering farmers to thrive amidst challenges.

The minimum support price (MSP) system was a significant policy intervention for ensuring food security and protecting farmers from market fluctuations. However, it has begun to show limitations and is now a source of unrest among farmers. Its narrow focus on a few crops has drawn criticism as today's agricultural challenges are evolving, with rising costs, ecological concerns and the need for viable alternatives. While the MSP system successfully stabilised wheat and paddy production, it inadvertently discouraged crop diversification, leaving farmers vulnerable to market volatility and climate impacts. The demand for reform is escalating, with farmers advocating for a legal MSP framework that encompasses a broader range of crops, backs sustainability and enhances economic security. Opponents of an expanded MSP, including many economists, argue that such a system is impractical and financially unsustainable for the government, which they believe should not be obligated to purchase all crops. They argue for a more liberated agricultural market, similar to other economic sectors. However, the agricultural market is not as free as it might seem; government regulations to maintain affordable food prices sometimes create opacity and most of the small and marginal farmers cannot compete against powerful traders and intermediaries. Moreover, there is no demand requiring government purchases at MSP. Yet, it is crucial that MSP serves as a price floor — ensuring market prices do not drop below it. Reforming the MSP to align with free-market principles requires creative thinking from policymakers, economists and legal experts. A promising approach is the establishment of a diversified MSP. Expanding coverage beyond wheat and paddy to include pulses, oilseeds, millets and horticultural produce would create a more inclusive and dynamic system, responsive to farmers' needs. This will not only secure farmers financially but also promote sustainable practices. For instance, millets need less water than paddy, making them ideal for drought-prone areas, while pulses can enrich soil quality. To successfully implement a diversified MSP, five key elements are essential: 1. Dynamic pricing: MSP rates should adapt to regional needs, market trends and environmental conditions to ensure equitable compensation and promote sustainable practices. 2. Robust infrastructure:

Significant investments are necessary to enhance storage, transportation and processing facilities, helping reduce post-harvest losses. 3. Legal safeguards: Farmers must have legal protections to secure fair prices and mechanisms to deter exploitation. 4. Technological integration: Utilising digital platforms can aid in transparent price discovery and facilitate direct sales between farmers and consumers. 5. Education: Training and awareness campaigns are crucial to inform farmers



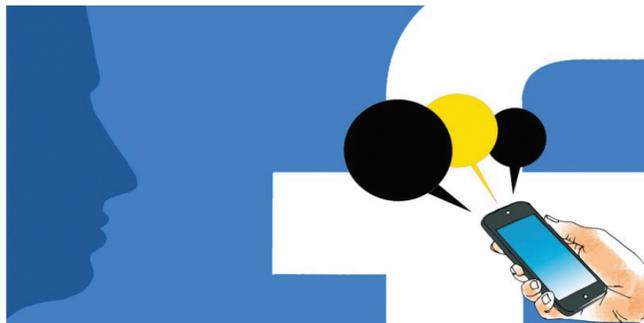
about the benefits of diversification. The demand for reformed and expanded MSP is justified because in the last over five decades, states have not evolved any sustainable alternative marketing intervention for the farmers. The Government of India made special financial provisions for MSP as a marketing intervention to meet the challenges of food security. The food credit limits sanctioned to the Green Revolution states were not included in their public borrowings. This special dispensation, often termed special central assistance, was crucial for these states. However, during all these years, innovative market access systems should have been developed to give farmers alternative options. In the absence of any other alternatives, the farmers' dependence on MSP and their demand for its expansion is appropriate. However, it is never too late. Both the Central and state governments need to evolve alternative market mechanisms for the farmers that assure them of good remuneration while maintaining the floor price for the produce. There are good examples to emulate. Some countries have implemented agricultural support mechanisms that could inspire MSP reforms in India. For example,

the US employs a combination of direct payments, crop insurance and market loans to support its farmers. These steps ensure that farmers have multiple safety nets and are not overly dependent on any single policy. The US Farm Bill includes provisions for price loss coverage and agricultural risk coverage, which help stabilise farmers' incomes during price drops. Similarly, the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) offers subsidies and incentives for sustainable farming practices, which can be adapted to Indian conditions to promote crop diversification and environmental conservation. Further, farmer cooperatives have shown promise in providing market stability and better bargaining power for small farmers. These cooperatives can be leveraged to aggregate produce, negotiate better prices and reduce dependency on middlemen. Examples from countries like Israel and the Netherlands illustrate how cooperative models can significantly enhance the profitability and sustainability of farming communities. In Israel, cooperative societies like Tnuva have helped farmers secure better market access and fairer prices through collective marketing and distribution networks. While government intervention is crucial in determining MSP for crops, a collaborative approach that includes private sector involvement in procurement could alleviate the financial load on public systems. Incentivising private companies through tax benefits to procure products at or above MSP can enhance market competitiveness and opportunities for farmers. This model has seen success in the contract farming system in Thailand, where private companies provide guaranteed prices to farmers, ensuring stable incomes. Further, connecting farmers directly to consumers or industries through digital platforms can bypass intermediaries, resulting in fairer prices. Initiatives like e-NAM (National Agriculture Market) in India are steps in the right direction. They promote a unified online trading platform for agricultural commodities. Investing in training for young farmers and providing transport support to target markets is vital for achieving better pricing. Digital literacy programmes and mobile-based applications can empower farmers with real-time market information, enhancing their decision-making capabilities.

## Online lies

End of Meta fact-checking a setback

META's announcement of abandoning its fact-checking programme, starting with the United States, comes as a setback to the global campaign against misinformation and disinformation online. The dramatic policy shift marks an end to the independent, third-party fact-checking programme launched by the social media giant in 2016. It cannot be mere coincidence that the decision comes ahead of US President-elect Donald Trump — a vocal critic of Meta for censoring right-wing voices — assuming office. CEO Mark Zuckerberg's pitch that the key motivation is a desire to embrace free speech is hard to swallow. A reluctant proponent of content moderation, a series of controversies attributed to fake news led him and other social media leaders to take aggressive steps to police discourse. Zuckerberg's move to mend the rocky relationship with Trump may make business sense, but on all other counts,



it is irresponsible. It does not bode well for information integrity worldwide. Instead of relying on professional fact-checkers to moderate content, Meta is going X's way, that banks on volunteers writing contextual notes to be

added below misleading posts. Serious concerns are being raised about the implications of loosening controls. Watchdogs warn of the ripple effects of removing strong guardrails, and how it could enable misinformation to thrive unchecked on Facebook, Instagram and Threads. The proliferation of falsehoods and in India's case, hate speeches as well, not only weakens people's access to trustworthy information, but also the ability to confront their political leaders. The notion of a 'WhatsApp university' that consistently misrepresents facts and twists history has come to denote the pitfalls of giving free rein to social media platforms. Toxic floods of lies need more fact-checkers, not less. Their absence can only mean an open invitation to spread falsehoods and misinformation, with zero accountability.

## Dr Singh deserves a befitting memorial

The scams reported during his second term in office were a result of his reluctance to discipline colleagues

Resuming my column after the Xmas break, I look back at the happenings in our country during the past few weeks. The distinct brand of democracy that is taking root in India was on display within the new Parliament building and outside. Elected members came to blows, a feature of some parliaments in the Far East. Outside the building's precincts, a Virat Kohli-like shove was attempted by Rahul Gandhi on a BJP elder. Virat's target on the cricket ground resumed his innings after the encounter. Rahul's opponent found himself in a hospital, chattering about the strengt of the younger man pitted against him. While the country watched the antics of our elected representatives, their party bosses got into a slanging match in poll-bound Delhi. The verbal duel has graduated to a poster war between the BJP and AAP, with the two opponents denigrating each other in print. We are amused and disgusted simultaneously, and in equal measure.

Mercifully, there was the proverbial silver lining. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra delivered her maiden speech in the Lok Sabha. In fact, she opened the Opposition's arguments on disrespect to the Constitution. She also mentioned the vituperative attacks on her great-grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru, the bête noire of the present dispensation. She spoke well and sensibly too. She resurrected a flicker of hope for the return of decency and substance to proceedings in Parliament, as was prevalent in the times of Pandit Nehru. An extremely decent human being, who was our Prime Minister for a decade, breathed his last in a hospital in Delhi. Dr Manmohan Singh was truly respected not only in Punjab and the North, from where he hailed, but also in other parts of the country where perceptive citizens ferret out

decent and credible leaders when they perceive the existence of such a rare specimen. It was not as a Sikh but as a Congress leader and the Prime Minister that Manmohan Singh apologised to the Sikh community for the injustices heaped upon them after Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984. Such a gesture of humility and contrition was not attempted by the Congress government in Maharashtra after the slaughter of Muslims in Mumbai in 1993 or by the BJP in Gujarat in 2002.

