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Deposed Bangladesh PM Hasina says death was minutes away as she fled Bangladesh



New Delhi, Jan.18: Deposed Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina has said she and her younger sister Sheikh Rehana escaped death by just 20-25 minutes on August 5 last year when her Awami League government was toppled in a student-led mass uprising.

minutes. I feel surviving the killings on August 21, surviving the large bomb in Kotalipara, or surviving on August 5, 2024, there must be a will of Allah, the hand of Allah. Otherwise, I wouldn't have survived this time," she is heard saying in Bangla in the audio clip.

Soft Hindutva takes centre stage as parties play religious card

New Delhi, Jan. 18: The Delhi election campaign is tinged with saffron as a jostle is on between the ruling AAP and the opposition BJP to become the biggest benefactors of the priests and the like.

Shah raised the slogan "Jai Shri Ram" and urged the slum dwellers to become Delhi's "liberators" by changing the government. The BJP accused the

was verifying voters in the Valmiki Mandir area but doing nothing about mosques and dargahs. He said the EC must refrain from "targeting and defaming" Hindus at the instance of the AAP chief.



ruling party of filing applications for the deletion of the names of 44 voters in the Valmiki Mandir area, accusing Kejriwal of being "anti-Dalit."

UP gov proposes 'no helmet, no fuel' policy to curb road accidents

Lucknow, Jan 18: The Uttar Pradesh Transport Department has proposed a strict 'no helmet, no fuel' policy across cities in the state in an effort to reduce road accidents and fatalities involving two-wheelers.



Yogi Adityanath earlier this month during a review of road safety measures in the state. The CM had noted that 25,000-26,000 lives are lost annually in the state due to road accidents.

Uttarakhand's first modern madrasa to offer NCERT curriculum

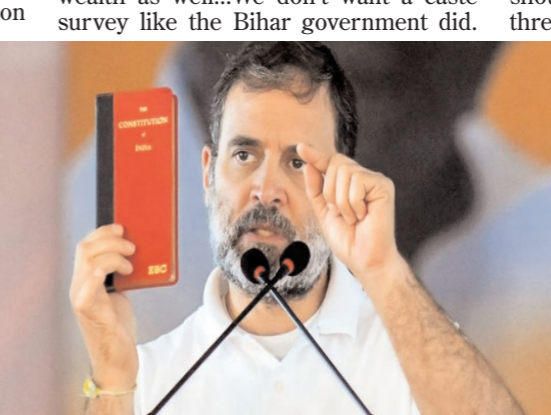
Dehradun, Jan.18: The Uttarakhand Waqf Board has set up the state's first modern madrasa offering general education under the NCERT curriculum with Sanskrit as an optional subject besides Arabic.

Nitish Kumar government's caste survey was to fool Bihar: Rahul Gandhi

Patna, Jan 18: Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Saturday alleged that the caste survey conducted by the Nitish Kumar government in Bihar was an exercise to fool the people.

but their participation in the country's wealth as well...We don't want a caste survey like the Bihar government did.

India) that all of the wealth of India should only go into the hands of two to three people...In today's India, the MLAs and MPs have no power," Gandhi said.



The exercise which the Bihar government had done was just to befool people," the Congress leader said, according to PTI.

Suspect detained at Chhattisgarh's Durg railway station

Raipur, Jan 18: A 31-year-old man suspected of stabbing Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan has been detained by the Railway Protection Force (RPF) at Durg railway station in Chhattisgarh, officials said.

bing, was traveling on Jnaneshwari Express (Train No. 12101). The Mumbai immediately alerted their counterparts at Rajnandgaon station, which lies on the Mumbai-Howrah route before Durg.



Police shared his mobile phone tower location and a photograph to aid in identification. Acting on the tip-off, the RPF

found the suspect in a room at the Mumbai-Howrah route before Durg. However, the suspect could not be located there. Two teams were subsequently deployed at Durg railway station.

A recent McKinsey Global Survey reveals a striking fact: nearly 90% of executives and managers acknowledge that their organisations either currently face skill gaps or anticipate them within the next five years.

What went inside court room where Sanjoy Roy was held guilty

Kolkata, Jan 18: Sanjoy Roy, who was standing in the witness box on the right side of court room facing the judge, pleaded innocence and maintained that he was being framed.

judge said in a packed room. Roy, who was standing in the witness box on the right side of court room facing the judge, however, pleaded



innocence and maintained that he was being framed. "I am innocent. I have a Rudraksh garland around my neck. Had I committed the crime it would have snapped that day. I am being framed. Others who were there have not been questioned," said a visibly agitated Roy, as his counsel intervened to calm him down.

court declined to hear Roy saying that he would be heard at 12.30pm on Monday before the quantum of sentence is read out around 2.30pm later that day.

the second floor of Sealdah court, where the hearing was scheduled to be held, was packed with lawyers, policemen and media.

in the order," the judge said during the proceeding which lasted for just 5 minutes. The victim's parents who were seated on a bench in the court room stood up after the verdict was pronounced and Roy was taken away by the cops.

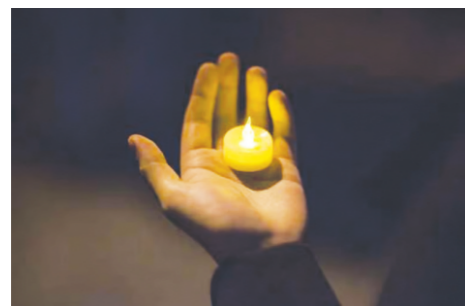


## NEWS BOX

## Seven-year-old boy with special needs found dead in Bengaluru lake

**BENGALURU.** A seven-year-old boy with special needs, who went missing from his Gempark Layout residence in Sarjapur in Bengaluru Rural district on Thursday afternoon, was found dead in a nearby lake around 11.30 am on Friday.

Elvin D'Souza was riding his cycle outside his house around 2.30 pm on Thursday. His mother was with him, but she went inside the house as a washing machine technician had come for repair. When she came out around 3 pm, she could not find her son. She and her mother started searching for



him in the locality. As he was not found, his father filed a missing complaint in Sarjapur police station. The police checked the CCTV footage of where he was last seen in the vicinity, near Pushpam Lush County Recreational Area in Gudigattahalli, which was close by to his house. He was seen near a water tank till 2.44 pm. Later he could not be sighted. The boy's pictures were also circulated on social media in an effort to trace him, asking public to contact his parents if they found the boy. The Sarjapura police, who have registered a case of unnatural death, are checking if there was any foul play behind the death. Further investigations are on.

## PIL on stampede: Andhra Pradesh HC posts matter next week

**VIJAYAWADA.** The Andhra Pradesh High Court bench of Justice Kanchireddy Suresh Reddy and Justice Kuncham Maheswara Rao on Friday upheld the court registry's objections over inclusion of names of the Chief Minister and the Governor's Secretary in the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking the court's intervention for a judicial inquiry into the Tirupati stampede, in which six devotees were killed and 40 injured. The bench posted the matter next week for further hearing and instructed the petitioner to submit the updated petition removing the names. A farmer from Pandurapuram village in Kurnool district has filed the PIL urging the court to issue necessary orders for a probe.

Siva Prasad Reddy, the petitioner's counsel, presented his arguments requesting the court to allow the petition as the lunch motion petition as this was the second incident where people died in stampede during the TDP government, headed by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. He also held that Naidu should take moral responsibility for the stampede. However, the bench upheld the exclusion of names of the Chief Minister and the Governor's Secretary from the list of respondents in the petition.

## Andhra Pradesh poised to be a global shipbuilding destination

**VIJAYAWADA.** In line with the vision of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, the State government is committed to transforming Andhra Pradesh into a leader in shipbuilding. With its 1,053 km coastline, a well-developed port network, and strategic locations, the State has immense potential to become a global shipbuilding destination. On Friday, Principal Secretary (Infrastructure and Investment) S Suresh Kumar held a crucial meeting to discuss opportunities for developing a state-of-the-art shipbuilding industry in AP. This aligns with the Government of India's Maritime Vision 2047, which aims to place India among the top five shipbuilding nations in the world.

To accelerate this vision, the Andhra Pradesh Maritime Board (APMB), recently invited Expression of Interest (EOI) for shipbuilding investments in Andhra Pradesh. The APMB team had reached out through this EOI to the world's leading shipbuilders, and garnered a lot of attention in the marketplace. Hyundai Heavy Industries and Korean shipbuilders had previously engaged with the APMB, and showed strong interest in the State's potential. Their site visits and discussions highlighted Andhra Pradesh as a promising destination for shipyard development.

The meeting focused on exploring collaboration opportunities with Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), a leading shipbuilder in India. GRSE representatives had productive discussions with the APMB, and also visited potential sites for setting up shipbuilding facilities.

According to officials, GRSE representatives were impressed with Andhra Pradesh's infrastructure and coastal resources. Discussions centered around how the State can contribute to achieving India's Maritime Vision 2047 through shipbuilding, and development of maritime ancillary industry cluster. The APMB assured full support, including incentives, streamlined approvals, and infrastructure development, to encourage investments.

## Study reveals low helmet compliance among adult motorists in Tamil Nadu, with only 1 in 4 wearing helmets

**CHENNAI.** Only one in four adult motorists riding two-wheelers in seven districts of Tamil Nadu, including Madurai and Tiruchy, wears a helmet, a study has found.

Chengalpattu, Kancheepuram, Cuddalore, Tiruvarur and Tiruvannamalai are the other five districts where helmet compliance among adults is below 25%, according to the study conducted by Citizen Consumer and Civic Action Group (CAG).

The highest compliance of around 75% was observed in Coimbatore and Tirunelveli, while in Chennai and Salem, the compliance rate was above 50%. The highest rate of compliance among children was observed in Salem and Tirunelveli districts, the report said. According to the study, the overwhelming belief by the riders on their ability to avoid road accidents and the general perception that helmets were unnecessary for short trips are the major reasons for the non-use of helmets. Parents transporting children to schools displayed the lowest compliance, the report said. The CAG carried out the study at two traffic intersections each in 11 districts of Tamil Nadu in November 2024. In absolute numbers, 1,729 adults were observed in Chennai, of them, 1,023 were found wearing helmets. In Coimbatore, 2,565 of the 3,320 observed adults wore helmets.

However, the numbers were drastically low in

districts like Madurai where only 242 of 2,034 observed adults wore helmets. Besides Madurai, compliance was also lower in Kancheepuram and Tiruvannamalai districts.

The low compliance among adults directly influences the low or nearly non-existent helmet use among children, the study



said. The compliance among children was negligible in Tiruchy, Madurai, Chengalpattu and Kancheepuram districts. In Chennai, too, it is below 25%, said the report.

**'Only 63% pillion riders follow regulations'**  
Contradicting the Greater Chennai Traffic Police reports of substantial helmet compliance rate among motorists, the study mentioned that only 63% of the people riding pillion adhere to the regulations. Though Chennai recorded 3,654 road accidents involving two-wheelers in 2024, the fatalities due to non-usage of helmets was only nine of

the 504 deaths, said the report. The highest fatalities due to non-use of helmets was reported from Cuddalore (84), followed by Kancheepuram (31), Chengalpattu (15) and Coimbatore (15), it added. Enforcement of regulations, coupled with educational initiatives significantly enhances the effectiveness. Conducting joint campaigns was found to be eight times more effective than enforcement and 12 times more effective than education, CAG said. The report suggested that the state must ensure standard helmets are widely available and affordable, especially in rural and low-income areas. Likewise, standards must be developed for lightweight and climate-appropriate helmets that can address common complaints about discomfort, it added. Strategies to overcome resistance to helmet use in India include promoting helmet designs suitable for Indian weather conditions, the report added.

## Fact file

TN witnessed a daily average of 50 fatalities due to road accidents. Two-wheelers accounted for 44.22% of all road accident fatalities. A total of 29.9% of such fatalities involved individuals not wearing helmets.

Coimbatore, Tirunelveli, Salem and Chennai districts have the highest helmet compliance levels among adults. Salem and Tirunelveli districts have the highest helmet compliance levels among children.

## Poor app engagement 'times out' Supplyco's delivery service

**KOLLAM.** Supplyco has discontinued its Supply Kerala delivery service introduced to offer doorstep delivery of essential goods. The service was phased out due to limited customer engagement with the app for online purchases. Launched by the civil supplies department, the Android app aimed to ensure fast delivery of essentials, particularly in rural areas. However, it garnered just three orders and fewer than 500 downloads over the past three years. Via the app, customers could place orders by selecting their nearest Supplyco outlet. The distribution network of over 500 Supplyco supermarkets across the state was expected to create job opportunities for more than 10,000 youth. Additionally, the app provided information on newly launched products. Despite these features, the app was removed from the Play Store after failing to gain traction among users.

"In the past three years, we have received only three orders through the app. After the first six



months, we didn't receive a single order. Initially, we thought cities like Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi might see success, but there was no significant uptake there either. The main issue was that we charged extra for delivery, while several other delivery apps offered free delivery. In a market where private delivery services are more effective, we couldn't compete," a

source with Supplyco told.

Launched in 2021, the app made home delivery available within a 10km radius of Supplyco outlets in both rural and urban areas. Delivery charges were based on weight and distance. For example, an order weighing 5kg to be delivered within 4km incurred a charge of Rs 35 plus GST. Special offers were available for orders over Rs 1,000. Another source with the civil supplies department revealed that the app was never actively promoted by the outlet managers at Supplyco supermarkets. "The Rs 35-charge was a huge deterrent. Due to this fee, many officials at the outlet would directly engage with customers, offering home delivery without any charge. As a result, managers at several Supplyco supermarket outlets chose not to promote the app," the source explained. Food and Civil Supplies Minister G R Anil acknowledged that the app's failure stemmed from a lack of market research.

## Red chilli farmers in Warangal protest low prices amid declining exports and market challenges

**WARANGAL.** Red chilli farmers have started arriving at Asia's largest Enumamula Agriculture Market in Warangal with substantial loads of red chilli crops for sale. The farmers are eager to sell their produce but are dissatisfied with the prevailing prices in the market.

The traders attribute the low prices to a decline in red chilli exports within the country and outside. Farmers at the Enumamula Agriculture Market have expressed dissatisfaction over the low prices offered for their red chilli crops. Although the maximum prices displayed on the market yard boards range from Rs 14,800 to Rs 15,500 per quintal, traders are paying as low as Rs 11,000 per quintal. The market has 100 licensed traders handling red chilli sales. On Friday, the Wonder Hot (WH) variety

was priced between Rs 11,000 and Rs 14,800 per quintal, while the Teja variety and 314 varieties were both priced at Rs 13,000 per quintal. A total of 7,433 bags of red chilli were brought to the market. The Geographical Indication (GI)-tagged Chapata Chilli, also known as tomato chilli, remains in demand. However, its arrivals in the market are yet to begin this season. Data obtained by TNIE from the Enumamula Agricultural Market Committee Warangal reveal that 11,72,740 quintals of red chillies were brought to the market last year, with prices at over Rs 20,000 per quintal.

## Demolition of building housing Ernakulam KSRTC bus station to begin soon

**KOCHI.** The demolition of the over five-decade-old building that still houses the Ernakulam KSRTC bus station will get under way soon, and a new terminal, to be modelled after the Vyttila Mobility Hub, will be set up on 2.9 acres of land at Karikkamuri.

However, no ownership of land will be exchanged with the Vyttila Mobility Hub as decided earlier. This was decided at a high-level meeting led by Industries Minister P Rajeeve and Transport Minister K B Ganesh Kumar in Thiruvananthapuram. "The order directing demolition of the old building will be issued next week. The tender process will be completed on a war footing and the demolition will begin thereafter," said P Rajeeve, who is the minister in charge of the district. However, it was decided that the ownership of land at Karikkamuri and Vyttila



won't be exchanged. Earlier, it was agreed that the right of possession of the proposed land at Karikkamuri, owned by KSRTC, would be given to the Vyttila Mobility Hub, and in exchange the corporation would get certain land at the Vyttila Hub. "The change will be incorporated in the Memorandum of Understanding as well," he said. A new swanky bus terminal will be set

up in the adjacent Karikkamuri on the model of the Vyttila Mobility Hub. For this, 2.9 acres of land there will be handed over to the KSRTC. The KSRTC will be exclusively given the rights over six bays in the new terminal, which will also have facilities like Station Master's Office and the facilities for employees. The KSRTC will be exempted from paying the user fee. All revenue modes will be explored to generate income from the new terminal. The new building will have a waiting area, various kiosks for medical shops and refreshment stalls, a drop-off area for passengers, separate entry and exit points for private vehicles, and proper drainage facilities, besides other facilities for passengers. At Vyttila hub, the KSRTC will be given the right of operation and also the facilities for the Station Master office. The new terminal can be accessed by both private

and KSRTC buses.

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## India's banking sector needs market-friendly reforms: New York

## University don Viral Acharya

**BENGALURU.** India's banking sector must undergo market-friendly reforms instead of reforms that favour incumbents, said Professor Viral V Acharya, CV Starr Professor of Economics at New York University Stern School of Business, during his keynote address at IIM Bangalore on Friday. Speaking at the inauguration of the IMR Doctoral Conference 2025, Prof Acharya laid out a roadmap for the future of India's banking system, stressing the importance of addressing both economic and political factors in driving long-term reforms.