I had occasion to interact with Dr Singh during my years in service and later. Two such occasions remain etched in memory. The first arose when the IPS Officers' Association asked me to meet the PM to plead its case when the Pay Commission's recommendations were being considered by the Union Government. Had retired by then and set up home in Mumbai, the city of my birth. I asked the officer who had spoken to me on the phone why that was necessary when the PM's own son-in-law was a member of our service. The officer replied that the son-in-law would not dare to broach the subject to the PM. In a country where nepotism is an accepted evil, the thought that the PM was beyond such weaknesses was certainly exhilarating. After the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, famous lyricist and screenwriter Javed Akhtar and influential Marathi journalist Kumar Ketkar asked me to accompany them to Delhi to meet the PM to discuss the repercussions of this incident for the polity. Dr Singh listened carefully to each of us. I spoke about inter-community relations and how civil society in my city was involved in finding acceptable solutions. He obviously took my suggestions to heart because when I arrived back at Mumbai's airport, the Chief Minister sent an

emissary to request me to drive straight to his residence to discuss with him the suggestions I had made to the PM. Dr Singh was an attentive listener. He acted on ideas if he perceived some merit in them. He was not merely humble; his credibility was high. It is true that his sense of decency sometimes worked against him. The scams that were reported during his



second term in office were a result of his reluctance to discipline colleagues, especially those from other political parties which were part of the coalition government. Narendra Modi scores much better than him in the ability to manage coalition partners. An unseemly row has erupted between the Congress and the BJP about the site of a memorial to honour the former PM's contribution to the country and its people. Dr Singh was the only non-politician to rise to this pedestal. He did not command a following

among citizens like other Prime Ministers did to a larger or smaller degree. But he deserves a monument in marble to remind us of the man who opened our economy and lifted crores of Indians to the ranks of the middle income groups from near-poverty levels. In Maharashtra, the BJP-led coalition is wrestling with the financial downside of the Ladki Bahin project, which literally took Mahayuti over the finishing line in the 2024 Assembly elections. A massive exercise is afoot to ascertain the eligibility of crores of applicants whom the scheme was not supposed to cover. Half of the would-be beneficiaries will find themselves deprived of the promised largesse. They are bound to grumble. In the meantime, the Agriculture Minister is finding it hard to pacify farmers who were promised loan waivers, which the treasury cannot accommodate at present. 'Grumbling' was the word most in evidence when the state's Cabinet was to be formed. The number of aspirants for ministerial status exceeded the figure permitted by law. The 41 MLAs belonging to Ajit Pawar's NCP faction and the 57 from Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena had a tough time concluding who should be in and who could be left out. This is a common occurrence that has been experienced earlier, but this time around, the aspirational levels had risen so sharply that it took a month after the election results to arrive at a solution. The police establishment will be forced to part with many more personnel to provide security (status, really) to the 40-odd Ministers. Status and importance are what they all crave for. Some, of course, are in search of 'creamy' portfolios! It will be difficult for CM Devendra Fadnavis to please them all. I reckon it will be a test of his leadership skills.



# Quickies and cross gender Spa massages find takers in the city

Full-body relaxing and holistic massages have always been popular, but women in Mumbai have apparently got a little naughtier — the city has seen an increase in the demand for male masseurs. Spa therapists and specialists state that massages do have a sexual connotation, but of course it's not always just that. Women who lead busy, demanding lives are now looking for complete relaxation and detoxification of the system and do not mind adding a little spice to it as they go along. Dr Sonal Shah, founder of a detox spa, says, "Cross therapy (male masseurs for ladies) has gained acceptance and popularity of late. Also, it is no longer the traditional two-hand massage; women are now asking for four or even

six-hand massages (where a massage is given by two or three masseurs simultaneously)." **Cross massages are popular** Spa owners say that earlier, cross gender massages were not asked for openly. But now, since the client demand has increased manifold, many have complied. Dr Sonal adds, "Massages are extremely personalised



these days. The world has become smaller and people who come back from Bangkok and Singapore ask for different kinds of massages."

### Foot pressure, the latest fad

Lying down completely disrobed while a male therapist uses his feet to massage your back, legs, buttocks, fingers and even toes, is another method that is gaining popularity. Farooq Merchant, founder and owner of a spa in the city, says, "There is a spa in the western suburbs that offers this. The masseur balances from a rope and walks over you to relieve tension from pressure points." Also known as Chavatti Tirumal, this massage form originated from the ancient fight sport of Kalaripayattu.

### Quickies are in demand

A spa therapist from a fusion spa that has a couple of centres in South and West Mumbai says, "We often get a lot of clients who are working



women and they are in a hurry when they come to us. Our four-hand massage options are in demand as the entire session gets done in much less than an hour." These back and feet massages, that last around 20 to 30 minutes, relax and de-stress you with reflexology. Dr Shah adds, "We have women coming in during lunch-hour to get these quickies."

### Four-hand massages are not new

The old-style Abhyanga ayurvedic massage has always been a four-hand massage. Wellness therapist Amrapali Patil says, "Traditionally, this massage is done by two therapists, who stand on the right and left of you and massage your body symmetrically and simultaneously, thereby providing ultimate relaxation." Nisha Jhaveri, spa professional and co-owner of a luxury spa that has branches in the suburbs and South Mumbai, says, "Four-hand massages are common because these are actually quite comforting and a lot of our clients opt for and enjoy them. But since they are more expensive because there are two therapists working on you, these massages are not for everyone."

## 4 benefits of

# Oiling hair on daily basis

Certainly, many of us still swear by our grandma's special weekend 'champi' or the more famously known 'maalish,' many of us have forgotten the goodness of oiling hair regularly. While many of you may not know, but regularly oiling hair is super beneficial in the long run. From covering your hair from becoming greasy, to



fighting fungal and dandruff, regular oiling of hair has many benefits.

### Fights pre-mature greying of hair

It is believed that regular usage of oil prevents pre-mature and greying of hair. Not only that, regular usage of oil also keeps your hair, strong and healthy.

### It protects hair from pollution

Many of us aren't aware of the fact that oiling our hair regularly, also helps it against pollution. While we can wash our face every time, washing our hair at regular interval isn't feasible. Instead oiling it regularly can be useful as a protective layer for the

hair, protecting it from various environmental attacks such as dirt, dust, pollution, ultra-violet rays of the sun.

### Prevents dryness of the hair

While regular hair spas isn't a bad option to keep your hair free of dryness and supple, regular use of oiling will keep it nourished for longer. Also, oil acts as a coolant and it would prevent your hair from harsh heating conditions. If your hair is



extremely dry, you can just apply oil to your hair and then soak a towel in hot water and wrap it around your head. This would make sure that oil penetrates well into the scalp.

### Smoothens hair

One of the best ways to keep your hair smooth is by oiling them daily, or atleast regularly. Oiling your hair increases the blood circulation in the scalp and thus, repairing of damaged hair. This will make your hair look smoother and shinier.

## Have you tried the body wrap yet?

Also called the body envelopment, this works well to get you glowing, toned and refreshed before D-Day

So your big day is coming up and there is much to do -makeup and wedding dress rehearsals, included. But don't forget the skin regimen too. Steam baths and facials are part of it, couples are also opting for a beautifying body wrap made of algae, clay mud (detox) or oil and lotion (hydrating), to tone and tighten the skin. Says beauty expert Natasha Shah, "Body wraps are the rage at spas these days, and they truly can do wonders to your body -rejuvenating and relaxing you -with the mix of right ingredient products, aroma therapy, oils and technique." Adds spa expert Dr Pramod Rane, "These wraps, administered under guidance, are extremely popular with brides-to-be as they leave the skin smooth as silk and bright as ever."

### KINDS AND BENEFITS

Body wraps are essentially designed to detox, hydrate, slim down or tone the body. Explains spa expert Nisha Jhaveri, "Envelopments or wraps are a must for skin maintenance. Try a marine algae wrap if you feel sluggish or tired or want to balance the system out. Slimming wraps eliminate excess fluids and toxins by drawing them out through skin pores. They can be coupled with a massage to break down the fat. You also have wraps that help

hydrate and nourish the skin such as rose, which also calms the mind and a caviar wrap has anti-ageing properties." Here are other popular ones...

### CHOCOLATE WRAP:

Here clay is infused with ingredients like dark chocolate oil, the essence of cocoa, almond oil and vitamin extracts. The wrap is a treat as the aroma is pleasant and it can uplift the mood owing to its chemicals such as serotonin and dopamine, which elevate the mood. The cocoa butter in it is a good moisturising agent. "This works as a slimming wrap as cocoa acts as an active ingredient to break down body fat," says Nisha.

### MUD AND CLAY WRAP:

One of the most sought-after wraps, is therapeutic mud or clay. It is lightly massaged into the skin before the wrap starts, and aims to cleanse and

detoxify. These wraps increase circulation and remove excess water, firming the skin. A variety of clays are used, such as bentonite, red, green, or with Dead Sea clay. Says Natasha, "The green clay body wrap, known for its detox properties draws out toxins, gives taut, glowing skin and removes the dead layers, too. On a deeper level, clay wraps relieve joint, rheumatic and arthritis pain along with on the outside calm, heal and soothe sensitive skin." Adds Dr Mane, "A paste of cotton or black moor mud decongests skin, it supplies nutrients, regenerates the skin, fights wrinkles, spotting and sagging skin, making it smooth and bright."



# Union Budget May See Fiscal Consolidation But Rural, Welfare, Subsidies May Go Up: Report

The report highlighted that the upcoming budget will be crucial for balancing growth and fiscal discipline.

**New Delhi.** With the Union Budget for FY26 scheduled to be presented on February 1, 2025, a report by Goldman Sachs underlined two key concerns for policymakers, the pace of fiscal consolidation and the government's spending priorities. The report highlighted that the upcoming budget will be crucial for balancing growth and fiscal discipline as India stands out for its high levels of public debt and fiscal deficit as compared with other emerging markets. Goldman Sachs noted that the government is likely to keep the fiscal consolidation path intact, driven by the need to manage high public debt-to-GDP ratios. However, the report cautioned that this fiscal tightening could act as a drag on economic growth in the upcoming fiscal year. The report also highlighted a slowdown in public capital expenditure (capex). It mentioned that the fastest growth phase in public capex is now behind us, with future capex growth expected to align with or fall below nominal GDP growth rates. Welfare



spending, too, is unlikely to see significant increases, although pre-pandemic trends in such spending are expected to continue. The report noted that India is currently experiencing a cyclical growth slowdown, the report said, primarily due to fiscal tightening and slower credit growth as a result of the Reserve Bank of India's macro-prudential measures to control consumer loans. The central government's fiscal deficit is expected to be targeted at between 4.4-4.6 per cent of

GDP for FY26, down from the target of 4.9 per cent for FY25. The reduction reflects the government's focus on fiscal consolidation amid elevated public debt levels.

It said, "We think elevated public debt-to-GDP is likely to keep the fiscal consolidation path intact, and we expect the government to target fiscal deficit at 4.4-4.6 per cent of GDP in FY26 (from 4.9 per cent of GDP in FY25)". In the ongoing fiscal year FY25, robust tax collections, particularly from direct taxes, have provided the government some leeway to increase current expenditures. However, capital expenditure has remained subdued. The budget is also likely to make an overarching statement about the long-term economic policy of the government towards 2047. The focus will be on job creation through labour-intensive manufacturing, credit for MSMEs, promoting rural housing programs, and sustained focus on the domestic food supply chain and inventory management to control price volatility.

## Why Steve Jobs' Wife Was Not Allowed To Touch Shivling In Varanasi

**New Delhi.** As the Maha Kumbh 2025 kicks off, late Apple co-founder Steve Jobs' wife Laurene Powell Jobs visited the Kashi Vishwanath temple in Varanasi. She later travelled to Prayagraj, where she will stay at the Niranjini Akhara camp till January 15, before returning to the US to attend the swearing-in ceremony of President-elect Donald Trump on January 20.

At the Kashi Vishwanath temple, she was not allowed to touch the Shivling inside the sanctum sanctorum. Spiritual leader Swami Kailashanand Giri, the Acharya Mahamandleshwar of Niranjini Akhara, explained, "She is very religious and spiritual. She is my daughter, and Maharishi



Vyasananda was also there. All of our family did 'Abhishek' and worshipped. She was given prasad and a garland, but there is a tradition that anyone other than a Hindu cannot touch Kashi Vishwanath. If I do not maintain this tradition, then it will be broken." During her stay in Prayagraj, Ms Jobs is also planning to take a dip in the Ganga river. She was given the Hindu name 'Kamala' by Kailashanand Giri, symbolising her spiritual engagement. Dressed in a salwar-suit, she was welcomed to the camp with trumpets and served tea in a traditional kulhad.

She later participated in the Pattabishek (coronation) ceremony of Vyasanand Giri Maharaj.

Maha Kumbh will take place from January 13 till February 26 and is expected to be attended by 45 crore pilgrims. The main bathing rituals (Pavitra Snaan) will take place on January 14 (Makar Sankranti), January 29 (Mauni Amavasya), and February 3 (Basant Panchami).

## In A First, All-Girl NCC Contingent To Take Part In Army Day Parade

**New Delhi.** The Army Day Parade this year will see the participation of an all-girl marching contingent from the National Cadet Corps (NCC) and the showcasing of four thematic tableaux, including one based on the force's Mission Olympics Wing.

An all-women Agniveer contingent from the Corps of Military Police (CMP), Centre and School at Bengaluru, and a set of marching 'robotic mules' will also register their presence at the prestigious annual parade for the first time, defence sources said. The Army Day Parade will take place at Bombay Engineering Group (BEG) and Centre in Maharashtra's Pune on January 15 which comes under the Army's Southern Command. In the evening, a programme called 'Gaurav Gatha' is planned to be held showcasing the evolution of welfare from ancient period to the contemporary era. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is likely to grace this event, the sources said.

The theme for the 77th Army Day celebrations is 'Samarth Bharat, Saksham Sena', and the focus this time is to demonstrate the capabilities of the Army contributing to a stronger nation.

Some of the platforms that will be showcased during the parade include K9 Vajra self-propelled howitzer, BMP-2 Sarath infantry combat vehicle, T-90 tanks, Swathi weapon locating radar, Sarvatra Bridging System, Multi-Barrel Rocket System, ATOR N1200 all-terrain vehicle, drone jammer systems and mobile communication nodes, sources in the defence establishment said. "This year's parade will include an all-girl contingent of the NCC and an all-women Agniveer contingent from the Corps of Military Police centre in Bengaluru and both will be taking part in the Army Day Parade for the first time," a defence source said.

## Parents visit IIT-Kharagpur to meet son, find him hanging in his room

**New Delhi.** A 21-year-old IIT-Kharagpur student was found dead inside his hostel room by his parents who had come to meet him on Sunday, police said. Shawn Malik, a third-year Electrical Engineering student at IIT-Kharagpur, was staying in the Azad Hall of Residence of IIT-Kharagpur. According to IIT officials, Malik's parents and the institute's security guards had to forcibly open the door of the hostel room after he did not respond to repeated calls. "The reason for the extreme step was not clear. We have not received any suicide notes. The boy's parents came to meet him with food. Like they do every Sunday. They were the first to see the body hanging. The boy was very good at his studies," IIT Kharagpur Director Amit Patra said. "Nothing suspicious was found. Malik had good relations with the teachers. He didn't tell anyone about the rest. A lab assistant died a few days ago. But there's no connection to it," he said. After the incident, Malik's body was recovered and sent for autopsy to Medinipur Medical College for postmortem. The police are investigating, Patra said. A senior police officer said the post-mortem had been completed, and the process was videographed. An investigation is underway, he said. IIT-Kharagpur has seen several incidents of student deaths in recent years. In June 2024, another IIT-Kharagpur student, Devika Pilai, was found hanging on the college campus. In October 2023, a fourth-year Electrical Engineering student, K Kiran Chandra, was found dead. Prior to this, in 2022, another IIT student, Faizan Ahmed, was found dead on the campus.

## From Humble Start To Cutting-Edge Tech, IMD Leads Weather Race At 150

**New Delhi.** From a few rain gauges in 1875 to rivalling the world's best weather agencies, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has weathered its way to becoming a global leader in forecasting. Born out of calamities -- a devastating cyclone in 1864 and monsoon failures in 1866 and 1871 -- the IMD, turning 150 on January 15, has transformed from a humble setup into a cutting-edge hub of weather science. "HF Blandford, the first Meteorological Reporter to the then Government of India, prepared the first rainfall map of the country (undivided India) using data from 77 rain gauges... The IMD has come a long way since its modest start," IMD Director General Mrutyunjaya Mohapatra told PTI.

According to its 2023 report, the IMD operates 39 Doppler Weather Radars, INSAT 3D/3DR satellites providing 15-minute cloud updates, and a robust network of 806 Automatic Weather Stations, 200 Agro-AWS, 5,896 rain monitoring stations, 83 lightning sensors and 63 Pilot Balloon Stations. The IMD's key advancements include rapid severe weather assessments (2015), 6-minute cyclone scans (2018) and upgraded satellite systems. Its advanced numerical weather prediction models now deliver seamless forecasts from a few hours to an entire season, backed by high-resolution global models and seasonal forecast systems introduced between 2016 and 2021.

Mohapatra said improvements in observations, communication, modelling and infrastructure have significantly enhanced weather and climate services. "Forecast accuracy for severe weather events improved by about 50 per cent in 2023 compared to 2014. This has significantly reduced the loss of lives and property during extreme weather events," he said. By 2023, the accuracy of five-day forecasts matched the one-day forecast accuracy of 2017. Cyclone landfall forecasts have become highly precise, with zero error in most cases (20 km for 24-hour forecasts).

The 24-hour forecast accuracy stands at 80 per cent for heavy rainfall, 86 per cent for thunderstorms, and 88 per cent for heat and cold waves. To make this information accessible to the public in simple language, the IMD has launched several mobile applications, including 'Mausam', which provides weather forecasts for every location in the country. The IMD achieved all this despite India's complex weather patterns compared to many developed countries.

M Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, said India's tropical weather is characterised by extreme variations, making it more challenging to predict than Europe's relatively stable weather patterns.

## India summons Bangladesh envoy day after Dhaka's summons to its diplomat

**New Delhi.** The government on Monday summoned Bangladesh Deputy High Commissioner Nural Islam amid escalating border tensions between the two nations. The development comes a day after the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry summoned Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma over the issue. Nural Islam was seen leaving from South Block after he was summoned by the Ministry of External Affairs, as per a report by news agency ANI. The border tensions between India and Bangladesh have escalated after Dhaka alleged that India was trying to construct fences at five locations along the India-Bangladesh border, violating a bilateral agreement.



According to Bangladesh Home Affairs Adviser, Lt Gen (retd.) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, the conflicts have surfaced in five areas, including (northwestern) Chapainawabganj, Naogaon, Lalmonirhat, and the Tin Bigha Corridor. Chowdhury claimed that "several issues have arisen along the Bangladesh-India border" due to

imbalanced agreements signed by the previous government. He criticised the former Sheikh Hasina-led government for signing unequal agreements, which he said contributed to disputes over fencing at 160 sites between 2010 and 2023.

Meanwhile, Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma, who entered the Bangladesh foreign ministry on Sunday, said after the meeting that Dhaka and New Delhi "have understandings with regard to fencing the border for security".