Prof Acharya emphasised that while the economic backdrop plays a significant role in shaping the banking sector, it is the political economy that also drives its trajectory. "The banking system in India is steered not by the economic backdrop alone, but by the political economy of banking as well." He explained that the nationalisation of banks was not solely a measure for financial inclusion, but also a political strategy. "It is a misconception that banks in the country got nationalised for financial inclusion, there was the realisation of political objectives as well. Very often, banks are used by the government to achieve delivery of populist expenditure."

Discussing the evolution of India's banking sector, Professor Acharya outlined how the system had stabilised over the past decade following the financial excesses of the preceding years, especially after the Global Financial Crisis.

One of the key points in his address was the discussion on digital finance, where he commended India's approach. "India got this right from the very beginning. Digital finance got a big boost post-Covid," he said.

Turning to broader economic concerns, Prof Acharya addressed the issue of concentrated wealth in India, particularly the 'savings glut of the rich.' He explained how the wealth gap has led to an imbalance in economic benefits.

## Coimbatore residents slam CCMC over delayed garbage collection after Pongal holidays

**COIMBATORE.** The Coimbatore City Municipal Corporation (CCMC) has been caught napping as a majority of sanitation workers are yet to report for work after the Pongal holidays. As a result, garbage collection and disposal work have been severely affected. With door-to-door garbage collection also affected, residents slammed the civic body for not making alternative arrangements during the holidays. The CCMC engages more than 3,000 sanitary workers in door-to-door collection in 100 wards of the city, but a majority of them did not report for work on Thursday after the festival holidays. Due to this, garbage has not been collected and waste has piled up on the roads in several localities, including Kavundampalayam, Vadavalli, Ramanathapuram and Kuniyamathur.

Many residents said the problem is a recurring issue during festival seasons. "This happens every year. It's not just about the holidays; it's the lack of preparedness by the CCMC," said K Ramesh, a resident of Kavundampalayam. "We are paying taxes which includes dedicated charges for garbage collection and disposal



services. But garbage collection is often neglected. It's unbearable to live near these garbage dumps. Sanitary workers haven't shown up in our area for the past four days."

Adding to the woes, the delayed resumption of waste collection services has disrupted the daily lives of traders and they have raised concerns. "Customers avoid coming to our shops because of the stench. If this continues, it will hurt our livelihoods," lamented S Kavitha, a shop owner on Raja Street. Health experts have also warned about the potential outbreak of diseases

due to the unhygienic conditions. As the garbage piles grow, residents hope for swift action from the civic body to restore cleanliness and prevent similar situation in future. When contacted, CCMC Commissioner M Sivaguru Prabakaran said, "I was told that a few sanitary workers hadn't returned to work after the festival which has affected the garbage collection work. I've instructed them to report back to their duty immediately. They will all return tomorrow (Saturday) and the problems will be addressed in the next two days."



## News box

## Short circuit in 1 parked car burns down 3

**Ghaziabad.** Three cars parked on a vacant plot in Masuri's Kushaliya village were gutted in a fire that broke out early on Friday morning. The cars — two Balenos and one Brezza — belonged to a former village pradhan, Sahid Umar Khan, and his brother Kabir, and were parked next to each other. The other vehicles parked nearby were not damaged in the blaze. A complaint was submitted by the brothers claiming foul play.

Sahid told TOI his family, like many other neighbours, usually parked their vehicles on the plot next to their house. "Around 11.30 pm, I had seen off some guests and then retired to bed with the rest of the family. About an hour later, a neighbour woke me up and informed me about the fire. We alerted the fire department and, in the meantime, tried to douse the fire using water from a submersible," he said, adding that only three cars belonging to his family was gutted in the fire, while the other cars were untouched. ACP Masuri Siddharth Gautam said they received a complaint and subsequently an FIR was registered against an unknown person under BNS Section 324 (4) (mischievous causing damage to the amount of Rs 50 fifty rupees). "The forensic analysis indicates the fire was sparked by a short circuit in the Baleno, which was parked between two other cars. The flames spread quickly and engulfed the adjacent vehicles," the ACP said. Chief fire officer Rahul Pal said the fire was doused completely within an hour.



## Three Chinese men held for overstaying in Noida

**Noida.** Three foreign nationals were arrested on Friday for illegally residing in the country after their visas expired. The arrested individuals were allegedly staying at a mobile phone company's under-construction plant in a Greater Noida village.

Additional deputy commissioner of police Ashok Kumar said, "The visas of the suspects — Wu Xingbo, Chen Chao and Peng Shao — expired a few months ago. All of them are Chinese nationals. They were arrested and information is being sent to the embassy in Delhi for necessary action." Kumar said the suspects were arrested by officials from the Noida SWAT Team, FRRO Team and Rabupura police station personnel. "Officials from the SWAT Team and Rabupura police were conducting checks in Kheri Bhav village and found the foreign nationals residing at the plant being built there," he said.

Police told TOI that the arrested suspects are construction engineers and arrived in the country about two years ago. One of them worked with a mobile phone company and then they all moved to a construction company, Sausam, tasked with building the new mobile phone company plant in Kheri Bhav village. They were still working and living at the plant even though their visas expired three or four months ago, police said.

## 7 new substations to improve power supply this year

**Noida.** Seven new substations are set to enhance supply in GB Nagar this year. These include four substations of 220kV capacity in Jalpura, Knowledge Park 5, Metro Depot and Jewar extension. The other three are of 132kV capacity in Ecotech 8 and 10 in Greater Noida and Bhangal extension in Noida. Also, the capacity of five substations in the district was ramped up in 2024 at sectors 129, 148, 123, 66 and Dankaur, while one new substation of 220kV capacity is proposed to be built in Sector 62 in 2025.

Further, four more substations are planned to be



ramped up this year. These include two 220kV substations in Dadri and Knowledge Park 5 in Greater Noida and two 132kV substations in sectors 62 and 63 in Noida. Built at a cost of over Rs 10 crore to Rs 141 crore, based on their capacity and function, each substation caters to around 5km area in urban spaces and between 10km and 12km in rural areas.

"The new substations, along with the enhanced capacity of existing substations, will improve the distribution network and power supply in the coming months.

Construction of new substations was undertaken keeping in mind the increasing population, domestic and industrial growth of the city," Dileep Kumar Gupta, executive engineer (transmission), UPPTCL Noida, told.

On Jan 15, the Noida power department sent a proposal of Rs 152.16-crore budget for sanction under various business plans for FY 2025-26 — such as ongoing repairs and infra-upgrade works — to PVVNL Meerut headquarters. For FY 2024-25, a budget of Rs 145.68 crore was cleared for the ongoing works, of which 15% has been completed so far.

## Exams just wks away, 800 students left in lurch as FIITJEE centre shuts

**Ghaziabad.** The sudden closure of a FIITJEE coaching centre at Rajnagar District Centre has left more than 800 engineering aspirants in a precarious situation, with crucial JEE (Mains) and board examinations merely weeks away. On Monday, an FIR was registered against the chairperson and three other officials of the coaching centre following allegations that the facility was operating without proper registration before shutting down unexpectedly — leaving hundreds of students stranded in the middle of their syllabus.

Parents who have paid substantial advance fees — upto Rs 5 lakh — are now concerned about their children's academic future, with an additional financial burden to secure an admission for them in alternative coaching centres.

Ashish Tyagi — a resident of Raj Nagar whose son Aarush is scheduled to appear for JEE Mains on Jan 23 and board examinations on Feb 15 — expressed concern about whether the student could complete his syllabus and obtain

adequate practice. "My son is anxious since his teachers left the coaching centre last month. While one teacher has been kind enough to assist him personally, we cannot depend entirely on this arrangement," said Tyagi, who invested Rs 3.6 lakh in a two-year programme at FIITJEE. Ridhima Arora



from Raj Nagar Extension, who paid Rs 5 lakh for her daughter's four-year classroom package last year, said, "The institute collected a lumpsum for four years. I'm waiting for the management's response before deciding on alternative arrangements." Some local coaching

institutes are offering mid-session admission options for the affected students, but at a considerable expense. Manish Gupta, whose son is in Class 11, was equally worried. "We paid Rs 4 lakh for four years, and now my son's preparation is completely disrupted. Most established institutes have already completed their syllabus by now. But here, we are left with limited options," he added. Cherry Kansal, another affected parent from Raj Nagar who paid Rs 3.6 lakh to FIITJEE, has filed a complaint with the consumer forum, hoping to recover the fees. "The coaching centre management never informed us about the situation. We learnt about it only when some senior teachers announced their plans to leave the institute last Friday," she added.

HR Kapoor, who invested Rs 3.5 lakh for his two children's education at FIITJEE, highlighted the financial strain. "Finding alternative coaching at this stage is both expensive and challenging. Most institutes are asking for full-year fees even for mid-session admissions. Plus, there's uncertainty about recovering our money

from Raj Nagar Extension, who paid Rs 5 lakh for her daughter's four-year classroom package last year, said, "The institute collected a lumpsum for four years. I'm waiting for the management's response before deciding on alternative arrangements." Some local coaching

## Guzzling groundwater: Gurgaon extracted from aquifers double of what it recharged last year

**GURGAON.** The city withdrew more than double the amount of groundwater it could naturally replenish last year, extracting 212% of the permissible limit, data released by the National Compilation on Dynamic Groundwater Resources of India showed.

While the city's sustainable annual groundwater extraction limit is 20,333 million-hectare metres (ham), it ended up withdrawing 43,262 ham in 2024. This extraction rate was the third highest in Haryana, following Kurukshetra (228%) and Panipat (222%). Kaithal (190%) and Faridabad (180%) were close behind. Palwal demonstrated better resource management with an extraction rate of 94.5%, significantly lower than neighbouring Faridabad. Other districts showing critical levels

included Fatehabad (177%) and Karnal (173.9%). In contrast, districts such as Hisar (88.6%), Panchkula (62.3%), and Rohtak (51.1%) maintained safer extraction levels.

The state's overall groundwater extraction rate showed a slight increase from 135.7% to 136% over the past one year. Haryana's total extractable groundwater was calculated at 9.3 lakh ham, yet actual extraction reached 12 lakh ham during this period. The study — commissioned by the Central Ground Water Board — evaluated 143 assessment units across the state, with 88 of them (61.5%) categorised as 'overexploited'. Additionally, 11 units were classified as 'critical' and eight 'semi-critical'. Only 36 units (25.1%) fell within the

'safe' category.

The report also noted that assessment units in the country's north-western region — particularly Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, and UP — possessed abundant replenishable groundwater resources.

However, excessive extraction led to widespread overexploitation, it pointed out. The study, released this month, also assessed future groundwater availability, considering changing climate patterns and extraction trends. Five districts — Gurgaon, Panipat, Kaithal, Karnal, and Kurukshetra — were found to have exhausted their groundwater resources for future use. And the entire state of Haryana now has only 1.1 lakh ham of groundwater available for the future, the report stated.

## 'Forced into agreements': Paradiso evacuation put off as RWA opposes move in Gurgaon

**Gurgaon.** Deputy commissioner Ajay Kumar has postponed the decision to vacate Towers A, B, and C of Chintels Paradiso Society in Sector 109 following objections raised by the residents welfare association (RWA).

During a meeting with residents of these towers, officials decided to first tackle residents' concerns before taking further action. A structural audit committee will determine the next steps after the builder responds to objections. The RWA alleged that despite the Supreme Court's orders for reconstruction, the builder is pressuring flat owners into agreements. RWA members say "families refusing to sign have been denied rent payments" after vacating their flats, leaving nearly 40 households in financial distress. The DC highlighted that the district

administration issued clear directives to the builder management to work on resolving concerns of residents in a fair and transparent manner. Kumar said, "Residents can choose from the options provided for rehabilitation, but if there are additional demands or suggestions, they should submit them in writing to the committee."

Some residents expressed their reluctance to vacate their flats and requested the administration to consider their concerns before making any decisions. The deputy commissioner assured them their objections would be carefully reviewed and that the builder management would be asked to respond appropriately. "The committee will take a final decision only after addressing all objections and suggestions from the residents," he said.

He urged the residents to cooperate with the administration by following safety guidelines issued from time to time to ensure the security of lives and property within the society. A spokesperson for the developer said, "With effect from Jan 1, Chintels has paid rent for the month of Jan to all the flat owners who opted for option 2, which is reconstruction of flats. Any claim to the contrary is not true." "In the last meeting held concerning Towers A, B & C, under the chairmanship of the DC, the flat owners were asked to present their grievances in writing, following which Chintels will submit its reply," he said. The spokesperson said, "Chintels has always complied with all the directions of the Supreme Court and that of the administration and will accordingly continue to do the same in the future as well."

## Heart attack? Ghaziabad bizman found dead in car that hit biker &amp; rammed divider

**Ghaziabad.** A 52-year-old businessman was found dead inside a car that collided with a motorcycle and crashed into a divider of the flyover near Santosh Hospital in Sihani Gate on Friday morning. With no visible signs of injury on his body, police suspect Yogesh Kumar may have suffered a heart attack behind the wheel.

He managed to drive his Hyundai i10 in a zigzag manner for almost 100 metres presumably after suffering the attack, leading to the accident around 7.50am. A resident of Shalimar Garden, Kumar, police said, was a labour contractor and ran an iron welding business. ACP (Nandgram) Poonam Mishra said police received information about the accident around 8am.

A team reached the spot and found Kumar unconscious inside his i10. He was rushed to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared him dead on



arrival. "Initial investigation has revealed that while traveling towards Ghaziabad, the man apparently suffered a heart attack and lost control of his vehicle. He subsequently hit a

motorcyclist moving adjacent to him and crashed into a divider. We have sent his body for an autopsy. The reports will make a number of things clear," Mishra said. The biker who was

hit by the car was identified as Rahul Kumar (29), a resident of Pappu Colony in Bhopura. He was traveling from Hapur intersection on his Hero Splendor when the i10 scraped past him.

Rahul suffered injuries to his legs and was initially taken to Sanjay Nagar District Hospital.

His family later transferred him to a private hospital in Delhi for treatment. Till late on Friday evening, no police complaint was lodged. The businessman's brother Anil Kumar, a govt bank employee, said Yogesh left home around 7.30am. "He informed his family members that he had some work in Kavi Nagar, after which he planned to go to Gurgaon for business. Around 8.30 am, we received a call from police, informing us about the accident," he added.

Anil said his brother had no previous history of heart attacks, though he was taking medicines for blood pressure and diabetes.



NEWS BOX

Chinese Employee Who Won Rs 7 Crore Lottery At Company Event Asked To Return Prize

**World.** A Chinese man who won more than 6 million yuan (approximately Rs 7 Crore) in a lottery at a year-end company party was asked to return the prize money. According to the South China Morning Post, a company in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, China, held its annual year-end party in 2019. It distributed over 500 lottery tickets to employees to enhance the festive atmosphere. However, when one employee secured the top prize of 6 million yuan, the firm requested the winner to return the prize so it could be evenly distributed among all attendees.

The win had caused a buzz among the employees, with many sharing the news on social media. "Come join our company, six million lottery wins are just a regular perk! Message me for job openings," joked one employee, as per SCMP. Another remarked, "Our annual party handed out lottery tickets, and someone won the jackpot! This is probably the closest I will ever get to such a huge prize." However, things took a dramatic turn when the company demanded that the winner return the ticket. The firm argued that the large prize should be divided among all the partygoers. But when the winner refused, the dispute escalated and had to be sorted out at the local police station.

Authorities from the Yinzhou district confirmed that they had addressed the matter. "It was a civil dispute, and we advised the parties to resolve it through legal channels," police said. Adding to the drama, it was later revealed that the lottery draw took place two days before the tickets were distributed to staff. It was also disclosed that the company had instructed the finance department to ensure that no winning tickets were handed out.

Los Angeles Firefighter Finds Lost Wedding Ring In Rubble Of Burned Home

**World.** A firefighter and his wife were overcome with emotion after he found his wedding ring amid the rubble of their home, now destroyed in the Los Angeles wildfires. Pasadena Fire Engineer Chien Yu, accompanied by CNN's Erin Burnett, was searching through the rubble when one of his colleagues discovered a silver ring and handed it to him. Upon realising it was his wedding ring, which had been misplaced in the chaos, he showed it to his wife. Overcome with emotion, the couple hugged and cried outside their destroyed home, where they had lived for nearly eight years.

"That's it-oh my God!" Mr Yu said after fellow firefighters dug through the ruins of his home and found the ring. Asked how he expected his wife would react, Chien Yu said that she had no idea it was missing. Filled with emotion, she said, "What! Oh, my gosh!" and froze for a moment before the two hugged each other. Speaking to CNN, Mr Yu said when he saw the fire approaching last week, he evacuated his wife and two children before buckling up for a 16-hour shift combating the fire in his neighbourhood. He had no idea his home had been demolished until he got off work that day. The couple and their two sons have moved, but the kids are having a hard time adjusting. "It's never going to be the same for the kids," he said. "They're doing the best they can, you know?" They frequently ask when they can go back to their house or return to school, which was destroyed in the fire and was located next door, said Mr Yu.

According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the Eaton Fire had burned 14,117 acres of land and is 55 per cent contained as of January 16. The Palisades Fire has burned 23,713 acres and is 27 per cent contained. At least 27 people have died and the death count may climb further, as per the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner. Over 30 people are still reported missing.