Our two border guard enforcements - BSF and BGB (Border Security Force and Border Guard Bangladesh) - have been in communication in this regard. We expect that this understanding will be implemented and there will be a cooperative approach to combating crimes along the border," Verma added.

## Cold but extraordinary: Foreign devotees take dip in Sangam as Maha Kumbh begins

**New Delhi.** As the Maha Kumbh Mela, the biggest spiritual gathering in the world, began in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj on Monday, devotees from across the world arrived in the city to take a holy dip in the Ganga river. Several foreign devotees took a dip in the Triveni Sangam, a confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati, on the first 'Shahi Snaan' on the occasion of Paus Purnima on Monday.

Francisco Soares de Guzman, who has come to Prayagraj from Brazil, said that India is a place filled with spirituality. He was quoted as saying by news agency ANI that although the water at the Triveni Sangam confluence "was cold", his heart "was



filled with warmth" after he took a dip. Anthony Thompson came from London to take a dip in the Ganga during the Maha Kumbh. He said that he was very "humbled and privileged" to be in Prayagraj. Thompson said that it was an "extraordinary experience" for him, and he had been dreaming of coming to Prayagraj for over 40 years. Thompson was quoted as saying by

ANI that his dip in the Ganga was not just swimming, but "much more elemental and essential for the spirit".

Another foreign devotee who took a bath in the confluence said that he visits the Ganga every year to take a dip. "It is a very good experience to be with other spiritual seekers. I think the holy dip is the best. Every year, I visit the Ganga in Rishikesh for a holy dip. I've been to Prayagraj once before and look forward to taking part in the Maha Kumbh," he told ANI. The 45-day Maha Kumbh, happening after a gap of 144 years, started at the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and the mystical Saraswati rivers on Monday, and over 45 crore devotees are expected to visit the event.

## From boosting defence logistics to tourism, here's why Z-Morh Tunnel is important

**NEW DELHI.** Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the 6.5-kilometer-long Z-Morh Tunnel in Jammu and Kashmir's Ganderbal district on Monday (January 13), marking a historic step in boosting connectivity between Srinagar and Sonamarg. The two-lane bi-directional road tunnel, built at an altitude of over 8,650 feet, will ensure year-round accessibility to the Sonamarg tourist resort, bypassing landslides and avalanche-prone areas.

The Z-Morh Tunnel, would not only connect roads but also bridge economic opportunities, boost defence logistics, and tourism potential, solidifying its place as a landmark project in Jammu and Kashmir.

**STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE FOR DEFENCE, ECONOMY**

Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari, who was present at the inaugural event, said that the tunnel, which has a capacity of handling 1000 vehicles per hour,

holds immense strategic importance, particularly for the armed forces.

"The inauguration of the tunnel ensures uninterrupted supply chains for military essentials, safeguarding lives by mitigating avalanche-related risks," said the Transport Minister. The minister further added that the tunnel also creates employment opportunities for local residents. Residents in Ganderbal are optimistic that the tunnel will boost the local economy and tackle unemployment.

"We are happy that now tourists can come to Sonamarg throughout the year. Earlier, the region remained cut off for four months due to snow. Now, not just Sonamarg, but areas like Drass and Kargil will remain connected. People in this area are poor, but this tunnel will provide year-round livelihood opportunities now," he added.

**BOOST FOR TOURISM**



The inauguration has been hailed as a turning point for tourism. Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah emphasised the tunnel's potential to transform Sonamarg into a premier winter sports destination, rivalling the popular Gulmarg skiing resort. "The opening of the Z-Morh tunnel will enable the development of Sonamarg resort in Ganderbal district as a winter sports destination, similar to the famous Gulmarg skiing resort town", said the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister. He

added that the project would unlock new opportunities for tourism, economic growth, and winter sports, bringing international attention to the region.

Tourist guide Fayaz Ahmad Sheikh, who has worked in Sonamarg for years, expressed relief that the region would now have a year-round tourist season. "The tunnel would bring tourists all year, providing better facilities and more income opportunities for locals, he said, adding that earlier the tourist season was limited to only six months in the region due to road closures caused by snowfall.

The project, completed at a cost of over Rs 2,700 crore, also features a parallel 7.5-meter-wide parallel escape tunnel for enhanced safety. It significantly reduces travel time between Srinagar and Sonamarg, allowing vehicles to travel at speeds of up to 70 km/h, compared to the previous 30 km/h on winding mountain roads.

**Finish before buying new products**

One of the best ways to ensure that you do not waste your old products is by using them until they are completely empty. For example, if you have a moisturiser left, squeeze it until there is nothing left in it anymore. Often when you do not finish a product, it keeps lying in your makeup kitty and with time it expires.

**Stop yourself from impulse purchases**

The only reason why your old products finds its way behind the new ones is because more often than not, women tend to buy beauty products simply on an impulse. If you already have a shade of red lipstick, wait for it to get over and then get another one of the same shade, rather than accumulating six lipsticks of the same colour scheme.

**Try out samples before you buy**

Trying out product samples before making a final purchase can



# 6 ways to avoid wasting Beauty Products

**How many times have you found yourself checking half finished products lying in your makeup kitty? For most women, even before they finish using a product completely, the urge to buy a new one takes form with the old product being pushed right behind the new ones. Here are a few ways to make sure that you do not waste your old products.**

prevent you from getting a skin rash or any other kind of skin inflammation. Further, you may also realise that you do not want to use the product because either the colour is not what you want or it doesn't go well with your skin complexion. Sampling the product will help you from recklessly purchasing it.

**Go for small-sized products**

You are bound to pick the larger size when it comes to buying beauty products. Though you cannot pick a small size for every product, like a lipstick, mascara or a lip liner, there are other items that are available in

small sizes. For example, if you want to buy an eye shadow, instead of picking an entire palette, try a palette of one or two shades that will be easier for you to finish.

**Check your stock always**

Before you begin buying a new product, always check whether you have something similar in your kitty.

**Opt for all-in-one items**

For those who love to stock on various types of cosmetics and beauty essentials, it is always safe to choose all-in-one products that are not only

## Myths debunked

# 8 skincare

**The truth and the fiction behind getting supple skin**

**Washing your face will cure acne:**

You may have heard this way too many times, but washing your face constantly throughout the day does not aid in reducing acne. In fact, it strips your skin of essential oil and makes your skin extremely dry and parched and susceptible to acne. Restrict to washing your face only twice or thrice in a day.

**Scrubbing often reduces excess oil on the face:**

It is believed that if you have oily skin, scrubbing your face twice or thrice in a week will reduce the excess sebum. But this is not true. In fact, scrubbing your face more often might end up bruising your skin and in turn cause blemishes or pimples.

**Pimples reduce with age:**

Most women believe that acne mostly happens to women in their teens and early 20s. However, acne has nothing to do with age. Not everyone outgrows it with age. Instead it reduces when you alter your lifestyle and have the right kind of food that

cleanses and detoxifies your system from within.

**Do not wear an SPF on a cloudy day:**

Just because it is raining heavily, does not mean that you don't require a sunscreen. Going without it even at this time of the year is a complete no-no. Even on a cloudy day, the UV rays of the sun are at its prime and if you go without a sunscreen, you will surely get tanned.

**Age spots are signs of getting older:**

Age spots or sun spots as popularly known, can occur at any age. The freckle-like spots on the skin are not really age spots, but happen when your skin has been exposed to the harmful UV rays of the sun. The sun-induced discolouration can be only treated by skin treatments that are done by dermatologists.

**Makeup can lead to skin breakouts:**

It is a popular belief among women that applying too much make-up can cause acne and pigmentation. Though applying a product that does not suit the skin does lead to breakouts, but that's not too often. However, you must choose a product that suits your skin type. Also, look for products that have 'non-comedogenic' or 'non-acnegenic' written on it.

**If you have dry skin, drink more water:**

It is said that if you have dry skin, drinking more water will bring moisture to your skin. However, drinking water has nothing to do with dry skin. Surely, it does help your face glow and clears toxins from your system but it does not necessarily bring moisture to your skin. When you have more water, it cleanses your system from within, thereby making your skin less prone to any skin-related problems.

**Expensive products are better:**

It is believed that only expensive brands and products go a long way in keeping your skin healthy and free from any skin-related problems. But the fact is that they almost do the same job that probably a less expensive product would do. It is actually your lifestyle choice and the kind of food on an everyday basis that keeps your system healthy from within.



## 5 Essential makeup tips for the summer



**It is that time of the year again, when the sun relentlessly shines down upon us.**



foundation, use a primer first, rather than applying the foundation directly on the skin. Silicone-based eyeshadows or the pressed ones are best for summer as they are less likely to cake due to the heat. Dust your eyelashes with powder and then apply mascara. That way, the mascara

While summer is a great time to experiment with colours and prints, for those of us who like to wear makeup, there is always the fear of sweat, turning your carefully made up face into a pile of melted mush. No one wants concealer streaks down their face now, do they?

Here are some tips and tricks which will help you keep your makeup in place during the hot summer months...

Sweat is not the only cause for melted makeup, oil too is a major factor. Make sure you use an oil-control facial cleanser or toner to reduce the oil on your face especially the T-zone.

Rather than using a foundation, use a tinted concealer or a tinted moisturizer for a light and sheer look. If you have to use

will cling to the powder and not run when you sweat. Plus it will give your lashes a fuller look. Of course, water-resistant mascara works best.