Russian attack kills four in Kyiv: City's military administration

**KYIV.** A Russian attack has killed four people and injured three in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, the city's military administration said Saturday. "We already have four dead in Shevchenkivsky district," said Tymur Tkachenko, head of Kyiv's military administration, in a Telegram post, adding that three people were injured.

Hours earlier, Kyiv's mayor Vitali Klitschko warned of a "ballistic missile threat" against the capital and said the city's air defence was activated.

He later said a building in Shevchenkivsky district had its windows broken, with smoke coming from it,



while a water pipeline in the area was damaged. In addition, a metro station near the city's centre also suffered damage and was temporarily closed, with Kyiv's trains bypassing that stop, Klitschko said. The attack -- a rare strike on the heart of the Ukrainian capital -- came as Kyiv has upped its aerial attacks on Russian energy and military facilities in recent months. Kyiv's army has hit several Russian oil depots recently, including two major strikes on a facility near a military airfield in Russia's Saratov region that triggered days-long blazes.

Also on Saturday, Russian forces "attacked the centre" of Zaporizhzhia, injuring two people, according to local governor Ivan Fedorov. An administrative building of an industrial facility was partially damaged, he said.

Canada ups the ante, warns of 'biggest trade war' over Trump tariff threat

Canadian PM Justin Trudeau said that if a "worst-case scenario" trade war ensues between the US and Canada, Ottawa won't hesitate to take strong retaliatory measures.

**World.** Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau vowed to hit back if incoming US President Donald Trump follows through on his threat to impose punishing tariffs on Canadian imports, warning that such a move could trigger the biggest trade war between the two countries in decades. "No

one wants to see US tariffs imposed on our goods. But Canada will be ready with a national response if we need one," Trudeau said on Friday at a meeting of the newly created Canada-US Relations Council.

The 18-member body, composed of representatives from the auto industry, unions, agriculture, and other sectors, was assembled to bolster Canada's strategy in dealing with Trump's policies.

"We've brought leaders in business, labour, and policy to the table. People from different fields, parties, and parts of the country -- all on Team Canada," added Trudeau, who recently resigned as Prime Minister. Canada sends 75 per cent of its exports to the US, and the proposed tariffs could have a devastating economic impact on both countries. Trudeau stated that if a "worst-case scenario" trade war ensues, Canada won't hesitate to take strong retaliatory measures. "If push comes to shove, we will be strong and unequivocal in



our defence of Canada and Canadians," he said. Canadian Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly echoed the stern sentiment, warning of immediate counter-tariffs. "The Americans would be starting a trade war against us. We are ready to put maximum pressure," she said during a press meet in Washington.

"We have a series of measures that are already prepared, certainly, tariffs linked to imports," Joly said. "If the President goes ahead on Monday, we will be ready. And we are ready for a second round and a third round." According to a report by Radio Canada, the Trudeau government is

planning a first round of reciprocal tariffs that could be unveiled as soon as Trump is sworn in on January 20. An initial round of counter-tariffs will reportedly target \$37 billion in US goods, with additional measures prepared to affect up to \$110 billion if necessary. The countermeasures are designed to minimise harm to the Canadian economy while demonstrating the cost of a trade war to the US. Trump, set to return to the White House next week, has made clear his intention to impose 25 per cent tariffs on Canada as part of a broader economic policy targeting key trading partners like Mexico, China and India. He argues the measures are necessary to tighten border security and curb entry of drugs like fentanyl into the United States. Trudeau has dismissed the premise, maintaining that less than 1 per cent of irregular migrants and fentanyl flowing into the US come from Canada. Ottawa also recently announced a C\$1.3 billion (\$909 million) border security plan in response to Washington's concerns.

Parody Account Claims Vivek Ramaswamy Will Run For Ohio Governor, He Reacts

**World.** Vivek Ramaswamy thinks running for Ohio Governor is "not a bad idea." The Indian-American biotech entrepreneur sparked speculation after responding to a parody account on X (formerly Twitter) that claimed he was officially announcing his candidacy. The post read, "I am officially announcing my candidacy for governor of Ohio. I am ready to lead with vision, integrity, and a commitment to addressing the needs of every Ohioan." The former presidential candidate quickly clarified, "Note - the below is a parody account. (Not a bad idea, though)."

Mr Ramaswamy's comment came a day after sources close to him said he was preparing to run for governor as Ohio's current Republican leader, Mike DeWine, approaches the end of his term. DeWine cannot seek re-election



in 2026. Vivek Ramaswamy's base plan remains the same: to achieve accomplishments within Donald Trump's Department of Government Efficiency initiative (DOGE) before announcing a gubernatorial run, an Ohio political operative shared with Fox News. Mr Ramaswamy, an Ohio native, was appointed alongside billionaire Elon

Musk to lead DOGE, which aims to restructure the federal government, reduce regulations, and cut expenditures. Donald Trump has set a deadline for DOGE's work to be completed "no later than July 4, 2026" - ahead of the Ohio governor's race set for November that year. Another source familiar with Mr Ramaswamy's strategy confirmed that plans are already in motion. "The statement is drafted. It is ready," they told The Washington Post, adding that his official announcement might come after DeWine selects a replacement for Vice President-elect JD Vance in the Senate. On Friday, Governor Mike DeWine announced that Lt. Gov. Jon Husted would temporarily fill the US Senate seat vacated by former Senator JD Vance. Vance, now vice president-elect, stepped down earlier this month ahead of Monday's inauguration.

Israel Will Release 737 Prisoners In 1st Phase Of Gaza Truce Deal

**Jerusalem.** Israel's justice ministry has said 737 prisoners and detainees will be freed as part of the first phase of the Gaza ceasefire and hostage release deal approved Saturday. It said in a statement on its website that "the government approves" the "release (of) 737 prisoners and detainees" currently in the custody of the prison service.

Israel's cabinet voted to approve the ceasefire deal early Saturday, according to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office, ending days of uncertainty about whether the truce would go into effect this weekend.

Those named by the ministry include men, women and children who it said will not be released before Sunday at 4:00 pm local time (1400 GMT). It had previously published a list of 95 Palestinian prisoners, the majority women, to be freed in exchange for Israeli captives in Gaza.

Among those on the expanded list was Zakaria Zubeidi, a chief of the armed

wing of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah party. Zubeidi escaped from Israel's Gilboa prison with five other Palestinians in 2021, sparking a days-long manhunt, and is lauded by Palestinians as a hero. Also to be freed



is Khalida Jarar, a leftist Palestinian lawmaker whom Israel arrested and imprisoned on several occasions. Jarar is a prominent member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a group designated a "terrorist organisation" by Israel, the

United States and the European Union. Detained in late December in the West Bank, a Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967, the 60-year-old has been held since then without charge.

Two sources close to Hamas told AFP that the first group of hostages to be released consists of three Israeli women soldiers. However, since the Palestinian Islamist movement considers any Israeli of military age who has completed mandatory service a soldier, the reference could also apply to civilians abducted during the attack that triggered the war. The first three names on a list obtained by AFP of the 33 hostages set to be released in the first phase are women under 30 who were not in military service on the day of the Hamas attack. Justice ministry spokeswoman Noga Katz has said the final number of prisoners to be released in the first swap would depend on the number of live hostages released by Hamas.

Israel Approves Gaza Ceasefire Deal, Set To Begin Today

**Jerusalem.** Israel's cabinet voted to approve a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release deal on Saturday, the office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, ending days of uncertainty about whether the truce would go into effect this weekend. The ceasefire, set to begin Sunday, would halt fighting and bombardment in Gaza's deadliest-ever war. It would also enable the release of hostages held in the territory since Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. "The government has approved the hostage return plan", Netanyahu's office said early Saturday morning after the cabinet held its vote. The justice ministry published a list of 95 Palestinians to be freed starting Sunday, "subject to government approval". They include 69 women, 16 men and 10 minors.

Israeli strikes have killed dozens since the ceasefire deal was announced, with the military saying Thursday it had hit about 50 targets across Gaza over the previous 24 hours. The truce is to take effect on the eve of the inauguration of Donald Trump, who claimed credit for working with outgoing US President Joe Biden's team to seal the deal. It was earlier approved by Israel's

security cabinet, with Netanyahu's office saying it "supports achieving the objectives of the war". Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas said the Palestinian Authority has completed preparations "to assume full responsibility in Gaza" after the war. Even before the truce begins, displaced Gazans were preparing to return home. "I will go to kiss my land," said Nasr al-Gharabli, who fled his home in Gaza City for a camp further south. "If I die on my land, it would be better than being here as a displaced person." In Israel, there was joy but also anguish over the remaining hostages taken in the Hamas attack. Kfir Bibas, whose second birthday falls on Saturday, is the youngest hostage. Hamas said in November 2023 that Kfir, his four-year-old brother Ariel and their mother Shirli had died in an air strike, but with the Israeli military yet to confirm their deaths, many are clinging to hope. "I think of them, these two little redheads, and I get shivers," said 70-year-old Osnat Nyska, whose grandchildren attended nursery with the Bibas brothers.

**'Confident'** Two far-right ministers had voiced opposition to the deal, with one threatening to quit the cabinet, but US Secretary of



State Antony Blinken said prior to the vote he believed the ceasefire would proceed. "I am confident, and I fully expect that implementation will begin, as we said, on Sunday," he said.

Gaza's civil defence agency said Israel pounded several areas of the territory, killing more than 100 people and wounding hundreds more since the deal was announced on Wednesday. Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, warned that Israeli strikes were risking the lives of hostages and could turn their "freedom... into a tragedy".

The October 7, 2023 attack on Israel resulted in the deaths of 1,210 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures. Of the 251 people taken hostage, 94 are still in Gaza, including 34 the Israeli military says are dead. Israel's retaliatory campaign has destroyed much of Gaza, killing 46,876 people, most of them civilians, according to figures from the Hamas-run territory's health ministry that the UN considers reliable.

Trump and Biden

The ceasefire agreement followed intensified efforts by mediators Qatar, the United States and Egypt after months of fruitless negotiations. In the days of talks, Biden pointman Brett McGurk was joined in the region by Trump envoy Steve Witkoff in an unusual pairing to get the deal over the line, US officials said.

"If we weren't involved... the deal would've never happened," Trump said in an interview Thursday. Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani, announcing the agreement on Wednesday, said an initial 42-day ceasefire would see 33 hostages released.

Biden commutes sentences of 2,500 non-violent offenders in a day, sets record

**Washington.** President Joe Biden on Friday commuted the sentences of nearly 2,500 people convicted of non-violent drug offences in what the White House called the largest single-day act of clemency in US history. Those whose sentences were commuted were serving "disproportionately long sentences" compared to what they would receive today, Biden said in a statement. He called the move "an important step toward righting historic wrongs, correcting sentencing disparities, and providing deserving individuals the opportunity to return to their families." "With this action, I have now issued more individual pardons and commutations than any president in US history," Biden said, adding that he may issue further commutations or pardons before he hands over power to President-elect Donald Trump on Monday. The outgoing president said



those receiving clemency had received lengthy sentences based on now-discredited distinctions between crack and powder cocaine, which have disproportionately impacted the Black community. Historically, there have been considerably more crack cocaine convictions involving Black offenders than whites and the disparate sentencing policy has been condemned as racist. Kara Gotsch, executive director of The Sentencing Project, which campaigns for prison reform, welcomed the White House clemency action, saying it would provide "relief for countless families who have endured punishments for loved ones that far exceed their utility." "Cruel and excessive prison sentences that have overwhelmingly harmed Black communities have been the cornerstone of federal drug policy for generations," Gotsch said in a statement. "American communities, disproportionately Black and Brown, have long borne the scars of the Drug War." Biden commuted the sentences of nearly 1,500 people and pardoned 39 others last month. Among those pardoned in December was Biden's son Hunter, who was facing a possible prison sentence after being convicted of gun and tax crimes. Biden has meanwhile reportedly been debating whether to issue blanket pre-emptive pardons for some allies and former officials amid fears they could be targeted for what Trump has previously called "retribution." In December, Biden also commuted the death sentences of 37 of the 40 inmates on federal death row. Three men were excluded from the move: one of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombers, a gunman who murdered.



NEWS BOX

TN liquor sales hit a high, up by Rs 47 crore this Pongal

CHENNAI. Liquor sales by the Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (Tasmac) saw a slight increase during Pongal this year and the days leading up to it, when compared to the corresponding period last year. From January 12 to 16, Tasmac earned Rs 725.56 crore in sales, compared to Rs 678.65 crore during the same period last year, according to the data accessed by From January 1 to 16, Tasmac recorded sales of Rs 2,462.97 crore, up from Rs 2,300.23 crore during the same period in 2024, marking an increase of Rs 162.74 crore (7.07%). A senior Tasmac official said, "Liquor sales in Chennai and its outskirts saw a decline during the Pongal festival as many people had travelled to their hometown for the holidays. However, other outlets across the state recorded regular seasonal sales." He added 12 districts, including Kanniyakumari, Nagapattinam, Tiruvallur, and Ramanathapuram, also saw a slight decline in sales. "We have instructed district managers to identify the reasons for the decrease in sales in these areas," the official said. In terms of district-wise (as per Tasmac's classification) increase in sales, Perambalur reported the highest of 15.26%, followed by Cuddalore (10.41%) and Villupuram (9.62%). Perambalur also topped in beer sales, with 27,047 cases sold compared to 22,435 last year in the district, a 20.56% increase.

Vulture which flew 4,000 km to reach Pudukkottai electrocuted

CHENNAI. A juvenile white-rumped vulture, a critically endangered species listed on the IUCN Red List, was electrocuted near Thirumayam in Pudukkottai. The one-year-old vulture, part of the Jatayu Conservation Initiative, was GPS-tagged and released in July 2024 from Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra, by the state's forest department and the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). This is the fifth such electrocution-related death among 25 vultures, including 10 long-billed and 10 white-rumped vultures released under the programme. The bird, which had travelled an impressive 4,000 km across states over five months, was found dead after coming in contact with a live wire. The vulture had made pit stops in several areas, including Chennai, before reaching Pudukkottai. It was last seen scavenging on a dog carcass near an electric wire. S. Bharathidasan, founder of Arulagam, an NGO that works towards conserving vultures in the Nilgiris, said, "I monitored and fed the bird for three weeks, hoping it would take longer flights. The bird was healthy, but due to the easy availability of food in human habitats, it was not flying long distances." He had requested the forest department and BNHS to relocate the bird to Moyar Valley where there is an established population of vultures, but was turned down. Experts have raised concerns about the increasing risk vultures face due to poorly managed infrastructure near their habitats.

Relook at Roerich Estate eco-tourism plan: Activists

BENGALURU. Conservationists and experts have penned a letter to the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), demanding it take a relook at the proposal drawn by the Karnataka tourism department to make Devika Rani and Roerich Estate on Kanakapura Road, on the outskirts of Bengaluru, an eco-tourism destination. They demanded the ministry to review the project and the departments concerned to obtain prior approval under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980. The letter sent to the ministry is based on the article - Roerich estate is forest land, eco-tourism tough in jumbo corridor - published in The New Indian Express in its January 10, 2025, edition. The letter, dated January 16, 2025, stated that the property, also called Tataguni Estate, is a dry deciduous forest and is one of the last remaining lung spaces of the fast developing Bengaluru city, which is losing its green cover at an alarming pace. The estate is spread over nearly 470 acres, of which around 100 acres is notified as a reserve forest and remaining area is notified as a deemed forest by the Karnataka government. Any non-forestry activity on forest land attracts the provisions of Forest Conservation Act, 1980 and diversion of forest land for eco-tourism involving permanent structures is impermissible as per the Sustainable Eco-Tourism in Forest and Wildlife Areas 2021 guidelines issued by the MoEFCC in October, 2021. "The estate adjoins UM Kaval State Forest and is strategically located between Bannerghatta National Park and Savandurga Forest which is also an elephant corridor. Apart from elephants, the estate area is home to smooth coated otter, deer, rusty spotted cat, muntjac etc. based on a study conducted by Sanjay Gubbi and his team from Nature Conservation Foundation in 2017," the letter said.

Insurance barriers restrict patients' access to mental health treatment

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM. Insurance companies are increasingly using patients' mental health treatment records to deny them claims for unrelated medical conditions. Treatments for conditions like depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) are being used as reasons to reject insurance claims for procedures such as cataract or heart surgeries. The practice has sparked opposition, especially after actor Archana Kavi shared her own struggles with a claim denial. Hospitals known for mental health services are witnessing a wave of complaints from patients over claim denials, despite the fact that the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, mandates equal treatment for mental and physical illnesses. The trend not only deepens the stigma surrounding psychiatric care but also discourages people from seeking help or disclosing their mental health struggles. While the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) mandated that all health insurance policies include coverage for mental health conditions starting November 2022, its implementation has been inconsistent. Ajinas, a resident of Ernakulam, was taken aback when his mother's cataract surgery claim was rejected. "I took my mother for cataract surgery at a well-known hospital in Perinthalmanna. Since I was aware of the cashless claim process, I instructed the hospital's insurance team to notify the

insurance company for approval. However, when they did, the firm responded with questions about my mother's depression history," Ajinas said. "They kept asking about her depression treatment and ultimately denied



the claim. How can a cataract surgery be denied due to depression treatment? The two are unrelated. It feels like the insurance company is intentionally trying to avoid covering a legitimate claim," he said.

Vivek Raj (name changed) from Alappuzha faced a similar battle when his claim was rejected due to his history of bipolar disorder. Even after approaching the IRDAI, he could not get a

favourable ruling. "Mental illness is still seen as a high-risk category, so insurance policies include specific clauses related to it. If people don't disclose their mental health history, it can lead to claim rejection during document verification," said Dr Ushus Kumar, director of Optimus Medical Services Pvt Ltd, which conducts third-party verification for several insurance companies.

New challenge

A new challenge has emerged as insurance companies, despite the legal obligation to cover mental health conditions on par with physical issues, have created policies that complicate matters for patients.

One such policy requires applicants to prove at least a 40% mental health disability to qualify for coverage. The clause has sparked criticism from health experts, as it contradicts the intent of providing equal coverage for mental health issues. "By linking the Mental Health Act with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the burden is placed on patients to obtain a certificate proving 40% disability. This is rare for mental health conditions. Patients with OCD, depression, or even stabilised schizophrenia would struggle to get such a certificate. The policy seems designed to make it difficult for people with mental health histories to access insurance coverage," said Dr C.J. John, senior psychiatrist at Medical Trust Hospital and a member of the State Mental Health Authority.

Kerala: Neyyattinkara Gopan's burial held amid probe

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM.

Amid ongoing investigation to ascertain the exact cause of his death, Neyyattinkara Gopan Swami's burial rites were completed by Friday. The ceremonies began at 4 pm in a newly constructed tomb near his house in Aralummoodu. The burial rituals were conducted by monks from various ashrams. His sons, Sananthan and Rajasen, along with other family members, performed the ceremonies. The body was brought home from a private hospital in Neyyattinkara in a ceremonial procession led by Hindu organisations. It was transported on an open vehicle, where the body was seated on a platform, dressed in saffron robes. The face was covered during the procession.

The newly constructed tomb has been named Rishipeedom. The new tomb, made of bricks, was filled with ash, camphor and fragrant materials before the body was lowered into the pit. It was then covered with more ash and camphor, and a slab was placed on top to seal the tomb.

The family said that prayers led by monks would be conducted at the site for the next 41 days. VSDP, All India Nadar Association and other Hindu groups coordinated the event. Heavy police deployment, led by the Neyyattinkara DySP, was present from the hospital to the house. The family constructed a new tomb to lay Gopan Swami to rest near the earlier burial site, which the police had opened on Thursday. Stones were placed inside the tomb for the burial. The tomb was opened on Thursday and the body was exhumed for a postmortem at medical college hospital. The police carried out the exhumation after the High Court rejected a plea by Gopan's wife and sons to stay the order. The body had been buried with camphor, ash and other ritual materials filled up to the chest. The preliminary postmortem report showed no external injuries or any foul play. The cause of death remains unclear. Police are waiting for results from chemical analysis, forensic lab tests, and histopathological examinations to determine if there were internal injuries or substances in the lungs. The police may question Gopan Swami's family members again as part of the investigation.

Hyderabad to introduce pod taxi system for seamless connectivity in IT corridor

HYDERABAD. The state government is planning to introduce a Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) or pod taxi system to improve last-mile connectivity in areas like Knowledge City, Hitech City and Kondapur, bringing an end to the frequent traffic jams in the IT corridor. The PRT system will initially come up in two corridors, linking Metro stations with key office hubs, multinational companies and high-rise buildings in Raidurg, Madhapur, Kondapur and nearby areas. The 8.8 km-long Corridor-I with 28 stops will cover Raidurg-ITC Kohenu-Knowledge City and is estimated to cost Rs 880 crore. Corridor-II, on the other hand, will have 27 stops over 6 km. It will cost Rs 600 crore and cover Raidurg-Tech Mahindra-Hitech City/Kondapur. HMRL has commissioned a DPR which will be submitted to the government by the month-end.



The PRT system is expected to end traffic jams by offering a seamless connection from Metro stations to offices and other destinations. It will provide faster, smoother transit while reducing reliance on conventional road transport. The PRT system will consist of small, battery-operated, driverless pods travelling on

elevated, guided tracks. Each pod can carry 6-8 passengers and will operate under centralised control. After boarding, passengers would have to select their destination on a touch panel, and the pod would travel directly to the designated stop. Pods can also be hired privately for uninterrupted travel. The system is designed to handle 10,000 passengers per hour during peak times, with a daily capacity of 1 lakh commuters. A similar pod taxi system is being developed in Mumbai's Bandra-Kurla Complex. The Hyderabad project, once operational, is poised to become a model for urban transportation in India's growing metropolitan areas. The state government expects that the new system will significantly improve connectivity in Hyderabad's IT and business districts, contributing to a more streamlined urban infrastructure.

24k quintals of jowar worth Rs 6 crore found worm-infested in Karnataka's Ballari

BENGALURU. Nearly 24,000 quintals of jowar worth Rs 6 crore stored in the godown of the Karnataka State Warehousing Corporation (KSWC) in Ballari was found unfit for consumption. However, this worm-infested jowar was supplied to fair price shops in and around Ballari district. This came to light when Upa Lokayukta Justice B Veerappa visited the godown of Unit-2 of KSWC on Friday. In all, 48,000 bags of jowar, each weighing 50kg, were found worm-infested. When Justice Veerappa, accompanied by deputy registrar Aravind NV and others questioned, Sharavathi, manager of the Ballari unit of the KSWC, and Sakina, deputy director of Food and Civil Supplies, said they obtained a certificate from the Food Corporation of India (FCI) on March 29, 2024, that "jowar is fit" for consumption. Jowar was sent to Haveri and other districts for distribution through fair price shops. The Upa Lokayukta told the officials that it was not fit even for animals to consume. In all, 48,000 bags of jowar were wasted because of negligence on the part of the officials concerned, he said. Upset by Justice Veerappa's confrontation, Sharavathi asked him to provide a photo linking to GPS for confirmation of his visit to the godown. Enraged by her conduct, Justice Veerappa told the media that the manager sought proof of his visit. "This shows they have reached a stage of even questioning us," he said. "This is unfortunate. The minister concerned has to take action against the officials," he said. He said jowar was procured using taxpayers' money and it should not be wasted this way. "We will definitely take action under the Karnataka Lokayukta Act", he said.

NISG and Andhra Pradesh government join hands for tech innovation

VIJAYAWADA. The National Institute for Smart Governance (NISG) will collaborate with the State government to provide technical support for technological advancement and governance innovation. A team of NISG representatives, led by CEO Rajiv Bansal, met senior government officials at the Real-Time Governance Society (RTGS) office in the Secretariat on Friday. Highlighting the various initiatives NISG has already undertaken in Andhra Pradesh and other States, Bansal opined that the latest collaboration is envisioned to play a key role in realising the State's ambitious "Swarna Andhra@2047" vision. He emphasised that NISG, a non-profit organisation, offers strategic planning, e-governance solutions, and consultancy services at a low cost to help governments leverage emerging technologies for greater efficiency and effectiveness. Bansal highlighted the organisation's extensive track record, which spans over two decades. NISG has trained over 30,000 government employees across various levels and successfully managed over 200 projects



in States and Union Territories. He reaffirmed that Andhra Pradesh was a founding supporter of NISG and expressed the organisation's commitment to further strengthening this partnership. "We are deeply committed to helping Andhra Pradesh achieve its technological and governance goals," Bansal stressed, adding, "Through strategic collaboration, we aim to support the State in embracing cutting-edge technologies that will lay the foundation for a smarter and more efficient governance system." Special Chief Secretary (Revenue) RP Sisodia responded positively to NISG's

proposal, emphasising that technical solutions are critical in overcoming the challenges faced by government departments in their operations. He stressed that NISG's expertise would be instrumental in helping the State modernise its systems and enhance service delivery to citizens. Principal Secretary (Investment and Infrastructure) S Suresh Kumar highlighted AP's active focus on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, drone technology, and deep tech. He explained that the State government intends to seek NISG's support to further integrate these technologies into its infrastructure and governance models. To strengthen the collaboration, State's IT Secretary N Yuvraj proposed that NISG establish an office in Amaravati, similar to the one in Hyderabad. NISG representatives responded positively to this suggestion, signalling a strong commitment to deepening the partnership between the two entities. RTGS CEO K Dinesh Kumar welcomed the NISG delegation and expressed optimism about the continued cooperation and its transformative impact on the State's governance landscape.

Centre announces Rs 11,440 crore package for Visakhapatnam Steel Plant's revival

VIJAYAWADA. The Central government has announced a financial package of Rs 11,440 crore for the revival of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited). The announcement was made by Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting Ashwini Vaishnaw on Friday and was later confirmed during a Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Visakhapatnam Steel Plant is a Schedule-A Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) under the Ministry of Steel, with a current installed capacity of 7.3 million tonnes per annum (MTPA). The revival package includes an equity infusion of Rs 10,300 crore and the conversion of Rs 1,140 crore of working capital loans into 7% non-cumulative preference share capital, redeemable after 10 years, to ensure RINL



remains a going concern. The equity support will allow RINL to address operational challenges, raise working capital, and gradually achieve full production capacity of 7.3 MTPA. It is expected to stabilise the Indian steel market, protect livelihoods, and enable the plant to

operate at full capacity, contributing significantly to the economy. Describing it as the largest package ever for RINL, Vaishnaw highlighted the strategic importance of VSP, the only offshore steel plant in the country under government ownership. He noted that the package would enable the activation of two blast furnaces by January 2025, with all three blast furnaces set to be operational by August 2025, significantly increasing production. In a post on X (formerly Twitter), Prime Minister Modi remarked that the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant holds a special place in the hearts of the people of Andhra Pradesh. "During yesterday's Cabinet meeting, it was decided to provide equity support of over Rs 10,000 crore for the plant. This has been done understanding the importance of the

steel sector in building an Aatmanirbhar Bharat," he said. After capital infusion, privatisation of RINL will not be considered: HDK Elaborating on the package, Union Minister of Steel HD Kumaraswamy said privatisation of RINL will not be considered following the capital infusion. "This decision honours the sentiments of the people of Andhra Pradesh. The government is committed to protecting the plant and ensuring its growth," he asserted. The Minister outlined how the package became a reality through persistent efforts and multiple review meetings with stakeholders, including the Finance Minister and bankers. He assured that all three blast furnaces would reach over 92% production levels by mid-2025. RINL has been grappling with severe financial and operational challenges.



## India-Afghan relations beyond Pakistan's shadow

The upscaling of India's relations with Afghanistan is not sudden and Pakistan-centric. The 90-minute warm exchanges between Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Afghan Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi last week in Dubai in the aftermath of the deteriorating Afghanistan-Pakistan relations were a coincidence. The Afghan Foreign Office stated that the meeting conformed to its determination to strengthen political and economic ties with India "as a significant regional and economic partner." India is equally determined to continue to connect with Afghans and prevent the hiatus that existed from the mid-1990s to 2001 (during the factional warfare within the Mujahideen government and the rule of the Taliban) when the Indian embassy and consulates remained shut. The Indian decision to step up India-Afghanistan relations is in line with India's progressive engagement with the Taliban. JP Singh, Indian government's point person for Afghanistan, pursued this periodically through contacts with the relevant Afghan authorities. Over time, both sides felt the need to expand their relations beyond humanitarian assistance from India in foodgrains, pesticides, vaccines, medicines and de-addiction and relief materials. Although the Taliban regime is non-inclusive and mistreats minorities and women, the law-and-order situation has improved and opium cultivation has almost gone. Isolating the Taliban is unlikely to moderate them.

The conspiracy-obsessed Pakistani social media is viewing the Dubai meeting as a plot hatched against it. Its commentators invariably see any growing closeness between India and Afghanistan as two sides of a nutcracker trying to crush Pakistan. They disregard India's stake in Afghanistan's stability, the traditional connection between Indians and Afghans and the Indian security consideration (to assure itself that Afghan territory is not used by terrorist groups against India). India meets its strategic objective if Afghanistan can stand on its feet and make its own decisions. The establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan led to triumphalism in Pakistan. The Taliban bristles at the suggestion that it is a Pakistani puppet. The Pakistani euphoria has since turned to disquiet because of the refusal of the Taliban leadership to accept its tutelage. To pressure the Taliban, Pakistan has pushed back Afghan refugees at a time when the authorities in Kabul cannot handle the numbers. Pakistani actions have resulted in unfriendly relations with three of its five neighbours — Afghanistan, India and Iran. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif described the recent Pakistani cross-border military strikes as a "teeth-breaking response" to the Taliban's perceived non-cooperation in curbing the activities of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. Besides, Pakistan has a grudge against the Afghan refusal to acknowledge the Durand Line as the frontier between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Following border skirmishes between the two, Pakistani aerial bombardment of 83 locations in Afghanistan led to many civilian deaths, including women and children. The Pakistani punitive strikes have been "unequivocally" condemned by the Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesperson. The former army chief of Pakistan, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, altered the erstwhile Pakistani idea of establishing 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan — propounded by one of his distant predecessors, General Mirza Aslam Beg — by qualifying that Pakistan should do so without control over Afghanistan. The Pakistani establishment has done the opposite — not just eschewing the quest for control but also engaging in aggression against Afghanistan. No wonder, the Afghan reaction is fierce. Acting Deputy Foreign Minister Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai reminded Pakistan that though Pakistan had named its missiles Ghaznavi, Abdali and Babur, it should remember that Afghanistan had.

## Political lessons of AAP's Delhi school model

India's education system is in urgent need for reform, yet in the rough and tumble of electoral promises, education rarely makes an appearance.

One of the biggest puzzles about Indian politics is the near absence of political competition around public goods like education (and health) in the electoral battlefield. It simply does not get as much public debate as it deserves. This is particularly puzzling because Indians care deeply about education and recognise it as the path to better jobs and mobility.

India achieved near-universal enrolment in elementary education in the mid-2000s and it has stayed steady since; enrolment in secondary schools has been growing, as has the market for private schools and private tuitions. Between 2000 and 2022, the number of people with secondary education or higher levels doubled. However, most students are receiving an education of shoddy quality. At the elementary level, as ASER reports repeatedly remind us, just about 50 per cent (pre-Covid) of students in Class V can read a Class II textbook. This figure increases at the secondary level. The intense competition and scandals around competitive exams for higher education and the increasing unemployment rates amongst educated youth in India are testimony to this. India's education system is in urgent need for reform. Yet, in the rough and tumble of electoral promises, education rarely makes an appearance. While parties compete over subsidies and cash transfers, their silence on public goods like education is conspicuous. This is where the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi stood out. Soon after coming to power in 2015, the government announced its mission to 'revolutionise' education in Delhi. Despite the ups and downs through its decade in power, the party repeatedly deployed education as its key differentiator, the lynchpin of its "Delhi model". The party stood out because it made education an electoral issue. Today, a lot of this is being lost in the ugliness that has become the norm in election campaigns. The AAP, too, is shifting focus. It is looking more like its peers, doling out direct benefit cash transfers to women and playing the Hindutva game. Elections are a time to reflect on the big shifts that parties have engendered. The AAP's work on education was not without critique, but it was substantive. It offers a site to engage with the challenges of our education system. For several years, I had the opportunity, along with a team of researchers, to observe AAP's education reforms as they unfolded in Delhi's elementary schools (classes VI-VIII). In a recently published book, 'Lessons in State Capacity from Delhi's Schools', we reflect on what we had learnt. Most discussions on Delhi's education revolution focus on enhanced budgetary provisions and improvements in school infrastructure. But to me, what really stood out was the willingness to acknowledge and open a political dialogue on the fundamental challenge confronting the Indian education system: the obsession with mastering examinations through rote-learning. This is a system



obsessed with syllabus-completion rather than subject-mastery, with the goal of ensuring that the best students are made exam-ready. For teachers, pass percentages are the key metric to which they are held accountable by both the school system and parents. Rote-learning is the primary means to this end. I refer to this as the classroom consensus. It works for the best students, but for those left behind, the tyranny of syllabus completion and pass percentages has meant that the classroom simply does not cater to them. As Manish Sisodia, the architect of Delhi's school reforms, has said, the classroom is a victim of the curriculum, syllabus and textbooks. Much of what the Delhi education revolution did was aimed at disrupting the classroom consensus by experimenting with ways to ensure that basic, foundational literacy and numeracy skills were imparted to all students. It included infrastructure upgradation, building a cadre of mentor teachers, improving in-service training and exposure visits around the world, infusing campaigns to build foundational literacy and numeracy skills, along with aligning classrooms within a grade according to student learning levels (how close students were to curriculum level expectations). None of this was unchallenged. In schools, amongst teachers and educationists, questions were asked, debates held and ideas critiqued. Moreover, versions of these reform ideas have been tried out in some other states and in different ways, but rarely as a political project and never for long enough to disrupt the classroom consensus. Change was hard. There was confusion, resistance and active pushback at the school level. The spectre of syllabus-completion and examinations loomed, causing confusion in the messaging. Over time, a subtle but important shift took place. Consistent engagement

was held with schools on the dynamics of the classroom. Teachers were exposed to different ways students could acquire basic skills outside the framework of the syllabus-examination nexus. Regular "missions" that focused on improving basic literacy and numeracy were infused. All this shifted the conversation. Teachers still spoke about students in terms of their exam-readiness, but now the gaps in student learning levels and the distance between curriculum expectations and the student in the last row of the classroom had entered the conversation, preparing the ground for a deeper change. There are lessons in this package of reform efforts for other states on how to improve foundational literacy and numeracy in primary schools, which is a key goal of the Union government's New Education Policy, 2021. Throughout the early years, a consistent attempt was made to make parent-teacher dialogue on student learning a routine through widely publicised mega parent-teacher meetings. Such engagement in government schools is rare. The quality of the mega parent teacher meetings was variable, but the political support they received and the stated goal of shifting the societal dialogue on education was important and a first for India. With the AAP's political battles in Delhi, the momentum for reforms in the government's second term slowed down. But it is important to recognise that in a political culture where welfare obligations of the state have been reduced to cash handouts, where bigotry, hate and the worst forms of identity politics are the primary offerings that politicians take to the hustings, for the first time, education was brought into the political discourse. This was significant and deserves attention in the cacophony of ugly, coarse political rhetoric that is now the norm in our electoral discourse.