Lipsticks tend to last longer during the summer if you apply a base of foundation first. Stay away from lip gloss and opt for matte finishes or lipstains instead.



## Want to get your credit card's annual fee waived? Follow these steps

**NEW DELHI** Owning a credit card often comes with perks, but the annual fee can feel like a hidden cost. What if you could enjoy all the benefits without paying this fee? Surprisingly, many banks offer ways to get your credit card's annual fee waived—if you meet specific spending criteria.

### SPEND MORE, SAVE MORE

Some banks allow you to waive your annual fee by crossing a pre-defined spending threshold. For instance, several cards, like the Axis Bank Rewards Credit Card, waive a Rs 1,000 fee if you spend Rs 2 lakh annually. Similarly, the Axis Bank Freecharge Plus Credit Card removes fees for spending Rs 50,000 in a year, while the Axis Bank Cashback Credit Card waives its Rs 1,000 fee if you spend Rs 4 lakh. For those who want to avoid annual fees altogether, there are options like ICICI Bank's Platinum Credit Card, which has no joining or annual fees.

### HOW TO ENSURE FEE WAIVERS

To maximise your chances:

**Leverage regular spending:** Use your card for groceries, dining, travel, or other everyday expenses to reach the threshold.

**Check eligibility:** Before applying, confirm if the card offers a fee waiver on specific spending levels. Contact the bank: If you've hit the spending mark but still see a fee, call customer service to request a waiver. Be a loyal customer: Banks often reward long-standing customers with fee waivers, even if you don't meet the exact criteria.

### SMART SPENDING PAYS OFF

While fee waivers are attractive, it's essential to evaluate whether the card's benefits justify its costs. Cards offering rewards, cashback, or travel perks may be worth the fee if the returns outweigh the expense.

## Trading platform Groww plans IPO at \$6-8 billion valuation: Report

**NEW DELHI** Trading platform Groww is preparing to file for its initial public offering (IPO) within the next 10 to 12 months, reported TechCrunch. Quoting sources familiar with the company's plans, the report suggested that the Bengaluru-based trading platform aims to raise its valuation to between \$6 billion and \$8 billion. This marks a significant jump from its last funding round in October 2021, which valued the company at \$3 billion. If successful, Groww's listing will mark the first IPO by a digital trading platform in India, adding a new chapter to the rapidly expanding fintech landscape. The company has already begun discussions with investment banks and is expected to select advisors for the IPO soon, added the report.

To strengthen its position, Groww also made strategic moves last year by shifting its domicile to India from the U.S., aligning itself with local market regulations in preparation for the public offering.

Backed by major investors such as Peak XV, Tiger Global, and Alkeon, Groww has firmly established itself as a leader in India's competitive retail investing market. The platform boasts 13.2 million active users as of December, significantly surpassing its closest rival, Zerodha, which has 8.1 million users, according to National Stock Exchange data.

Groww's growth trajectory has also been impressive, having added between 325,000 to 550,000 new users each month, which is more than double that of its competitors.

## HCLTech share price flat ahead of Q3 earnings. What to expect

**NEW DELHI.** Shares of HCL Technologies fell slightly ahead of its Q3 earnings announcement later in the day. At 12:34 pm, HCLTech shares were trading marginally lower by 0.17% at Rs 1,992.20.

The IT giant is set to report its quarterly results with expectations of a modest rise in profit and revenue despite challenges in key business segments.

As investors wait for the results, here's a look at what brokerages are forecasting for the company. Brokerage firm Prabhudas Lilladher predicts a 3.9% year-on-year (YoY) increase in HCL Tech's net profit, which is expected to reach Rs 4,520 crore, up from Rs 4,350 crore in the same quarter last year. Revenue is anticipated to rise 6% YoY to Rs 30,200 crore, compared to Rs 28,450 crore in Q3 FY24. However, the brokerage expects a slight contraction in the EBIT margin, projecting a decrease of 54 basis points to 19.2%, down from 19.7% in the previous year.

Despite this, the brokerage firm forecasts a sequential improvement in the margin, which should grow by 62 basis points from the 18.6% recorded in the September quarter.

JM Financial is more optimistic, projecting an 8.5% YoY increase in profit to Rs 4,593.5 crore, along with a 5.3% rise in revenue to Rs 30,393 crore.

The brokerage expects the EBIT margin to reach 19.1%. It notes that the quarter's results will benefit from a \$20 million contribution from the one-month consolidation of CTG, along with anticipated 1.5% growth in IT Services and ERS/Product & Platform businesses in USD terms. However, wage hikes are expected to be a headwind, potentially impacting margins.

Brokerage firm Nuvama anticipates a 13.1% YoY increase in profit to Rs 4,790 crore and a 4.3% YoY rise in revenue to Rs 30,110 crore for Q3.

It also expects the company to slightly upgrade its FY25 revenue growth guidance to 4-5% CC YoY growth, from the earlier forecast of 3.5-5%.

# China's exports in December up 10.7 per cent, beating estimates as higher US tariffs loom

**HONG KONG.** China's exports in December grew at a faster-than-expected pace as factories rushed to fill orders in anticipation of higher tariffs threatened by U.S. President-elect Donald Trump once he takes office. Exports rose by 10.7% compared to the same month last year, surpassing economists' expectations of a 7% increase. Imports, on the other hand, rose by 1% year-on-year, defying analysts' forecasts of a 1.5% decline. As exports outpaced imports, China's trade surplus surged to 104.84 billion dollars.

Trump has pledged to raise tariffs on Chinese goods and close loopholes that exporters currently use to sell products more cheaply in the U.S. If these plans are enacted, they are expected to increase prices in the U.S. and squeeze sales and profit margins for Chinese exporters. However, Zichun Huang of Capital Economics believes China's



exports will remain strong in the near term as businesses rush to front-run the anticipated tariff hikes. "Outbound shipments are likely to stay resilient, supported by further gains in global market share, thanks to a weak real effective exchange rate," Huang wrote in a note. Nonetheless, she warned that exports could weaken later in the year if

Trump follows through on his tariff threats.

Officials in Beijing reported that the total value of China's imports and exports reached a record 43.85 trillion yuan (nearly \$6 trillion) in 2024, marking a 5% increase from the previous year. China remains the world's largest exporter and the primary trading partner of over 150 countries and regions, according to Wang Lingjun, deputy director-general of the Customs Administration. Despite a slowdown in other sectors of China's economy, partly due to the pandemic and a downturn in the housing industry, exports have surged. Under President Xi Jinping, the ruling Communist Party has been promoting the upgrading of factories and a shift towards high-tech manufacturing. The report highlighted that China's export of mechanical and electrical products increased by nearly

9% in 2024, with exports of high-end equipment growing by more than 40%. Specific sectors saw impressive growth, with exports of electric vehicles rising by 13%, 3D printers jumping almost 33%, and shipments of industrial robots surging 45%. E-commerce trade, including sales from companies like Temu, Shein, and Alibaba, reached 2.6 trillion yuan (\$350 billion), more than double the level seen in 2020. While China aims to increase its imports, the value of imports still lagged behind exports, partly due to lower prices for key commodities such as oil and iron ore. Officials noted that there is still significant room for growth in imports, citing China's large market capacity and vast potential. However, China is blocked from importing some products due to trade restrictions, particularly in strategically sensitive areas such as advanced semiconductors and military-related items.

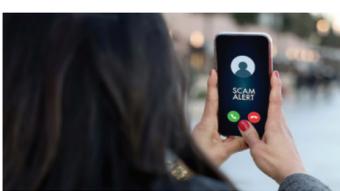
## NPCI issues clarification on 'Jumped Deposit Scam.' 3 key things to know

**NEW DELHI** As digital payments revolutionise India, fraudsters are devising new tactics to exploit unsuspecting users. The latest concern, dubbed the 'Jumped Deposit Scam,' has sparked fears amongst Unified Payments Interface (UPI) users. However, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has assured users of UPI's robust security and clarified misconceptions surrounding the alleged scam.

### HOW THE SCAM OPERATES

In the Jumped Deposit Scam, fraudsters transfer small amounts of money to a victim's account to build trust. They then send payment collection requests, urging the victim to refund the amount. The scam escalates when users, in their haste, authorise these requests by entering their UPI PIN, mistakenly believing it's required for verifying account balances. NPCI stated that a UPI PIN is never needed to receive funds and is only used to

authorise outgoing payments. Cyber experts reveal that scammers manipulate victims by creating urgency and using emotional appeals, such as claims of mistaken transfers or



fabricated emergencies. These tactics exploit human psychology, making even financially savvy individuals vulnerable to fraud.

### NPCI'S CLARIFICATIONS AND SAFETY TIPS

NPCI has reiterated that no cases of this scam have been observed on the UPI platform. The organisation emphasises that UPI transactions are device-based

and require explicit user authorisation with a PIN. Merely opening a UPI app or entering a PIN does not initiate or approve any transaction.

To protect yourself, NPCI advises scepticism towards unexpected deposits. Avoid clicking on suspicious links or responding to unverified requests. If you receive an unsolicited deposit, consult your bank or UPI service provider. Educating yourself about digital payments and staying alert are key to preventing fraud.

### STAY VIGILANT

While scams like the Jumped Deposit Scam highlight the need for vigilance, NPCI's clarifications reaffirm UPI's security and reliability. By understanding how UPI works and being cautious, users can confidently embrace the convenience of digital payments without falling prey to cybercriminals.