## Ace in space

Docking of satellites a new high for India

Getting off to a flying start in the new year under a new chief, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has achieved yet another milestone by successfully performing the docking of satellites as a part of the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX). This exercise is expected to make the country better equipped for more ambitious and complex missions such as the Bharatiya Antriksha Station, Chandrayaan-4 and Gaganyaan. India's stature in space has gone up a few notches as it has become the fourth country — after the US, Russia and China — to accomplish the feat. It is remarkable that ISRO has bounced back from the Chandrayaan-2 heartbreak of 2019 to make rapid strides in the past couple of years, especially the Chandrayaan-3 soft-landing in 2023.

The strategic importance of the space sector cannot be overemphasised. The SpaDeX success comes amid a



fierce race between the US and China, which are both going all out to send a crew to the moon — the first since NASA's Apollo programme conducted its final mission in 1972. Just a few weeks ago, China accused

America of initiating "dangerous actions" to jeopardise global strategic stability after the US Space Force stationed a unit in Japan. Beijing itself has been speedily expanding its military capabilities in space. President Xi Jinping's "eternal dream" of building China into a space power has an ominous ring to it. This is worrisome not only for the US but also for its ally India, whose relations with China continue to be uneasy despite recent signs of a thaw.

The Chinese challenge makes it imperative for India to develop cutting-edge capabilities to protect its space assets such as satellites and indigenous launch vehicles. This should go hand in hand with greater stress on research and innovation to ensure that the country's space programme remains on course for human spaceflight and other key missions.

## Producing biochar a profitable alternative to stubble burning

The pyrolyser, a portable and automated machine, is transforming crop waste management by converting it into biochar directly in the field.

Agriculture, the backbone of global food security and economies, sustains billions of lives. However, the excessive use of fertilisers and pesticides since the Green Revolution has significantly degraded soil, depleting its carbon levels, a key indicator of soil health. Simultaneously, agriculture is a major contributor to climate change, with intensive farming practices releasing greenhouse gases (GHGs), such as carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide into the atmosphere. The challenges facing agriculture in India are multifaceted: demand for fair crop prices and assured procurement, effective stubble management, deteriorating soil health, lack of crop diversification, depleting water levels and rising food demand, driven by a growing population.

Addressing these challenges requires innovative solutions that safeguard farmers' livelihoods, boost incomes and reduce environmental harm. Recognising their role in shaping a sustainable future, farmers are willing to adopt eco-friendly practices like carbon-negative farming, provided their profits remain intact. Carbon-negative farming involves practices that remove more GHGs from the atmosphere than they emit. It surpasses carbon neutrality, which merely balances emissions with removals. This approach uses natural methods to capture carbon dioxide and store it in the soil, which is the best place for carbon. Practices like agroforestry, cover cropping and biochar enable this transformation, with biochar emerging as particularly effective. Biochar is a carbon-rich material produced by heating crop residues through pyrolysis, a high-temperature, low-oxygen process that sequesters carbon in the soil for centuries.

Globally, Bhutan, Suriname and Panama are recognised as carbon-negative, with Sikkim leading as India's first carbon-negative state. These examples highlight the feasibility and impact of sustainable practices at both global and local levels.

Carbon credits, a key driver of carbon-negative farming, offer farmers an opportunity to earn additional income. Each carbon credit certifies the removal of one metric tonne of carbon dioxide. These credits, calculated by using remote-sensing and AI-driven satellite data, enable farmers to monetise the carbon sequestered in their fields. As corporations strive for carbon neutrality, the demand for carbon credits is increasing rapidly. Private players are enrolling farmers in programmes that reward sustainable practices with carbon credits, positioning carbon-negative farming as both an environmental solution and a profitable venture. Crop residue management is one of agriculture's most pressing challenges. In Punjab and Haryana, stubble burning has escalated into a crisis, releasing massive GHGs and causing hazardous air pollution. This practice harms public health, degrades soil and pollutes the environment. A sustainable solution lies in producing biochar from stubble, unlike burning, which releases carbon into the atmosphere. Biochar locks carbon in the soil, transforming waste into a valuable resource.

The concept of biochar is not new. It dates back to ancient Amazonian agriculture, where it was used to create fertile "Terra Preta" soils that remain productive even today. Modern science has revived this practice, demonstrating its ability to improve soil health, enhance water retention, boost nutrient availability and reduce reliance on fertilisers. Farmers who adopt biochar often report increased yields and greater resilience to climate stresses within a single growing season.

However, scaling biochar production and adoption remain a significant challenge. In this context, the pyrolyser, a portable and automated machine developed by Applied Carbon, is transforming crop waste management by converting it into biochar directly in the field. The pyrolyser employs a high-temperature, low-oxygen

process powered by syngas, a byproduct of pyrolysis, making it self-sustaining. Designed for ease of use, it integrates seamlessly with tractors and harvesters. Once biochar is produced, it is quenched with water, enriched with nutrients or microbes tailored to farmers' needs, and immediately applied to the fields. This process not only enhances soil fertility but also allows farmers to earn carbon credits, turning sustainable practices into a source of additional income. India, with its vast agricultural landscape, stands to benefit immensely from carbon-



negative farming. Punjab, a cornerstone of the nation's food security, contributes 40-45 per cent of India's wheat and 28-30 per cent of its rice. However, this productivity comes with challenges like stubble management, soil degradation and declining soil fertility. A promising solution offered by the pyrolyser involves converting stubble into biochar. This approach enables farmers to improve soil health, reduce air pollution and earn additional income through carbon credits. It addresses

India's twin challenges of feeding a growing population and meeting international climate commitments. Applied Carbon's pyrolyser has gained global recognition, with five prototypes developed and \$21.5 million raised for large-scale production. Microsoft, committed to becoming carbon-negative by 2030 and offsetting all historical emissions by 2050, has shown a keen interest in this technology. This collaboration underscores the growing synergy between corporate sustainability goals and transformative agricultural practices and offers a blueprint for scaling such innovations.

However, scaling the pyrolyser technology requires policy support, adequate funding and active public-private partnerships. Governments should provide subsidies, promote localised manufacturing and facilitate collaboration with agricultural engineers, technologists and AI experts to tailor solutions for local farming needs. These measures can ensure the widespread adoption of carbon-negative farming practices. Carbon-negative farming represents a transformative shift in agriculture, evolving it from a contributor to climate change into a part of the solution. By addressing challenges like GHG emissions, soil degradation and farmer livelihoods, it aligns agriculture with the broader goals of sustainability and environmental health. Pyrolyser-based sustainable farming practices can be both environmentally and economically viable, allowing farmers to boost their incomes while contributing to a carbon-neutral and sustainable future. The benefits of carbon-negative farming extend far beyond individual farms. By improving soil health, strengthening food security and addressing stubble burning and climate change, it tackles critical global challenges. Adopting sustainable agriculture reflects a collective commitment to securing a healthier planet and a better future for generations to come.



# 10 tips for Email Etiquette



However, people often forget that they have to use a different, more formal tone for official email correspondence, and end up peppering their emails with too many emojis and abbreviations. Here are a few tips to keep in mind when you're sending out a work email.

- 1. INTRODUCTIONS ARE IMPORTANT:** Always introduce yourself if you are writing to someone you don't know or haven't corresponded with previously. If you've got the sender's address from a mutual friend, mention that in your email. Introducing yourself is especially important if you're sending out a survey or questionnaire to people whose addresses you have got from a database.
- 2. ALWAYS RUN A SPELL-CHECK:**

It's important to run a spell-check for official correspondence, especially if you're sending an email from your phone. You don't want the auto-correct feature to backfire on an official email, after all. Ensure your grammar and punctuation are correct as well.

- 3. USE THE REPLY-ALL FEATURE SPARINGLY:** Only use the reply-all feature for an email that really needs it. If the reply is meant for only one person, just reply to him/her. And don't use it to reply to a sender's greetings for the festive season — you could find yourself being blamed for starting an unnecessary email thread.
- 4. USE BCC FOR GENERIC MAIL:** Use the Bcc field for when you are sending out mails to a very large number of



- 5. RESTRICT THE NUMBER OF ATTACHMENTS YOU SEND:** people who may not all know each other. It's also a way to ensure that all your contacts' addresses are not out there for people unknown to them to access.
- 6. DON'T OVER-ABBREVIATE:** Don't use too many abbreviations or in your email, like FYI, PFA, PDF or FYR. It may confuse the recipient, who may also get the impression that you don't have the time to type out a proper email. If you must use them, restrict it only to the subject line.
- 7. FORMATTING FUNDAS:** Do not use all caps and bold fonts as this will give the recipient the impression that you are shouting at him/her. The same goes for underlining in the middle of a lot of text. Don't use fancy fonts or multiple font colours either.
- 8. WATCH YOUR TONE:** Always be careful about how your email sounds. It may be an official email, but it should not sound too abrupt. You shouldn't sound over-friendly either, especially if this is the first time you are corresponding with the recipient. Moreover, don't send out an email if you're upset. Save it as a draft and re-read it when you're calmer.
- 9. FIX YOUR FORWARDS:** Make it a point to clean up forwards before you, in turn, forward them to other people. Not only does this make the email look cleaner, but it also ensures that you don't give away anyone else's email addresses.
- 10. CHECK WHO YOU'RE SENDING AN EMAIL TO:** Always check the To field of an unsent email before you send it. You don't want

Send heavy files via file-hosting services so that you don't clog the recipient's inbox. You could also zip files or resize pictures. If you know you're sending an email to someone who accesses his/her inbox on the phone, don't send several attachments with it.

The digital age has made communication much easier and more hassle-free, what with several apps available for mobile phone chat.

the wrong email being sent to the wrong person.

What every official email should contain  
**Subject line:** This is the first thing that recipients will see in their inboxes and it will determine whether they will read it or not. It should be clear and direct.

**Salutation:** Always start an email by greeting the recipient by using the word 'dear' followed by his/her name. If you aren't on a first-name basis with the recipient, use a title and a surname.

**Concise body:** Get straight to the point. If you have more than one issue to address, start with the most important, and list the rest point-by-point.

**Sign off:** Always sign off on your emails. Phrases like 'Yours sincerely' and 'yours faithfully' are acceptable for formal emails. 'Best regards' or 'kind regards' work in most other situations.

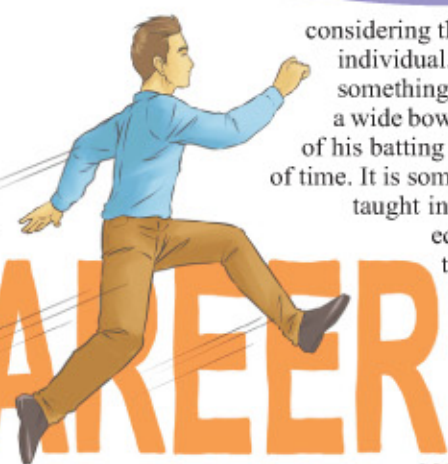
# Why put your Career over Jobs

Three tips which can definitely boost and take your career to new heights are awareness, knowledge, experience implementation.

Jobs



Rare people build careers and the rest are just doing their jobs. Taking a few simple steps could turn your job profile into a successful stepping stone of your career and you would reach where you always wanted to be. Well then, start right now to set your short-term and long-term goals and focus on the three tips mentioned below. Awareness is a common word but is not used fully,



considering the benefits it can bring to an individual. For example, awareness is something which makes a spinner bowl a wide bowl when a batsman comes out of his batting crease at that short moment of time. It is something which is never really taught in schools and colleges but is equally important along with the knowledge and experience an individual has gained. Awareness is not only restricting yourself to grasping the work of your manager while playing a role of an assistant manager in an

organisation; it is much more than that. It requires compete alertness at all levels by an individual. Keeping an open mind is also crucial because it can help you complete a particular assignment in a couple of days rather than holding and stretching the same work for a week. A little awareness can increase your productivity

at work and take you to bigger roles at a quicker pace. With this, you can also learn from your superiors and even from your colleagues by experiencing the way they do the same work in a different way which may be better and quicker than what you usually do in certain circumstances.

**Knowledge experience:** After gaining theoretical knowledge and a degree at your college, with a little practical training you have landed in your dream job. When the real job begins, you have to start from scratch and need to grasp as much practical knowledge as you can about your job and experience will certainly come along with time. One can take additional responsibilities within an organisation depending upon one's likes, interests and passion. You can also voluntarily ask your superior about any extra helping hand they require after you are done with your work. A determination and dedication for work will definitely increase your knowledge and experience related to your job and will also help you gain the respect of your colleagues and superiors.

Attending seminars, visiting exhibitions and being social would increase the chances of meeting new people and discussing work related to your job profile would always be an asset. Sometimes, meeting new

people outside your work place could create new opportunities with higher chances of growth or an experimental idea you initiate in your free time, might be the beginning of something huge.

Technology is available easily everywhere. Wise use of the World Wide Web, television and other hi-tech sources could be a plus for an individual profile rather than wasting time and using it for the wrong reasons.

Implementation is the last step after your awareness and knowledge. In order to be an asset for an organisation, you need to execute all your work sincerely and reliably.

Reliability at work can increase your chances of being a team leader. If you get a chance to lead a group, try not to take all the responsibilities; rather distribute work equally and also try not to take all the credit after finishing the task. During implementation, try to create a comfortable atmosphere with your coworkers as it turns to be an important intangible factor of your growth plan. Once co-workers feel the pleasure to work with you, it becomes easier for you to lead them if an opportunity arises.

Last but not the least, I would like to share a beautiful thought from Steve Jobs who is behind the success of Apple Inc and which would keep you going in your entire professional life. "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life."



# Don't invoke abetment of suicide mechanically, cops should be sensitised: Top court

► A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and KV Viswanathan said the investigating agencies should be sensitised so that people were not subjected to the abuse of the process of a totally untenable prosecution.

New Delhi. The Supreme Court on Friday said the offence of abetment of suicide under the Indian Penal Code should not be invoked mechanically against individuals only to soothe the feelings of the distraught family members of the person who has died. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and KV Viswanathan said the investigating agencies should be sensitised so that people were not subjected to the abuse of the process of a totally untenable prosecution.

"Section 306 IPC appears to be casually and too readily resorted to by the police. While the persons involved in genuine cases where the threshold is met should not be spared, the provision should not be deployed against individuals, only to assuage the immediate feelings of the distraught family of the victim," said the bench.

"The conduct of the proposed accused and the victim," the court went on, "their interactions and conversations preceding the unfortunate death of the victim should be approached from a practical point of view and not divorced from day-to-day realities of life. Hyperboles employed in exchanges should not, without



anything more, be glorified as an instigation to commit suicide." The top court said the trial courts also should exercise "great caution and circumspection" and should not adopt a "play-it-safe syndrome" by mechanically framing charges, even if the investigating agencies in a given case showed utter disregard for the ingredients of Section 306.

The judgment came on a plea filed by one Mahendra Awase challenging an order of the Madhya Pradesh High Court, which declined his prayer to discharge him from the offences

punishable under Section 306 of the IPC. According to the records, a person died by suicide and left a note in which he mentioned he was being harassed by Awase. Apart from the suicide note, the statements of witnesses were recorded that indicated the person who died was disturbed as Awase was harassing him over the repayment of a loan. The top court said, in order to bring a case within the purview of Section 306 of the IPC, there must be a case of suicide and in the commission of the said offence, the person alleged to have abetted the commission of suicide, must have played an active role by an act of instigation or by doing certain act to facilitate the commission of suicide. The bench said it was convinced that there were no grounds to frame charges under Section 306 IPC against the appellant. A reading of the suicide note reveals that the appellant was asking the victim to repay the loan guaranteed by the victim. It could not be said that the appellant, by performing his duty of realising outstanding loans at the behest of his employer, can be said to have instigated the victim to die by suicide," the court said.

## Land-for-jobs case: Delhi court issues production warrant for Amit Katyal

NEW DELHI. A Delhi court on Friday issued a warrant to produce accused Amit Katyal in the land for a job money laundering case on the next date of hearing scheduled on January 31. Katyal, who is currently lodged in Bhondsi Jail, Haryana, under judicial custody in connection with a case filed by the Gurugram Police, has been charge-sheeted in the high-profile case involving former Railway Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav. The court's decision comes as the matter progresses towards critical stages, including the scrutiny of documents and the framing of charges. During the hearing, Special Judge



Vishal Gogne of Rouse Avenue Court queried the investigation officer about the status of prosecution sanctions against public servants.

Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) Manish Jain, under instructions from the investigation officer, informed the court that the process is underway. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) submitted documents as directed by the court, responding to pleas from the accused seeking access to relevant materials. The court urged the defense counsel to expedite the document scrutiny process to commence arguments on the framing of charges by early February. Earlier, on September 18, 2024, the court issued summons to Lalu Prasad Yadav, his sons Tejashwi Yadav and Tej Pratap Yadav, along with other accused in the case.

## Delhi University announces honorarium hike for staff working late or on holidays

NEW DELHI. The Delhi University on Friday announced a revision to its honorarium policy for staff working beyond regular hours or on closed days. The amendment, approved during the varsity's executive council (EC) meeting, provides increased payments for employees who report before 7:30 am, leave after 7:30 pm on working days, or work more than seven hours on Saturdays or closed days (over 60 days in a year). Under the new policy, Group A officers will receive Rs 400 for late sitting and Rs 800 for working on Saturdays or closed days.

Group B officials will be compensated Rs 300 for late sitting and Rs 600 for working on Saturdays/closed days, while Group C officials, including drivers, will receive Rs 250 and Rs 500, respectively. Additionally, the EC authorised prof Anil Kumar Aneja, Head of the Department of English and university representative on the governing body of St. Stephen's College, to facilitate communication between DU and St. Stephen's College to resolve any issues related to the college's operations, in line with the University's statutes, regulations, and UGC guidelines. Vice Chancellor Prof. Yogesh Singh also appointed two additional EC representatives, Aman Kumar and Raj Pal, to the committee to address these matters.

The EC also decided that the UGC NET scores from June 2024 and December 2024 will be considered for the second phase of PhD admissions for the academic session 2024-25. Candidates with a NET + JRF qualification will be given preference. Moreover, the EC approved an increase of 20-25% in PhD seats compared to the previous round of admissions. Moreover, DU employees will now have access to medical facilities at the Northern Railway Hospital. All DU staff and its colleges will be eligible for OPD, IPD, diagnostic, and operative services on a reimbursement basis at CGHS rates, following approval of the proposal by the DU EC.

## Ghazipur landfill residents decry broken promises as pollution, health crises persist

NEW DELHI. Nestled between East Delhi's Ghazipur landfill and the bustling wholesale meat and flower markets, about 400 families eke out a precarious existence. These families, predominantly migrants from West Bengal, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh, live off the refuse of a city that seems to have forgotten them. Despite political promises and high-profile visits, the towering mound of garbage remains an unrelenting source of misery. As Delhi gears up for another election cycle, political parties are ramping up their campaigns. Yet, for the residents of Ghazipur, including Mullah Colony and Rajbir Colony, the rhetoric rings hollow. Promises made by former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and even Prime Minister

Narendra Modi have yet to translate into tangible improvements. The landfill's toxic shadow continues to loom large over their lives. Satbir, 32,



who has known no other home, articulates the perpetual health crises faced by the community. "Cough, fever, and respiratory diseases are constants here," he shares. The landfill's fires during the scorching summers release

noxious fumes, exacerbating health issues. During the monsoons, clogged drains and overflowing sewage compound their woes. Raghunath, 41, another resident, bears visible scars of the environmental neglect. "People fall sick and don't even realise it's due to the landfill's pollution. I've suffered from a persistent fungal infection," he laments. His words echo the collective despair of a community abandoned by its representatives. "We vote, but our issues remain," he says. Srinivas, 71, a resident of over four decades, recounts the worsening conditions. "Respiratory problems have become a part of life here. During rains, the streets become rivers of filth," he says, holding up his medical prescriptions. His plea for a cleaner environment has long fallen on deaf ears.

## Delhi HC dismisses Janata Party's plea against EC order on poll symbols

NEW DELHI. The Delhi High Court on Friday dismissed a petition filed by the Janata Party challenging the Election Commission's directive that election symbols be reserved solely for recognised political parties. The bench, comprising Acting Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela, highlighted that the Supreme Court and the High Court had previously settled this matter in other cases.

The court clarified that political parties could not claim symbols as their exclusive property, especially when the symbols could be lost due to poor electoral performance. The bench firmly said, "In light of prior rulings, the petitioner's challenge to the

constitutional validity of the order is without merit. Hence, the petition is dismissed." The Janata Party's counsel



contended that the party, once recognised, should retain the right to its traditional symbol—a plough on a farmer's shoulder—even after losing

recognition. The counsel argued that an election symbol is inherently tied to a political party, regardless of its recognition status. He contended that the election symbol order unfairly discriminates between recognised and unrecognised parties. He further said that the order should not strip a party of its symbol simply because it failed to secure 6 per cent of the valid votes in the previous election.

Advocate Sidhant Kumar, representing the EC, countered that this issue had already been addressed and resolved by the Supreme Court in a previous case involving Subramanian Swamy. The court agreed, affirming that the matter was no longer open for debate, thereby supporting the Election Commission's stance.

## Parties cite public service to justify candidates having criminal cases: Report

New Delhi. Political parties have given reasons, such as "strong administrative capacity", "commitment to public service" and claims of cases being "politically motivated", for selecting candidates with criminal records in the 2024 Maharashtra and Jharkhand Assembly elections, poll rights body ADR said on Friday.

In many cases, the parties dismissed alternative candidates as lacking experience or the ability to connect with voters, using these explanations to side-step questions about their choices, the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said. The ADR has analysed Form C7 of 1,286 candidates, who contested the Maharashtra and Jharkhand Assembly polls. Form C7 requires candidates to declare their



criminal antecedents, if any. An ADR report revealed that such reasoning often failed to meet the Supreme Court's directive requiring detailed, merit-based justifications for selecting candidates with criminal backgrounds. Instead, statements like "the candidate is young and energetic" or "cases were filed due to public agitation" were repeatedly used. Despite these assertions, 29 per cent candidates

in Maharashtra and 20 per cent in Jharkhand had no justification published for their selection, a direct violation of the Supreme Court's orders. For instance, in Maharashtra, Digamber Rohidas Agwane of the Rashtriya Samaj Paksha, facing 35 criminal cases, was described as an "influential leader" dedicated to the poor, with no viable explanation for bypassing candidates without criminal records. Similarly, the selection of Congress's Sanjay Chandukaka Jagtap and Bunty Baba Shelke, facing 27 and 26 cases respectively, as candidates was justified on grounds of administrative experience and alleged political victimisation. The report also highlighted non-compliance with mandatory disclosures.

In Maharashtra, the NCP-Sharadchandra Pawar faction and the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) failed to provide justifications for any of their candidates with criminal cases. Similar

## Probe Agency Restores Properties Worth Rs 290 Crore in Maharashtra Bank Scam

New Delhi. The Enforcement Directorate (ED), Mumbai Zone, has restituted immovable properties worth Rs 289.54 crore to the Competent Authority, MPID appointed by the Government of Maharashtra in the case of M/s Pen Co-operative Urban Bank Ltd, an official said on Friday. A statement mentioned that the assets were provisionally attached by ED under Section 5 of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 as the erstwhile office bearers had cheated the banks and siphoned off the bank funds for private investments.

The investigation was initiated based on the FIR registered by Pen Police Station, District Raigad, Maharashtra. It was alleged by the LEA in its chargesheet that office bearers of the bank entered into criminal conspiracy with the then Auditors of the Bank willfully and intentionally manipulated the books of accounts of Pen Bank and fraudulently reported profit and caused a loss of Rs. 651.35 Crore to the bank. ED investigations revealed that the proceeds generated out of crime of forgery and cheating was diverted and routed through the bogus cash credit accounts opened in the said bank using the services of cheque discounters in the market. The statement further read that part of such Proceed of Crime (POC) was utilised for purchase of immovable properties at different locations in Raigad District of Maharashtra in the names of third parties (Benami properties). "These Benami properties measuring 70.9 acres worth Rs. 25.20 Crore were attached u/s 5 of PMLA on 26.05.2014 and 03.12.2014. Further Prosecution Complaint dated 20.06.2018 has been filed in the subject case before Hon'ble Special Court, PMLA and the trial is underway," it read. "In the meantime, a Criminal Writ Petition bearing was filed by one of Depositor of Pen Urban Cooperative Bank Ltd before the Hon'ble Bombay High Court praying for release of the properties attached under the PMLA. The Hon'ble Bombay High Court vide order dated 07.10.2016 directed the ED to hand over the properties to MPID. Against the said order, ED filed a SLP before the Apex Court vide order dated 03.11.2017 which granted a stay on the order of Hon'ble Bombay High Court. MPID authorities filed an application u/s 8(8) of PMLA dated 01.02.2019 before Hon'ble Special Court (PMLA), Mumbai to confiscate the attached property to MPID for its restitution," it further mentioned.

## Delhi government releases first merit list for nursery admissions 2025-26

NEW DELHI. The Department of Education (DoE) of the Delhi government released the first merit list for nursery admissions for the 2025-26 academic session on Friday. Parents will have the opportunity to raise any concerns regarding allotments from January 18 to 27. If necessary, a second merit list will be published on February 3,



with a resolution window available from February 5 to 11. The DoE has confirmed that the second list will include the marks allocated to applicants, and any additional admission lists will be issued on February 26, 2025. The entire admission process, including query resolution, is expected to conclude by February 14, 2025.

As per the policy, children must be at least three years old for nursery, four years old for kindergarten (KG), and five years old for Class 1 as of March 31, 2025. The upper age limits are capped at under four years for nursery and under five for KG.





# FRINGE BENEFITS

# All you need to know about fringe Benefits

**Fringe benefits not only help the employees in terms of long-term growth, they are also equally important for the organisations for various reasons.**

The corporate drone operates at every level across sectors in the industry. Fringe benefits are a new buzz doing the rounds of corporate halls. It is generally combined or part of the total rewards system. Fringe benefits broadly include health, security and retirement benefits offered to all full-time employees. They are offered in addition to the defined compensation structure. Recent explosion of the digital platform industry led to an epiphany among the top executives and leadership teams at large, on talent management. To increase the level of attraction for young and exceptionally skilled talent, the focus on leading edge

practices has become critical. Thus, an innovative bucket of fringe benefits is introduced in the market. Some of these are voluntary and taxable in nature, but aid the employee in different aspects of his/her life. Some of the popular ones are education assistance, adoption assistance, Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), bonus allocated, meals offered by the organisation, flexible hours, transport facility provided, etc. Elango R, president HP Business Unit and chief human resources officer, Mphasis shares his views on the fringe benefit that people appreciate the most. He suggests, "It is anything that includes employees' family, that has high social and peer recognition. We

should encourage giving a compensation that benefits their whole family. For instance, where an employee gets promoted or recognised for their work, without telling it to them, we can send a letter to their parents or spouse informing about the same. This gives them surprise and happiness. Second, at senior levels, people still like exclusive club memberships and offers which are difficult for them to get individually. This has a huge impact on them. The third is giving people enough opportunities to get together and socialise as peers either through conferences or similar learning exercises. Many people cut it calling it an expense, but it is really a fringe benefit because others like to travel with their peers and their group and they look forward to these events. It is just another way to renew their relationships with their colleagues. The distinction in company size relates more prominently to the extent to which initiatives are implemented and the

processes relating to how they are implemented. But acting as an outlier to this industry trend, these benefits are more popular among the start-ups who aspire to operate at a global level with employee-friendly policies and compensation structure. This aspect offered as an additional perk is often used as a bargaining chip with the prospective employees. The emphasis on the subject has increased to such an extent that some universities have actually started designing dedicated courses around the same. It can help manoeuvre the employee value proposition to the external and internal population and benefit the organisational repute. While the benefits offered are enjoyed by the employees and employer bears the expense, it's a mutually-beneficial programme for both involved parties. Healthy and secure employees will have better productivity, attendance, and vigour to take on new challenges. This will help the organisation perform better. Generally, the scale of operations also

determines the benefits offered as volume or headcount helps to spread the cost and gain discounts or workout better deals through collective bargaining for higher employee base. Also, these benefits are subject to Fringe Benefit Tax (FBT) which takes away time, energy and requires the expertise or knowledge to be there in the tax audit team. In the ultimate user experience, fringe benefits can be viewed as a distributed consensus system that allows management and employees at different levels to come on the same page and concur to achieve common organisational goals while contributing in their capacity. Industry experts advocate further growth and penetration of fringe benefits in the industry at large in the long range. While certain deficits are overlooked by the fact that an increase in the percentage of fringe benefits in the compensation structure will reduce the cash pay, an ideal scenario would be where benefits and cash components both increase at a similar pace, but that is too idealistic in a crunch economy like ours.

## Give yourself time to live, laugh and love

An exclusive with Saloni Mardia Kothari, CEO and Founder, Mtlx Research...  
Managing work-life balance  
Time management is the key to balance. Once I'm out of the work place, I strive to focus strictly on my personal life. Spending time with friends and dedicated 'me' time

It depends on the situation. I believe in planning well, setting goals and achieving them and taking calculated risks.

**Spiritual diet**

Yoga in the morning and deep meditation during the day helps me a lot. Giving myself time to live, laugh and love. Do good and do the right thing.

**Handling failure and success**

There is a lesson in every failure and the joy of success comes from overcoming obstacles. The challenge is to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

**Crisis management**

Always stay calm. Evaluate the situation and focus on the core issues. Think of a quick fix followed by a more proactive sustainable solution. Be level headed

while dealing with a crisis.

**Destress mantra**

Films are the best escape for me. My aim is to keep stress to the minimum by pre-planning work. I try to stick to a planned schedule and always keep time for emergencies.

The song you like to hum  
'You lift me up' by Mikey Wax.

A book that means a lot to me  
'The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari' by Robin Sharma.

A movie that moved me  
'Shawshank Redemption'.



are what keeps me in balance.

**Being a fit woman**

I'm not a fitness freak but I believe being healthy is important. Exercising regularly and keeping a strict watch on what is cooked in my kitchen are the key for keeping myself fit. Although, having a foodie husband makes this a daily struggle!

**Energy high and happiness**

I love the festive season. Feeding my friends and family and pampering them puts a big smile on my face. Seeing them around me give me joy.

**Risk taker or a micro-planner**

The manager of your team has been the best mentor you ever had in your professional life. He has guided you through all the ups and downs that you faced in this organisation and has been a strong pillar of strength for you during your present stint. You have prospered well and feel totally in control of things at work. But now, he has decided to move on to explore better avenues and things have suddenly become not so clear for you. As you prepare yourself to deal with situations without having him around, you get an offer to join him at his new workplace. Now, the big question haunts you as to whether or not to join him in his new venture.

Although, the most obvious and natural progression in this situation would be to instantly grab the offer and move along, there might be certain pros and cons that need to be weighed before one takes the plunge. Working with the same boss would definitely mean the same old level of comfort and understanding. Sandeep Budhiraja, CEO of DOOR Training & Consulting India Pvt Ltd, puts it into perspective as he says, "Change brings uncertainty and the manager who has moved to a new role may be driven by his or her own need to establish himself quickly. Therefore, he would also be interested in bringing the trusted team members along. Also, it is well understood in HR circles that when people move together to a new organisation, they are taking the same risk as the organisation they are coming from. Unless the company is desperate for that kind of talent, it is highly avoidable for them. Groups come with their own cultural and political

## Should you follow your boss to his new Workplace?

**While you may have the best rapport with your boss, moving with him to the new workplace may bring unexpected consequences. Choose wisely.**

issues. So, the new company that the employee has followed his manager to, will already start discounting the capabilities and trustworthiness of the employee, which does not bode well in the long run."

Any change will always have uncertainties associated with it. Nonetheless, it cannot be ruled out that moving out with your boss may bring in some good results for you as the rapport you share with him will also help you settle down better in the new role. With him already working to create a credibility for himself, chances are high that you will benefit alongside. However, in such work relationships, the employee often loses his own ability to take the best decision for himself. Moving to a new role would definitely mean risking the growth opportunities that might have come your way in your present assignment. At the same time, it would also mean losing on the remaining support systems that one might have in the present organisation. Shalini Pillay, head-people, performance and culture, KPMG India, says, "If you understand and believe in the growth platform that your present organisation provides, it is not difficult



to see the wider landscape of opportunities that present themselves in such a context too. What might seem like an easy path of going with the flow, might actually quite often be walking away from the imminent opportunity besides having to establish oneself in an entirely new organisational ecosystem. Similarly, the rapport that an individual builds with his manager and the trust he has in his ability to support individual growth is an outcome of a larger ecosystem. This ecosystem is a result of the culture and values that the organisation believes in. It may not be realistic to believe that similar culture-value systems exist in all organisations."

The same is reckoned by Geetika Joshi, a senior HR professional. "Not only will such a move bring uncertainty along, it will affect most other relationships that you might have fostered over time, and your relationship with your boss may even affect the relationships you make at your new workplace. Therefore, it is extremely essential to choose wisely and think deep before taking this plunge."

While an opportunity to work with your existing boss may sound extremely good at the first time, it is extremely crucial to weigh the pros and cons and then take an informed decision about the same.



## Hero launches four new products at the Auto Expo

**NEW DELHI.** The country's largest two-wheeler maker Hero MotoCorp launched four new products at the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025. The new models include the Hero Xoom 125 (R 86,900), Hero Xoom 160 (R 1,48,500), Hero Xpulse 210 (R 1,75,800), and Hero Xtreme 250R (R 1,79,900). All four products will be available for booking from February 2025, with deliveries expected to commence in March 2025. "Today two of our premium brands, Xtreme and Xpulse, have become even stronger. We have fortified our presence in the 125cc scooter segment and also ventured into the 160cc category with a Maxi Scooter," said Niranjan Gupta, Chief Executive Officer, Hero MotoCorp. He added, "The launch of these new models on the back of an already strong portfolio, will further boost our growth journey as we enter the next fiscal." Honda Motorcycle and Scooters India (HMSIL) also announced the prices of two electric scooters that were unveiled in November 2024. Prices for the affordable QC1 electric scooter start at R 90,000 while the more premium Activa e starts at R 1.17 lakh.

TVS Motor showcased multiple new concepts at the expo, the most important being the Jupiter CNG Concept. TVS said that riders will be able to switch between petrol and CNG instantly, and it will offer a range of 226km with running costs of less than R 1 per kilometre. TVS-owned British luxury motorcycle maker Norton Motorcycles is showcasing the Norton V4CR - the most powerful café racer from the UK.

## Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited signs loan agreement worth Rs 31,802 crore

**NEW DELHI.** BHARAT Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) has signed a loan agreement worth R 31,802 crore with a consortium of six lenders led by the State Bank of India. The project, estimated to cost R 48,926 crore, aims to establish a petrochemical complex, including a 1.2 million metric tonnes per annum (MMTPA) ethylene cracker unit and an expansion of the refinery's capacity from 7.8 MMTPA to 11 MMTPA.

This expansion will enable BPCL to produce downstream petrochemical products such as Linear Low-Density Polyethylene (LLDPE), High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE), Polypropylene (PP), and other aromatics, significantly reducing India's dependence on imports.

"We are delighted to achieve financial closure for our Bina Refinery Expansion cum Petrochemical Project, which aligns with India's broader strategy to boost industrial growth, infrastructure development, and increased industrial activity," said G Krishnakumar, Chairman & Managing Director, BPCL. "Upon completion, it will mark a significant milestone towards attaining Atma Nirbharata in petrochemical products and enhancing the energy security of the nation."

## Budget 2025: Govt May Introduce New Income Tax Bill To Simplify I-T Law; All You Need To Know

**NEW DELHI.** In the upcoming Budget 2025 session of Parliament, the government is likely to introduce a new income tax bill to simplify the current I-T law, make it comprehensible and reduce the number of pages by about 60 per cent, news agency PTI has reported. "The new Income Tax law will be introduced in the Budget session of Parliament. It will be a new law and not an amendment to the existing Act. Currently, the draft law is being vetted by the law ministry and it is likely to be brought in Parliament in the second half of the Budget session," according to the PTI report citing a source.

The Budget session is scheduled from January 31 to April 4. The first half (January 31-February 13) will start with President Droupadi Murmu's address to the joint sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha followed by the tabling of the Economic Survey for 2024-25. The Union Budget for 2025-26 will be presented on February 1. Parliament will reconvene on March 10 and will sit through April 4. Sitharaman in her July Budget had announced a comprehensive review of the six-decade old Income Tax Act, 1961, within six months. Pursuant to the Budget announcement by Sitharaman for a comprehensive review of the I-T Act, 1961, the CBDT had set up an internal committee to oversee the review and make the Act concise, clear, and easy to understand, which will reduce disputes, litigation, and provide greater tax certainty to taxpayers. Also, 22 specialised sub-committees were established to review various aspects of the Act.

Public inputs and suggestions were invited in four categories — simplification of language, litigation reduction, compliance reduction, and redundant/obsolete provisions.

The Income Tax Department has received 6,500 suggestions from stakeholders on review of the Act.

Sources said the provisions and chapters will be significantly reduced and the obsolete provisions will be deleted. The Income Tax Act, 1961, which deals with imposition of direct taxes — personal I-T, corporate tax, securities transaction tax, besides gift and wealth tax — currently has about 298 sections and 23 chapters.

# 8th Pay Commission: What were the big changes in 7th and 6th Pay Commissions?

**The Government has approved the formation of the 8th Pay Commission for central government employees and pensioners. Here is a look at the salary hikes under the 7th and 6th Pay Commissions.**

**NEW DELHI.** The Union Cabinet recently approved the formation of the 8th Pay Commission, which is set to revise salaries for lakhs of central government employees and pensioners. Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw suggested that the commission will likely be formed soon, and its recommendations will come into effect on January 1, 2026.

The announcement comes just days before the Union Budget 2025 and aims to align salaries with current economic conditions and inflation rates. As the anticipation around the 8th Pay Commission grows, here is a look at the major changes that were part of the 7th and 6th Pay Commissions.

## SALARY AND PENSION HIKE IN 7TH PAY COMMISSION

The 7th Pay Commission came into effect on January 1, 2016. It introduced many major changes for central government employees. One of the most critical aspects was the fitment factor, which was set at 2.57.

What this meant was that the basic pay would be multiplied by 2.57, leading to increased salaries across all levels amongst central government staff.

The 7th Pay Commission also recommended a minimum basic salary of Rs 18,000, marking an increase from the

previous Rs 7,000 under the 6th Pay Commission. In addition, pensions saw a decent increase. For pensioners, the minimum basic pension rose to Rs 9,000, up from Rs 3,500 under the 6th Pay

Commission. Pensioners also benefited marginally, with the minimum basic pension increasing from Rs 1,275 to Rs 3,500 per month.

## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE 8TH PAY COMMISSION?

As of now, nothing is clear about what exactly can be expected under the new pay commission. However, some reports suggest that it is expected to introduce a more major revision to salaries and pensions. Unconfirmed projections for the 8th Pay Commission indicate that the fitment factor could range from 2.28 to 2.86. If this happens, the minimum basic pay may rise from Rs 18,000 to anywhere between Rs 41,000 and Rs 51,480, providing a big financial boost for central government employees.



## WHAT HAPPENED IN 6TH PAY COMMISSION?

The 6th Pay Commission, which was implemented in January 2006, introduced modest changes but still

## Mixed Bag For Indian Stock Markets This Week, All Eyes On Trump's Inauguration

**New Delhi.** As Indian investors adopt a cautious approach ahead of the inauguration of Donald Trump as 47th US President and his comments with focus on tariffs, this week was a mixed bag for the domestic benchmark indices. After three days of gains, the domestic market ended on a weak note on Friday as large-cap IT and banking stocks saw higher underperformance due to a cautious outlook on discretionary spending for the former and subdued deposit and credit growth, as well as tighter liquidity conditions for the latter. In contrast, public sector banks (PSUs) performed well during the week. Sensex ended the week at 76,619.33 and Nifty settled at 23,203.2. The Nifty remained under bearish pressure for yet another

session. Nifty Bank ended at 49,540.6 down by 738.10 points or 1.50 per cent. The Nifty Midcap 100 index closed at 54,607.65 after climbing



123.85 points, or 0.23 per cent, while the Nifty Smallcap 100 index closed at 17,672.05 after adding 28.75 points, or 0.16 per cent. Since the recent peak in September 2024, the Nifty 50 has fallen by 11.5 per cent, with the

Midcap index down 12 per cent and the Smallcap index sliding 11 per cent. The Q3 earnings season will be critical in restoring confidence and stability.

According to market watchers, investors are increasingly adopting a risk-averse stance due to strengthening of the dollar. Furthermore, rising uncertainty over potential economic policies from the new US administration impacted overall sentiments. Overall, the market is expected to remain cautious in the short term due to moderate Q3 expectations, while persistent FII outflows could add to higher volatility. Looking ahead, the incoming US President's policies and comments will be keenly watched with focus on tariffs. Higher inflation in Japan or tighter policy from BoJ will weigh on market.

## International Monetary Fund Retains India's GDP Growth Forecast At 6.5% For FY26, FY27

**New Delhi.** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) retained India's growth forecast at 6.5 per cent for fiscal 2026 and fiscal 2027, the global economic body said in its World Economic Outlook report. The IMF added, "In India, growth is projected to be solid at 6.5 percent in 2025 and 2026, as projected in October and in line with potential."

The global body noted a slowdown in the Gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate adding that "growth in India also slowed more than expected, led by a sharper-than-expected deceleration in industrial activity." India's economic growth slowed in the second quarter of the current fiscal as it expanded only by 5.4 per cent whereas in the second quarter the GDP growth rate was recorded at 6.7 per cent. The GDP growth rate in



fiscal 2024 was recorded at 8.4. However, the economy still holds the tag of "world's fastest growing economy."

According to the November monthly economic review by the Finance Ministry, the fresh uncertainties have surfaced for global trade in the financial year 2026. However, despite the global challenges, the ministry in its report provides a cautiously optimistic

outlook for India. It predicts that growth in the second half of FY25 will be better than the first half. It said, "After a moderation in Q2 of FY25, the outlook for Q3 appears bright, as reflected in the performance of HFIs for October and November 2024." The report stated that the strong US dollar and potential policy rate adjustments in the United States are pressuring emerging market currencies.

On the international front, the IMF forecasted that global growth is projected at 3.3 per cent in both 2025 and 2026, below the historical (2000-19) average of 3.7 per cent. The forecast for 2025 is broadly unchanged from that in the October 2024 World Economic Outlook (WEO), primarily on account of an upward revision in the United States offsetting downward revisions in other major economies, the Washington-based organisation added.

## Big Boost For Food Processing Industry: Projects Worth Over Rs 30,000 Crore Approved Under PM Kisan Sampada Yojana

**The PM Kisan Sampada Yojana aims to increase processing and preservation capacity by 428.04 LMT per annum, create 13.42 lakh jobs, and benefit 51.24 lakh farmers.**

**NEW DELHI.** The Ministry of Finance has announced the approval of 1,646 food processing projects, including food testing labs and R&D initiatives, under various sub-schemes of the PM Kisan Sampada Yojana. These projects, approved until December 18, 2024, are valued at Rs 31,830.23 crore, with the potential to attract Rs 22,722.55 crore in private investment. Implemented by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) since 2016-17, the PM Kisan



Sampada Yojana aims to increase processing and preservation capacity by 428.04 LMT per annum, create 13.42 lakh jobs, and benefit 51.24 lakh farmers.

The government is committed to driving growth in agriculture and food processing by encouraging both private and public investments in areas such as aggregation, modern storage, efficient supply chains, processing, and marketing.

This push is aimed at increasing the level of food processing and enhancing the

export of processed foods by creating modern infrastructure with efficient supply chain management from farm gates to retail outlets.

## PMFME Yojana: First Scheme for the Unorganised Sector

The PM Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Yojana, a centrally sponsored scheme implemented by MoFPI since 2020-21, provides financial, technical, and business support for upgrading micro food processing enterprises. It is the first-

ever scheme for the unorganised sector. Under the PMFME Yojana, over 3.10 lakh SHGs have received seed capital support, and 1,14,388 individuals have benefited from credit linkage subsidies as of December 18, 2024. The Ministry of Finance also provided updates on financial support for the establishment of 50 multi-product food irradiation units in the MSME sector, as announced in the 2024-25 budget.

An Expression of Interest (EOI) was issued in August 2024 inviting proposals for the establishment of multi-product food irradiation units under the Integrated Cold Chain and Value Addition Infrastructure Scheme of PMKSY. So far, 20 project proposals have been received, and they are under scrutiny or evaluation in accordance with the scheme guidelines.

## PLI Scheme Update:

Regarding the PLI scheme for the food processing industry, the finance ministry reported that 133 companies are currently covered under the programme. Investments totalling Rs 8,910 crore have been attracted so far, and incentives worth Rs 1,084 crore have been disbursed in 85 eligible cases.

## PSU steel manufacturer RINL gets Rs 11,440-crore lifeline from government

**NEW DELHI.** The debt-laden Visakhapatnam-based public sector company -- Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL) -- has got a new lease of life after the Central government on Friday approved a revival package of Rs 11,440 crore for the company. Of the Rs 11,440 crore, Rs 10,300 crore will be in the form of fresh equity infusion and Rs 1,140 crore will be for converting the working capital loan into preferred share capital. "With this revival package, many of the historical legacy problems that RINL used to face will be resolved. Simultaneously, a lot of effort is going to be put in securing the raw material for RINL and the modernisation of the plant," said Ashwini Vaishnaw, Minister of Railways, Information & Broadcasting, and Electronics & Information Technology. The minister said that very soon RINL will start functioning with two glass furnaces, and by August this year, all the three glass furnaces would be operational. Vaishnaw further said that RINL has a very special position in the entire steel industry -- it is one of those plants, which is located at the coastal Andhra Pradesh in Vizag, and is very important for the overall steel sector of the country.

RINL has been under financial distress for quite some time, reporting losses and mounting debt for almost a decade now. In FY24, the company posted net losses of Rs 4,850 crore compared to Rs 2,850 crore in the previous year. The company's total debt at the end of FY24 was at Rs 17,000 crore. The Navratna PSU company has over 13,000 employees. The company has a total capacity of 10.8 million tonnes of manufacturing capacity. The Union government, which was once considering privatisation of RINL but had to stall the process after political opposition, had last year infused Rs 1,650 crore to help it tide over financial and operational issues.

According to Vaishnaw, the revival package would immensely benefit all employees of RINL and all the people connected with the economic activities of the company.

## Revival package

In a post on X, PM Narendra Modi said the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant has a special place in the hearts and minds of the people of AP, and the revival package has been given "understanding the importance of the steel sector in building an Atma Nirbhar Bharat".



## NEWS BOX

## Australian Open: India's men's doubles challenge over as Sriram Balaji exits

New Delhi . India's challenge at the men's doubles event at the Australian Open 2025 has come to an end as N. Sriram Balaji and his partner Miguel Angel Reyes-Varela exited the competition in the second round on Saturday, January 18. Balaji and Reyes-Varela put in a valiant effort against Nuno Borges and Francisco Cabral but ultimately lost in a hard-fought 3-set clash on Saturday by a scoreline of 6-7, 6-4, 3-6. Balaji was India's only remaining hope in the men's doubles as the likes of Rohan Bopanna, Ritvik Bollapalli and Anirudh Chandrasekar had exited the competition in the very first round. The match between both teams was evenly-contested from the get-go as they were stingy in giving away break points and it was 6-6 in the first set as we headed into the tiebreaker.

While Balaji and Reyes-Varela won the first point in the tiebreaker, Borges and Cabral put in a clinical performance to win it 6-1 to



take the first set.

**Balaji and Reyes-Varela mount a comeback**  
The Indo-Mexican pair weren't left disappointed after being blanked in the first set tiebreaker and started the second one by breaking the Portuguese duo. They made it 2-0 with Reyes-Varela serving before Borges-Cabral started to use their own service game effectively to make cut the deficit down to one. Game 10 of the second set saw Balaji and Reyes-Varela race into 40-0 and have 3 set points to their name. While the Portuguese duo was able to save one of them, the Indo-Mexican pair would take the set to tie the match at 1-1 and push it to the decider.

The 3rd and final set saw both teams start off by winning from their serves before the match turned on its head in Game 4. From Reyes-Varela's serve, Borges-Cabral were able to break the Indo-Mexican pair to take a 3-1 lead and never showed signs of letting it slip. Balaji and Reyes-Varela tried their best, but ended up losing the match in 2 hours and 9 minutes.

## Premier League: Manchester United legend Denis Law dies at 84

New Delhi. Manchester United legend and Ballon d'Or winner Denis Law has died at the age of 84, the Premier League club announced on Friday, January 18. Law, who began his career with Huddersfield Town, made a name for himself at United. The Scottish legend spent 11 years at Manchester United and won the league titles in 1965 and 1967 and the European Cup in 1968. The United legend scored 237 goals for the club in 404 appearances and is the club's third-highest goalscorer behind Wayne Rooney and Sir Bobby Charlton. Along with Charlton and George Best, Law formed one of the most feared footballing partnerships of all time, which was fondly dubbed as the 'holy trinity' by the Manchester United fans. Law is the only Scottish player to win the Ballon d'Or and the European Player Of The Year awards as he got the honours in 1964.



Law's family issued a statement through United announcing the demise of the legend on Friday. "It is with a heavy heart that we tell you our father Denis Law has sadly passed away. He fought a tough battle but finally he is now at peace," a family statement shared by United said. "We would like to thank everyone who contributed to his wellbeing and care, past and much more recently." "We know how much people supported and loved him and that love was always appreciated and made the difference. Thank you." United would also release a statement of their own, saying that everyone at the club are mourning the loss of one of the club's greatest players of all time.

"Everyone at Manchester United is mourning the loss of Denis Law, the King of the Stretford End, who has passed away, aged 84," United added in a statement. "He will always be celebrated as one of the club's greatest and most beloved players. The ultimate goal-scorer, his flair, spirit and love for the game made him the hero of a generation."

## Family's happiness after Arjuna Award win has motivated me more: Sanjay

New Delhi . For Sanjay, his rise in the Indian men's hockey team has been spectacular. After first tasting success in the youth Olympic Games in Argentina in 2018, the young defender went on to make his debut for the senior team in 2022 and has been a regular fixture of the squad ever since. Success would quickly follow the 23-year-old from Haryana as he would win the Asian Games 2022 gold medal and also secured 2 Asian Champions trophies in 2023 and 2024.