## Rupee crashes 27 paise to hit all-time low of 86.31 against US dollar in early trade

**MUMBAI.** The rupee has made one of its worst opening sessions on Monday, plunging past the 86 level, losing as many as 27 paise to touch 86.31, after a blowout US jobs report has left the market believing that the likelihood of the Federal Reserve leaving the rates high for longer than expected.

The rupee opened at 86.12 but quickly fell to the historic low of 86.31 in early trading, registering a 27-paise loss from its previous close of 86.04 last Friday. This slide was primarily driven by a strong US dollar, along with volatile global market conditions. Forex traders told the that a surge in crude prices (sniffing the USD 81/barrel mark), persistent foreign capital outflows, and a negative trend in the domestic equity markets also added pressure on the rupee. The benchmarks had a bloody day to begin with Monday losing almost 1.25 per cent in the opening one hour of trade which



marginally recovered later on still down about 75 bps from the Friday close. US employers added 2,56,000 jobs last month, compared to the 1,60,000 jobs expected, while the unemployment rate unexpectedly dipped to 4.1 per cent in the world's largest economy.

US interest rate futures show that market is expecting the Fed to cut rates only once this year, as against the two the Fed chair had said after the December

review. The dollar index rose to a more than two-year high on Friday, to nearly 110. The 10-year US yield climbed to a 14-month high. For speculators who are already into bearish bets on the rupee, the US job numbers provide one more reason to hold onto them, a currency trader at a public sector bank has said. "Having said that I think we are now near levels where a number of negatives for the rupee are in the price. Plus, we are long overdue a decent correction," the trader added. Options pricing suggests rupee is likely to weaken further and some are expecting the unit to drop to 88 over the medium term and plumb even to 90-92 levels in the next 6-10 months. According to forex traders, the dollar was bolstered by better-than-expected job growth in the US, which led to a rise in benchmark US treasury yields amid expectations that the Federal Reserve may slow its interest rate cuts.

# Laxmi Dental IPO: Should you bid for the Rs 698.06 crore public listing?

**Laxmi Dental IPO will remain open for subscription until January 15, 2024 with allotment for shares expected to be completed on January 16, 2025.**

**NEW DELHI.** The initial public offering (IPO) of Laxmi Dental Limited was booked fully a few hours after it opened for bidding on Monday looking to raise Rs 698.06. Laxmi Dental IPO will remain open for subscription until January 15, 2024 with allotment for shares expected to be completed on January 16, 2025. Laxmi Dental IPO was subscribed 2.39 times overall on its first day of bidding as of latest update. The retail portion of the



issue saw the highest interest, being subscribed 7.2 times. Meanwhile, there was no subscription recorded from qualified institutional buyers (QIBs), and the non-institutional investor (NII) segment was subscribed 3.96 times.

The price band for the IPO has been set between Rs 407 and Rs 428 per share. Retail investors can apply for a minimum of 33 shares, translating to an initial investment of Rs 14,124. For small non-institutional investors (sNII), the minimum application size is 15 lots, which equals 495 shares and requires an investment of Rs 2,11,860.

Meanwhile, for large non-institutional investors (bNII), the minimum requirement is 71 lots, or 2,343 shares, amounting to Rs 10,02,804.

### SHOULD YOU SUBSCRIBE?

Master Capital Services Ltd in its IPO report said that the global dental consumables market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 10.5% from USD 177.4 billion in 2023 to USD 356.8 billion in 2030, and emerging countries such as India and China are expected to witness higher growth compared to developed countries.

It further added that the company is one of the very few organised players in dental

laboratories segment having sufficient scale of operations, following quality standards, and catering to both domestic and international markets.

"The company continues to scale up branded product offerings and undertake product enhancements of existing dental products and launch new dental products. Investors looking to invest can invest in the IPO for the long term," said Master Capital Services Ltd.

### LATEST GMP FOR LAXMI DENTAL IPO

The latest grey market premium (GMP) for the Laxmi Dental IPO stands at Rs 145 as of January 13, 2025, at 10:55 AM. Given the IPO's price band of Rs 428, the estimated listing price is projected to be around Rs 573. This calculation is based on adding the cap price to the current GMP. If these projections hold, investors could see an estimated gain of 33.88% per share upon listing. Laxmi Dental IPO raised Rs 314.13 crore from anchor investors ahead of opening for subscription. Laxmi Dental IPO is expected to be listed on both the BSE and NSE, with the tentative listing date scheduled for Monday, 20 January 2025.

## Boss bought Lamborghini, thanked our 90-hour workweek: Investor adds to L&T memes

**NEW DELHI** The suggestion of a 90-hour workweek by L&T Chairman SN Subrahmanyan has sparked widespread controversy, raising important questions about work-life balance. Subrahmanyan's comments, which recommended employees work longer hours—including Sundays—have ignited strong reactions across the business world and beyond.

### VIJAY KEDIA'S SARCASTIC TAKE

Veteran investor Vijay Kedia shared a sarcastic remark on X, humorously highlighting the disconnect between employee effort and employer reward. He wrote, "A heartfelt moment at the office today: Our boss just bought a Lamborghini! We gathered to congratulate him, and his words truly inspired us: 'Thank you all for this achievement. Without you, it wouldn't have been possible. Your relentless 90-hour weeks made this Lamborghini a reality. Today, I promise you all..... if you continue to work this hard, I'll buy another one next year!'"

### INDUSTRY TITANS AND CELEBRITIES SPEAK UP

While Subrahmanyan's remarks drew support from some, industry giants like Anand Mahindra and Harsh Goenka offered a contrasting perspective. During the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue 2025, Mahindra stated that impactful change can happen in just 10 hours, highlighting that productivity stems from effective time management rather than extended work hours. Goenka, chairperson of RPG Enterprises, responded humorously, "Why not rename Sunday to 'Sun-duty' and make 'day off' a mythical concept?" He stressed the importance of work-life balance, warning against turning life into a "perpetual office shift." Adar Poonawalla, CEO of Serum Institute of India, echoed Mahindra's views, highlighting the value of "work-life balance." Poonawalla jokingly added, "Even my wife loves staring at me on Sundays." Bollywood star Deepika Padukone, known for her advocacy of mental health, also voiced her concern. Sharing a screenshot of Subrahmanyan's statement on Instagram, she remarked, "And they just made it worse," pointing to the detrimental effects of overworking employees. THE CALL FOR A SMARTER APPROACH TO WORK

The 90-hour workweek debate has illuminated a broader conversation about the need for smarter work strategies, not longer hours.

## NEWS BOX

## Barcelona coach Flick hails 'incredible team' after Super Cup win vs Real Madrid

New Delhi . FC Barcelona coach Hansi Flick praised his team after winning his first trophy at the club. Barcelona, who struggled last season under the coaching of Xavi have won their first trophy in an year. Under Flick's coaching, Barcelona beat their bitter rivals Real Madrid 5-2 in the Spanish Super Cup Final. Barcelona came back from one goal down to win the match 5-2 in Jeddah on Sunday, 12 January. Barcelona scored 4 goals in the first half itself and then put in a steely show of defence after their goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny was sent off in the 56th minute. "I'm very proud of the team, the staff, the club, the fans... everyone who supports Barça. I am proud to manage such an incredible team."

"After Szczesny was sent off, it wasn't easy for anyone. We the coaches had a little discussion and I thank them all because in the end we made the right decision. And Inaki did a great job and we defended as a team. I loved it."



Flick credited the team for playing as a unit and, more importantly, for playing to win, a spirit that was missing in December last year. Last month, Barcelona suffered an unexpected form slump that displaced them from the top of the LaLiga table.

"We are a team. You could see that after the win, but it always shows. We stick together and our aim is to learn from every game. At big clubs, the goal is to win titles. And that's what we're working towards. We are very happy and proud but we need to keep showing that we are the best in every game," Flick concluded. On Sunday, Lamine Yamal, Raphinha, Robert Lewandowski and Alejandro Balde were on the scoresheet for Barcelona. The team scored 4 goals in the first half itself to dent Real Madrid's hopes of winning the game. Raphinha was the star of the show, scoring two stunners against Thibaut Courtois.

## Karma hit me: Stefanos Tsitsipas reflects on shock Australian Open first-round loss

Melbourne. Eleventh seed Stefanos Tsitsipas suffered a shock first-round exit at the Australian Open on Monday, January 13. The 2023 finalist was defeated by 20-year-old American Alex Michelsen, 5-7, 6-3, 2-6, 4-6, in a match lasting 2 hours and 43 minutes at John Cain Arena in Melbourne. The Australian Open has traditionally been a successful tournament for Tsitsipas, with the Greek star having reached the semi-finals three times before making the final in 2023. Explaining his shock defeat - the first big upset of Australian Open 2025 - Tsitsipas attributed it to a lack of match practice in the new season. The World No. 12 had withdrawn from the doubles competition, where he was scheduled to partner his brother, Petros Tsitsipas, in a bid to conserve energy for the singles event.

"It's quite ironic. My whole idea was to try to go deep into the Australian Open. I knew the



first thing I had to consider was not playing doubles," Tsitsipas said after his defeat.

"I guess karma hit me. I was not able to deliver or play the way I had hoped to at this year's event. The whole purpose was to conserve energy and be fresher for the later stages of the tournament." The match saw fluctuating fortunes for both players. Michelsen dominated early, securing a 7-5, 6-3 lead, but Tsitsipas rallied to win the third set 6-2. As Michelsen edged closer to victory, nerves set in; the American committed three double faults and surrendered two service breaks in the fourth set. Despite his struggles, Tsitsipas, who appeared dejected throughout, double-faulted at 5-all to hand back a crucial break. Michelsen capitalised on the opportunity, sealing the match without further errors. Since reaching the Australian Open final in 2023, Tsitsipas has failed to progress beyond the quarter-finals at any Grand Slam. His struggles continued with a first-round exit at last year's US Open and two defeats in the three matches he has played so far in the 2025 season.

## Abhishek Sharma says IndiGo staff misbehaved at Delhi airport, ruined his holiday

**← Cricketer Abhishek Sharma lashed out at the popular airline, saying its staff misbehaved with him at the Delhi airport on Monday, January 13. Abhishek said he had only a day's holiday to spend with his close ones before he headed to Kolkata for the opening match of a T20I series against England.**

New Delhi . Indian cricketer Abhishek Sharma criticised IndiGo Airlines on Monday, January 13, alleging misconduct by a staff member at Delhi Airport. Abhishek expressed frustration, stating that his single day of holiday was ruined after

missing a flight despite arriving on time. Abhishek, 24, is set to join the Indian team for the much-awaited five-match T20I series against England, starting January 22.

In a strongly worded statement shared on social media, Abhishek claimed he was unnecessarily redirected between counters, causing him to miss the flight. He named a specific staff member and demanded action.

"I had the worst experience with IndiGo at Delhi airport, and the behaviour of staff, especially counter manager Ms Sushmita Mittal, was absolutely unacceptable. I arrived on time at the correct counter, but they redirected me unnecessarily to another counter. Only to tell me later that check-in was closed, making me miss my flight. I only had a one-day holiday, which has now been completely ruined. To make it even worse, they are offering no further helpful assistance. This is by far the worst airline experience, and worst staff management I've ever had,"



Abhishek Sharma said in his Instagram story. Abhishek Sharma was recently named in India's 15-man squad for the T20I series against England. He had been representing Punjab in the Vijay Hazare Trophy. Abhishek played for Punjab as recently on January 11. He was part of the XI that lost to Maharashtra in Vadodara and bowed out of the competition. It is likely Abhishek had planned to spend his brief holiday with family and friends before joining the national squad in Kolkata, where the first match of the series is scheduled for January

22. The players are expected to arrive a few days earlier to prepare under the leadership of Suryakumar Yadav and head coach Gautam Gambhir.

## ALL EYES ON ABHISHEK IN ENGLAND T20Is

Abhishek Sharma was in fine form during the Vijay Hazare Trophy, India's premier domestic 50-over tournament.

The left-hander scored 467 runs, including a century and three fifties, in eight matches. Abhishek made a solid start to his T20I career, scoring a century in only his second match at the highest level — against Zimbabwe in Harare in July 2024.

However, he struggled for consistency, going seven innings without a score of 20 or more. Questions were raised about his place in the T20I squad after failures in the first two knocks of India's tour of South Africa in November 2024. A few pundits defended him, arguing that Abhishek is a natural aggressor and should be allowed occasional failures. Abhishek regained some form towards the latter half of the tour, scoring a fifty in Centurion and a crucial 36 in Johannesburg.

## Champions Trophy: Pat Cummins to lead as Australia announce 15-member squad

New Delhi . Australia have announced their preliminary squad for the Champions Trophy 2025. Chief of selectors George Bailey named 15 players in the squad, including the injured fast bowling duo Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood. Cummins, who is the ODI captain of Australia, is currently on a family break after the team's victorious Border-Gavaskar Trophy campaign. While the break was decided beforehand, Australia notified after the Test series that Cummins had an injury concern as well. Bar Cummins, pacer Josh Hazlewood has also been named in the side, despite missing half the Border-Gavaskar Trophy due to a back injury. Australia have named a strong squad, which includes two fresh call-ups (for ICC tournament) - Matt Short and Aaron Hardie. Short has been in blazing form off late, and has hit a hundred in the Big Bash League



against Brisbane Heat. Australia have made three changes to their regular squad. Short replaces David Warner, who retired from international cricket at the start of 2024. Injured Cameron Green has been ruled out, while Sean Abbott has missed the 15-member pack.

## Australia Preliminary Squad for Champions Trophy

Pat Cummins (c), Alex Carey, Nathan Ellis,

Aaron Hardie, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Marnus Labuschagne, Mitchell Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Matt Short, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, Adam Zampa Australia pacer Nathan Ellis has been rewarded for strong Big Bash League form with the Hobart Hurricanes, who have locked in a finals berth in Australia's domestic T20 tournament. All-rounders Matt Short and Aaron Hardie will offer the side much-needed versatility in the tiring wickets of Pakistan and UAE. Short has been a One Day International mainstay for the Aussies since Warner's retirement in November 2023, while Hardie has also represented Australia in the format cricket 11 times. "It offers a variety of options for touring management depending on the opposition and the conditions that may present in Pakistan," said selection chair George Bailey.

## India not doing well in Test cricket: New BCCI secretary vows to make changes

New Delhi . Newly appointed Board of Control for Cricket in India secretary Devajit Saikia has admitted that India is struggling in red-ball cricket. Speaking to reporters in Mumbai after being elected unopposed, Saikia said that it would be a big challenge to return India to its former glory. India have lost two back to back Test series against New Zealand and Australia. After losing 0-3 to New Zealand at home, India were hammered by Australia 3-1 in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Saikia said that the BCCI is speaking to all the experts and trying to find a positive outcome. He added that India will take it series by series and at the moment focus on the white-ball bilateral series against England.

"It is a big challenge because if you see, we are not doing good in Test cricket in the last two series against Australia as well as New Zealand. So, immediately we are having the England series so far as T20 is concerned and thereafter the big event of the Champions Trophy in Dubai. We have to think about one

## El Clasico: 10-men Barcelona thrash Real Madrid 5-2 to win Spanish Super Cup

New Delhi. Barcelona came from an early goal down to beat Real Madrid 5-2 in a thrilling Spanish Super Cup final on Sunday, January 12. Playing at Jeddah, Barcelona secured their 15th title in the competition's history.

Despite being reduced to 10 men following a red card for goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny in the 56th minute, Barcelona won the match owing to their stunning first-half performance. This was Barcelona's first silverware in over a year.

Real Madrid made a dream start when Kylian Mbappé opened the scoring in the fifth minute, finishing a solo run with a powerful shot inside the far post. However, Barcelona responded quickly, levelling the score through Lamine Yamal in the 22nd minute. Yamal's sensational run from the right side saw the youngster cut back and calmly slot the ball past Thibaut Courtois' left side.

Robert Lewandowski then gave Barcelona the lead in the 36th minute, converting a penalty after Eduardo Camavinga fouled Gavi in the

box. The Catalan side extended their advantage just minutes later with a brilliant header from Raphinha in the 39th minute,



thanks to a perfect cross by Jules Koundé. Alejandro Balde added a fourth in stoppage time, finishing after a poor Real Madrid corner, making it 4-1 at the break. Real Madrid started the second half with renewed hope when Rodrygo struck the crossbar early on, but Barcelona swiftly extinguished any

chance of a comeback. Raphinha made it 5-1 in the 48th minute, slaloming through the Real defence before calmly finishing.

The match took another twist in the 56th minute when Barcelona goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny was sent off for fouling Mbappé in the box. Rodrygo scored from the resulting free kick to pull one back for Real Madrid, but Barcelona's defense, led by substitute keeper Inaki Peña, stood firm to seal a 5-2 victory.

Barcelona's win ended Real Madrid's hopes of winning their third title of the season, following their triumphs in the European Super Cup and the Intercontinental Cup. The result also marked a significant achievement for Barcelona, who had not won a trophy since last season. After the game, Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said: "A goal for big clubs is always to win titles, that's why we work hard. But now we have to show it in the next games. Real Madrid made many mistakes, and we knew how to take advantage of them to control the match."



(tournament) at a time. We have had a lot of discussions during the last two days and we are trying to streamline; whatever our drawbacks are, we have to overcome them," he told reporters at the BCCI headquarters.

"We are taking all the expert opinion also. So, we look forward to a very positive outcome from these discussions and exercise. Our immediate challenge is the England series (at home) and thereafter the Champions Trophy. I will carry forward the work done by ICC chairman and former BCCI secretary Jay Shah," he added.

## WHO IS DEVAJIT SAIKIA?

Hailing from Assam, Devajit Saikia has a multifaceted background that includes a career in cricket, law, and administration. As a former first-class cricketer, Saikia played four matches between 1990 and 1991, serving as a wicketkeeper. Although his cricketer career was relatively short, he managed to collect 53 runs and managed to exact 9 dismissals.

## After calling Gautam Gambhir hypocrite, Manoj Tiwary blames media for editing

New Delhi. Former India cricketer Manoj Tiwary has clarified his stance days after calling India head coach Gautam Gambhir a hypocrite. Taking to Twitter, Tiwary has blamed the media for editing and playing one particular chunk in his 20-minute interview.

On January 9, in an interview with News18, the former Bengal captain had lashed out at the current head coach. Tiwary had criticised Gautam Gambhir, calling the India head coach a hypocrite who "doesn't walk the talk". Tiwary questioned Gambhir's appointment as head coach, claiming the former opener lacks clarity and a definitive coaching style. His strongly worded remarks came in the wake of India's loss in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and their failure to reach the World Test Championship



final. "Gautam Gambhir is a hypocrite. He doesn't do what he says," Manoj Tiwary told News18 Bangla.