The biggest crowning moment for Sanjay came in Paris when he helped India win the bronze medal at the Olympics 2024 to continue his fine run. These consistent performances have now helped the young defender be one of the athletes to receive the prestigious Arjuna Award, which he received from President Droupadi Murmu on January 17. Ahead of this glorious personal moment, Indiatoday.in got the chance to talk to the defender, who is plying his trade now with the Kalinga Lancers in the Hockey India League. The 23-year-old opened up on his experiences so far in the revamped HIL, learning the art of drag-flicking from teammate Alexander Hendrickx and how winning the Arjuna

Award has motivated him more to achieve success.

**Sanjay exclusive interaction**

Sanjay: So far, the experience has been really great. I've learnt a lot, especially by getting the opportunity to play alongside some of the world's top players. Every moment, whether it's in the gym, on the field, or during our free time, has been a chance to learn from them. It's an excellent platform to prove my performance and show that I deserve to be part of the Indian team. This league is a big opportunity for all Indian players.

What is your personal goal for this season? Sanjay: My personal goal is to perform well for my franchise, give my 100 percent, stay fit, and avoid injuries. I also want to prove myself and ensure that I get selected for the upcoming Indian squad. How do you think the Hockey India League will help Indian hockey grow? Sanjay: Definitely, it's a huge boost. For emerging players, juniors, and young players like me, it will increase our confidence. Playing alongside top players will help us understand their skills, and learning from senior players will allow us to

implement those lessons in our game. This will surely benefit the Indian team in the long run.

You're being groomed as a drag-flicker. How



has your experience been, especially playing with someone like Alexander Hendrickx? Sanjay: Alexander is undoubtedly one of the world's top drag-flickers, and playing alongside him has been an amazing experience. Whenever we have free time, I try to learn as much as I can from him and ask questions. He has so many skills, and I hope to utilise those lessons in the future. Playing with such a big player is truly a proud moment for me.

The last time the Hockey India League was held, Kalinga Lancers won the title. Do you think that's possible this time?

Sanjay: Anything is possible. We are taking it match by match and not thinking too far ahead. Our focus is on giving 100 percent against the team we face next and implementing the plans step by step. Can you describe the moment when you won the Arjuna Award? How did it feel?

Sanjay: It was like a dream come true, and I felt incredibly proud of myself. I was very happy, and when I shared the news with my family, seeing their happiness motivated me even more. Their joy and the thought of receiving such a prestigious award has inspired me to work even harder to bring medals for the country and achieve more accolades. It's the New Year. What are your personal goals for this hockey season? Sanjay: Right now, the focus is on performing well in the HIL. I want to play well for my team, contribute to our victories, and also ensure my personal performance is up to the mark. My main goal is to get selected for the Indian team's squad, and after that, focus on the upcoming tournaments.

## Australian Open: Rybakina braves injury to beat Yastremska, advances to 4th round

New Delhi . Elena Rybakina progressed to the fourth round of the Australian Open 2025 as she beat Dayana Yastremska 6-3, 6-4 in the third round fixture at John Cain Arena on Saturday, January 18. Rybakina had to battle through an injury as she took a medical break during the first set but didn't let it affect her and got the better of her Ukrainian rival. Rybakina broke her opponent in the fourth game of the first set and eventually sealed it 6-3.

However, Yastremska fought back bravely in the second set as she broke Rybakina early in the second game itself, before Rybakina also made a comeback by earning a break point in the next game.

She further broke her opponent again in the



fifth game to take the lead. The 2023 finalist was made to work hard in the second set by Yastremska before she eventually sealed the win. Following her victory, Rybakina admitted that it wasn't easy for her to stay in the game after her injury and revealed that her ultra-aggressive gameplay helped her

get the better of her opponent. "Well, honestly, I didn't know how it's going to go because it came out the facade and I didn't expect, and of course it was not easy. I knew that, it will be very difficult for me to stay long in the rally, so I was trying just to play aggressive, sometimes risk a little bit more. So, yeah, really happy that it went on my way then," said Rybakina during her on court interview after the game.

Meanwhile, apart from her, Daria Kasatkina also made it to the fourth round, beating Yulia Putintseva 7-5, 6-1 at Show Court Arena. Eva Lys also progressed ahead in the tournament with a remarkable win against Jaqueline Cristian after losing the first set at Court 3. The German managed to seal the next two sets 6-3, 6-3 after going down 4-6 in the first one and made it to the fourth round.

## Dinesh Karthik questions Hardik Pandya's removal from vice captaincy in T20Is

New Delhi. Former India cricketer-turned commentator Dinesh Karthik has questioned Hardik Pandya's removal from vice captaincy in the Indian T20I side.

Pandya was surprisingly not chosen to lead the team after Rohit Sharma's retirement from the format after the T20 World Cup 2024, with Suryakumar Yadav being handed over the leadership duties. Pandya was not even chosen as the vice-captain of the team, with Shubman Gill being appointed as Suryakumar's deputy for India's first series post T20 World Cup against Sri Lanka. Even after Gill lost his place in the T20I side, the selectors didn't name any vice-captain for the last two series against Bangladesh and South Africa.

However, they chose all-rounder Axar Patel as the new vice-captain for the upcoming series against England. The move left Karthik baffled, who saw no reason to not choose Pandya even as a vice captain. "I really don't

know. I don't know why he (Hardik) was stripped of his vice-captaincy. I don't see any reason to. They have done well. They have won in the bilaterals that he was the



vice-captain. Not a clue," Karthik said on Cricbuzz. Pandya was handed over the responsibility of leading the Indian T20I side after their semi-final exit from the T20 World Cup 2022. The all-rounder captained the team in 16 matches and led them to 11 victories, losing five matches. However,

with Rohit Sharma making his return to the T20I side just ahead of the World Cup 2024, Pandya was stripped of his responsibility.

**Hardik continues his brilliant form in T20Is**

Following Rohit's retirement from the format after India's T20 World Cup 2024 triumph, Pandya was expected to be handed over the leadership duties. However, the selectors picked Suryakumar Yadav as the new skipper and didn't appoint the all-rounder even as the vice-captain. Chief Selector Ajit Agarkar was even asked about the reason behind Suryakumar's appointment in the press conference as he revealed that they needed someone who's available more often than not. Meanwhile, despite him not being considered for leadership roles, Pandya has been performing well for the team as he was adjudged Player of the Series in India's 3-0 victory over Bangladesh in October 2024. The all-rounder was the vital cog in India's T20 World Cup win in 2024 and continues to be an integral member of the team due to his all-round skills.



score being in the favour of the American at 4-3. Monfils committed a few errors while serving and a double fault at the end helped Fritz break him and extend the lead to 5-3. He would then serve out to win the first set.

**Monfils shows off his strength**

Both men once again were on top of their game when it came to their service, with Monfils serving up a total of 24 aces throughout the contest. With the score at 6-5, Monfils would be able to break Fritz, who was being left frustrated with what was happening.

The third set continued the same trend as the first two as both men dominated while serving and the game went into the tiebreaker. Monfils was able to dominate his opponent during the tiebreaker with some powerful shots and critical errors from Fritz. He raced into a 6-0 lead in the tiebreaker and while Fritz got one back, the Frenchman took the lead in the match. The third set saw Fritz pick himself up and put in a fight, with both men playing an entertaining Game 4 that went on for 12 minutes.

## Rishabh Pant has almost reached the same level as MS Dhoni: Mohammad Kaif

**Former India cricketer Mohammad Kaif feels India wicketkeeper batter Rishabh Pant has almost reached the same level as legendary wicketkeeper MS Dhoni.**

New Delhi. Former India cricketer Mohammad Kaif feels Rishabh Pant has reached the same level as legendary India wicketkeeper-batter MS Dhoni. Ahead of the squad announcement for the ICC Champions

Trophy 2025, there have been widespread discussions about who will take the wicketkeeper's slot for the mega event, with KL Rahul, Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson being in contention.

Recently, Kaif shared his views on the matter and mentioned how Samson has left Pant behind with his recent T20I performances. However, he mentioned that Pant's remarkable performances in Test cricket have made him almost reach the same level as MS Dhoni. Sanju Samson has gone ahead. You have to understand this. With Rishabh Pant, people have their emotions attached. He is a big match-winner in Tests. Who can forget his knock at the Gabba and the hundred in South Africa? He performs well in overseas conditions. He is a good wicketkeeper. Rishabh Pant is a better wicketkeeper than Sanju Samson; he has almost reached the same level as MS Dhoni,"



Mohammad Kaif said on his YouTube channel.

Furthermore, the former batter said that Pant needs to understand that his white-ball stats are not that good as compared to Samson. "Rishabh Pant needs to recognise the reality. If someone tells him 'wrong things are being done with you', they are not telling the right things. Rishabh Pant should stay away from such friends. Someone needs

to tell him that his white-ball stats are not that great. Sanju Samson has genuinely earned that chance to go to the Champions Trophy. Rishabh Pant needs to work hard," he added.

**Pant vs Samson in ODI cricket**

In 31 ODIs played in his career so far, Pant has scored 871 runs at an average of 33.50 with five fifties and one hundred to his name. On the other hand, Samson has scored 510 runs from 16 matches at an average of 56.66 with one hundred and three fifties to his name. He even scored a hundred in his last ODI played against South Africa in Paarl in December 2023. The 30-year-old is in sensational form, having scored three hundreds in his last five T20Is. Hence, Samson finds himself ahead in the race for selection for the Champions Trophy 2025. It remains to be seen whether he will get the selectors' nod for the mega event.



# Tamannaah Bhatia

Reviews Aaman Devgan And Rasha Thadani's 'Incredible Film' Azaad

Debutants Aman Devgan and Rasha Thadani starrer Azaad has finally opened in theatres, marking the official entry of the two young actors in Bollywood. Both hailing from the family of stars, with Aaman being the nephew of acting powerhouse Ajay Devgn and Rasha walking in the footsteps of her mother Raveena Tandon, expectations remain high for their performances in the historical drama. Ahead of the film's release, the makers hosted a star-studded premiere for the entire team, drawing the likes of celebrities like Ajay Devgn, Kajol, Raveena Tandon, Boney Kapoor, Sonali Bendre, Vijay Varma, and others. Tamannaah Bhatia also made a stunning appearance at the event dressed in a 'Uyiii Amma' themed T-shirt, seemingly showing her support for Rasha's debut. Keeping it casual, the actress paired her T-shirt with baggy jeans, exuding cool yet chic vibes at the event. For those unaware, Uyi Amma is a dance number from the Azaad featuring Rasha Thadani. The song has been recently trending on social media with its catchy lyrics, dance steps, and music already turning into a sensation.



Besides giving a shoutout to the song, Tamannaah also did not forget to share her personal review of the film.

Taking to her Instagram stories, she shared a picture featuring the lead actors with director Abhishek Kapoor and wrote, "What an incredible film and such genuine performances. This is the kinda cinema experience we need." Besides the core team taking centre stage in the photo, we cannot help but notice Vijay Verma in the background. During her appearance at the premiere, Tamannaah also had a fun banter with the paparazzi who teased her with the

song lyrics. While she humbly posed for pictures, she also praised the track and called it "Super." Opened in theatres on Friday, January 17, Azaad tells the story of Govind (Aaman Devgan) who admires a dacoit Vikram Singh's (Ajay Devgn) black horse Azaad.

As the story unfolds, Govind will be seen locking horns with Janaki, the daughter of landlord Roy Bahadur, further setting the stage for a complex narrative around their lives in the pre-independence era.



## Please Don't Disturb Triptii Dimri

She Is 'Having A Whole Lot Of Fun' With Little Bit Of Sun

Triptii Dimri, known for her stint in Animal, Bulbul, and more, is a complete travel enthusiast. Her social media handles are proof of the same. In the last month of 2024, she embarked on a journey to Prague, Finland and other surreal locations. Yet again, the actress went on a trip to an undisclosed destination. She shared a video on her social media handle capturing some of the best moments from there, which served pure travel goals. Taking to her Instagram account, Triptii Dimri posted a long reel featuring some stunning moments from her



recent vacation. The video began with the actress wearing a powder blue-hued flowy dress and riding on her cycle amidst the surreal nature of the place. From the floral garden to the small hills located over there, it seemed that the video was shot in France. As the scene changed from a sunny evening to an aesthetic location inside a building, the actress was descending the stairs. In the background, we can spot stacks of books kept on

a wooden shelf engraved on the white walls. Her video also featured iconic glimpses of various locations, sneak peeks into her road journeys, staycations and more.

For a lazy evening in France, Dimri was wearing a flowy black dress while staring at the beauty of the place. Next, she was also seen cycling through the cosy lanes of the French cities, wandering in flower gardens, plucking freshly harvested berries and even diving into some, walking through the lush green colonies and more. The actress ended the video with a moment captured during sunset. She was wearing a pink-hued bralette teamed with shorts while embracing the nature. Posting the video, she wrote, "A little bit of flowers.. a little bit of sun... and a whole lot of happiness." Soon, her fans started heaping praises on the actress for serving some pure travel goals. One user said, "We need a vlog on 'Tripts on Vacation' please!! These clips are so beautiful, hope you had an amaazing time darling girl!!" Another person mentioned, "This is more beautiful than Bollywood films." Someone added, "You make Europe look even more beautiful." One more comment read, "What fun! What a beautiful place." It is not the first time Dimri mesmerised her fans with stunning glimpses from her vacation. She enjoyed a snowy vacation in Finland, followed by her New Year celebration while watching the Northern lights - all of which served her travel goals. On the work front, Dimri appeared in three films in 2024 - Bad Newz, Vicky Vidya Ka Woh Wala Video and Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3. She will be next seen in the movie Dhadak 2.



### Kangana Ranaut Praises Vikrant Massey After Calling Him A 'Cockroach': 'Who Am I To Judge Him?'



Kangana Ranaut's Emergency finally hits theaters today after enduring multiple delays and challenges. While much of the buzz surrounds Kangana's portrayal of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the actor-filmmaker recently opened up about her changed dynamic with Vikrant Massey, the lead actor of The Sabarmati Report. Their relationship, once fraught with tension, has seemingly taken a surprising turn. Speaking on Shubhankar Mishra's Unplugged podcast, Kangana addressed her past feud with Vikrant, whom she had previously labeled a "cockroach" on social media. The incident stemmed from Vikrant's comment on Yami Gautam's bridal look, where he described her as "pure and pious like Radhe Maa." Kangana had famously replied, "Kahan se nikla ye cockroach. Lao meri chappal (Where did this cockroach come from, bring my slippers)." Fast forward to 2025, and Kangana has shifted her perspective. Reflecting on Vikrant's performance in The Sabarmati Report, she shared, "When I saw The Sabarmati Report, I told him that I liked his work. We must understand that every person has the potential to change. We shouldn't cage them or label them. Doing that is the biggest toxicity in Hindi cinema."

Kangana emphasized the importance of allowing room for growth, adding, "Who am I to judge him or anyone? Whatever capacity they are engaging with me, I will respond accordingly. There is a chance that he (Vikrant) can go back to feeling the way he did before the film. But having said that, it is much better than being so strict with your ideology that it makes you feel constricted and caged." Meanwhile, Emergency has finally released in theatres, with Kangana revealing she had contemplated an OTT release to avoid the obstacles of theatrical distribution. "There was an increased level of frustration about why I took the challenge of releasing the film in theatres."

### Soni Razdan Calls Out Media Portal For Posting Saif Ali Khan's House Pics After Attack: 'Irresponsible'



Veteran actress Soni Razdan has slammed a media portal for posting inside pictures of Saif Ali Khan's residence, hours after he was attacked by an intruder at his home. She was disappointed with the news portal for their 'incredibly irresponsible' post, and demanded its removal from social media. Saif Ali Khan was stabbed by an intruder at his residence in the wee hours of January 16. The Bollywood star was stabbed six times by the robber following which he was rushed to Lilavati Hospital. The actor is now out of danger. Soni Razdan reacted to India Today's post on Instagram that was titled 'Inside Saif Ali Khan's Rs 45 crore Bandra home where he was stabbed.' The following slide in the carousel showed an image of Saif's building, the entrance area, swimming pool, lobby and the courtyard. The next slide showed a map of Bandra, which was marked with the locations of Salman Khan, Shah Rukh Khan, Naseeruddin Shah, Sohail Khan, Aamir Khan, Rekha and other celebrities' homes. Soni Razdan commented on the post, and criticized this irresponsible post. "This is an incredibly irresponsible post. When will our press show even the tiniest bit of maturity and responsibility in the face of what could have been a monumental tragedy? Suggestion from me. Delete this post while you still can save some face," she wrote.

Yesterday, filmmaker Hansal Mehta also took to X (previously Twitter), and wrote, "Unfortunately incident with Saif. Prayers for his speedy recovery. But why the f\*\*k are media reports giving out his residential address?" Meanwhile, on Thursday night, Kareena Kapoor Khan also issued a statement and appealed for privacy as their family processes the traumatic experience. "It has been an incredibly challenging day for our family, and we are still trying to process the events that have unfolded. I respectfully and humbly request that the media and paparazzi refrain from relentless speculation and coverage." She expressed concern for their safety, urging the media to respect their boundaries: "The constant scrutiny and attention are not only overwhelming but also pose a significant risk to our safety. I kindly request your cooperation during this sensitive time," she wrote. The attacker has now been arrested by the Mumbai Police. Yesterday, after the news of the attack on Saif Ali Khan emerged, celebrities such as Jr NTR, Chiranjeevi, Parineeti Chopra, Pulkit Samrat, Pooja Bhatt, Neil Nitin Mukesh and others wished him a quick recovery.