"What is the use of a bowling coach? Whatever the coach says, he will agree. Morne Morkel came from Lucknow Super Giants. Abhishek Nayyar was at Kolkata Knight Riders with Gambhir, and the Indian head coach knows

that he will not go against his instructions," Tiwary added. However, three days later, Tiwary clarified his stance after criticism from former cricketer Aakash Chopra. Chopra had accused the former Bengal star of joining the criticism bandwagon against Gambhir. Manoj Tiwary addressed the video to Aakash Chopra and said that he only said what he believed was right.

"I was at my coaching centre, sitting there after practice. The local media came there to take my interview. We spoke for 20-25 minutes, and you know that when these people [media] take interviews, they go back to the office and edit it — whatever is convenient, what they feel is required will be kept. They will try to keep whatever there is demand for," Manoj Tiwary clarified.

"There were two things Aakash bhai [Aakash Chopra] said. I am pretty sure that he may not

have seen the interview of 20 minutes. And these four-five lines which came out from my interviews, he might have just seen that. I just want to clear this, Aakash bhai," he added.

"I like Aakash, I respect him, [he gives his] honest opinion. I feel it is important to clear this up. Aakash bhai said, 'Manoj behti Ganga mein haath dho raha hai [Manoj is washing his hands in the flowing Ganga],' (an idiom meaning to go with the tide), after people like Sunil Gavaskar and Sanjay Manjrekar were also criticising Gautam Gambhir. There is no such thing, Aakash bhai.

I have no need to wash my hands in the flowing Ganga. The river is close by, and I can wash my hands there any time, but I do not wish to. I had not been following what those people said. I just said what I felt in the interview," concluded Tiwary.

Virat Kohli Wraps His Arms Around

# Anushka Sharma

At Gateway Of India, Stunned Fans Look On In

Star couple Virat Kohli and Anushka Sharma were spotted at the Gateway of India in Mumbai as they made their way to the jetty from their luxury car. Anushka kept it casual yet chic in a blue oversized shirt paired with black shorts and pink flats, accessorising her look with a black clutch. Virat sported an all-black ensemble, keeping it simple and stylish. As the paparazzi greeted them with a cheerful "Good morning," Virat acknowledged them with a quick hello and returned the greeting. However, Anushka chose to avoid engaging with the paps and walked ahead. In another video, Virat can be seen putting his arm around Anushka's shoulders as they waited for their speedboat to dock. Despite the brief interaction, neither of them stopped to pose for the camera.



The couple has just returned from Australia, where the Indian cricket team faced a tough 3-1 defeat in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

Virat and Anushka also recently visited Premanand Govind Sharan Maharaj, bringing along their children, Vamika and Akaay. A video that surfaced on social media showed the couple greeting the Maharaj with folded hands, sitting on the floor as they listened to his teachings. During her conversation with the Maharaj, Anushka mentioned that she listens to his spiritual talks. "Pichli baar jab hum aaye the toh mann mein kuch sawaal the, mujhe laga ke pochungi lekin jo bhi baitha tha wahan pe un sabne kuch na kuch vaisa sawaal kar liya tha. Jab aapke pass aane ke hum

baat kar rahe the, main man hi man aapse baat kar rahe the, jo bhi sawaal mere aa rahe the," she said. Virat Kohli was also seen looking at her, with a smile on his face.

Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli met in 2013 during an ad shoot and kept their relationship private.

They married in Italy in 2017. The couple welcomed their first child, a daughter named Vamika, in January 2021, and a baby boy in February last year. On the work front, Anushka has taken a break from acting since her 2018 film Zero, but she's set to make a comeback in Chakda Xpress, a biographical film on cricket legend Jhulan Goswami, marking her return to the big screen.



Ranveer Singh's Shaktimaan-Inspired Superhero Film May Feature Wamiqa Gabbi As The Female Lead



Wamiqa Gabbi has been turning heads online since her standout performance in Baby John alongside Varun Dhawan and Keerthy Suresh. After exclusively breaking the news of her involvement in Akshay Kumar's Bhooth Bangla, fresh reports now suggest that she may soon share the screen with Ranveer Singh in a superhero film inspired by the legendary Shaktimaan. As per a report by Mid-Day, Wamiqa is the frontrunner for Minnal Murali director Basil Joseph's ambitious superhero project. This Bollywood adaptation of the iconic Indian superhero Shaktimaan will be led by Ranveer Singh.

A source close to the project revealed that the Baby John star continues to attract attention for her versatility in both Hindi and regional cinema. The actress is also rumored to be in talks for a Telugu film opposite Nani. "While discussions are still ongoing, the potential pairing of Wamiqa and Ranveer in Basil's film would bring a fresh dynamic to a project that's been in development for five years," the source shared. Though no official confirmation has been made, insiders report that pre-production is underway. Director Basil Joseph, despite not being fluent in Hindi, has been conducting script readings and meetings with Ranveer in Mumbai.

"Once the script is locked and schedules are finalized, the casting will be confirmed," said the source, adding that Ranveer Singh is currently wrapping up Aditya Dhar's spy thriller and will shift his focus to the superhero film after March.

Earlier, Pinkvilla reported that Shaktimaan has been in the writing phase for over three years. Directed by Basil Joseph and backed by Sony Pictures India and Sajid Nadiadwala, the film is expected to go on floors in May 2025, aiming for a grand release in 2026. This promises to be one of Bollywood's most ambitious superhero projects.

Is Ameesha Patel Dating Nirvaan Birla? He Clears The Air: 'We Were Both In Dubai...'



Ameesha Patel sparked dating rumors in November last year after sharing a delightful picture with entrepreneur and singer Nirvaan Birla during their time in Dubai. The image, showing the duo dressed in matching black outfits and sharing smiles, quickly went viral, prompting fans to speculate about a potential relationship. However, Nirvaan has now set the record straight, confirming their bond is purely platonic. In an interview with the Free Press Journal, Nirvaan clarified, "Ameesha and I are not dating. She is a family friend and has known my father since their school days. We were in Dubai because I was shooting for my music album, which she features in."

The rumors originated when Ameesha captioned the photo, "DUBAI — lovely evening with my darling @nirvaanbirla," accompanied by red heart emojis. The post, which even garnered a like from Nirvaan's father, Yash Birla, ignited a flurry of comments. Fans called them a "beautiful couple" and wrote messages like, "Happy you finally found your soulmate" and "You two look adorable together."

For the uninitiated, Nirvaan Birla is a successful entrepreneur and singer, known for initiatives like Birla Brainiacs and Birla Open Minds. As the son of Yashvardhan and Avanti Birla, he is continuing his family's legacy of excellence in business. Ameesha Patel, meanwhile, is enjoying a career resurgence. She recently celebrated the re-release of her iconic debut film, Kaho Naa Pyaar Hai, alongside Hrithik Roshan. Additionally, she starred in 2023's blockbuster Gadar 2, the sequel to the 2001 classic Gadar: Ek Prem Katha. The film, directed by Anil Sharma, was a massive box office success, earning over Rs 500 crore in India.

Set against the backdrop of the 1971 Indo-Pak war, Gadar 2 follows Tara Singh's (Sunny Deol) mission to rescue his son Jeete (Utkarsh Sharma) from Pakistan. Despite receiving mixed critical reviews, the movie's patriotic narrative, emotional depth, and nostalgia struck a chord with audiences, making it one of the highest-grossing films of the year. A star-studded celebration of its success featured Bollywood icons like Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, and Aamir Khan. Ameesha is also part of Netflix's upcoming documentary, The Roshans. Reflecting on her involvement, she shared, "I'm absolutely looking forward to watching The Roshans."

# Preity Zinta

Assures Fans She's 'Safe As Of Now' Amid LA Wildfires: 'I Never Thought I'd See...'

As the wildfires rage across Los Angeles, Bollywood star Preity Zinta took to social media to update fans about her safety and express her heartbreak over the devastation. Preity, who resides in the U.S. with her husband, financial analyst Gene Goodenough, reassured her followers, saying she is "safe as of now" but deeply affected by the ongoing crisis. Sharing her experience on X, Preity wrote, "I never thought I'd see a day when fires would ravage neighborhoods around us in LA. Friends and families



are either evacuated or on high alert, ash is falling from smoggy skies like snow, and there's fear and uncertainty with toddlers and grandparents by our side." She added, "I'm heartbroken at the devastation around us and grateful to God ?? that we are safe for now. My thoughts and prayers are with those displaced and those who've lost everything. A big thank you to the firefighters and everyone helping to save lives and property. Stay safe, everyone??"

Fans of the actor poured in their support. One follower commented, "Take care of yourself, Preity. Thoughts

are with you and everyone affected." Another wrote, "It's heartbreaking to see this. Stay strong and safe."

Preity isn't the only Bollywood star caught in the chaos. Nora Fatehi, also in LA, shared her harrowing experience on Instagram. She revealed, "We just got an evacuation order. I quickly packed my stuff and I'm heading toward the airport. I hope my flight doesn't get canceled because this is terrifying. I've never experienced anything like this." Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who resides in LA with her husband Nick Jonas and daughter Malti Marie, also shared her thoughts. Posting photos and videos of the wildfire's impact, she wrote, "My thoughts are with everyone. I hope we can all stay safe tonight." The California wildfires have caused widespread destruction, with thousands displaced, homes reduced to ashes, and many others on high alert.

