



## NEWS BOX

## NSS trains guns on Pinarayi over remark on shirtless temple entry

**KOTTAYAM.** Evoking memories of the revolt that he had spearheaded against the Pinarayi Vijayan government over the Sabarimala women entry issue in 2018, NSS general secretary G Sukumaran Nair on Thursday unleashed a scathing attack on the chief minister on another contentious topic — men entering temples with shirts on. “It (removing shirt while entering temple) is a practice followed by people for ages, and it cannot be altered by a government or a particular community,” Nair said, referring to Pinarayi’s remark supporting Sivagiri Mutt head Swami Satchidananda’s call to change the custom. “The CM should not have endorsed (Satchidananda’s) suggestion,” he said while addressing the inaugural session of the Mannam jayanthi celebrations at the NSS headquarters in Perumna. “There are reports that somebody said the practice (of removing the shirt) is to ascertain whether the person entering the temple is a Brahmin. Why are these interpretations limited to Hindus and their customs alone? Such obsolete practices, particularly pertaining to customs, exist in other religions, too. Does the Sivagiri Mutt or the chief minister have the guts to question such practices in other religions?” he wondered. The NSS is against changing age-old rituals and customs, he said. “Several temples are managed by various subdivisions in the Hindu community, and each temple follows its own customs and practices. While some temples permit darshan wearing shirts, others do not. In Sabarimala, there are no such restrictions. Hindus have the freedom to enter the premises without disrupting the customs and rituals of the respective temples.

## Maternal deaths: Ashoka demands Rao's resignation, judicial probe

**BENGALURU.** Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Assembly R Ashoka on Thursday demanded that Dinesh Gundu Rao resign as health minister and a judicial probe be ordered into the increasing number of maternal deaths in the state. “Congress leaders speak about women’s empowerment and their government gives Rs 2,000 to them under the Gruha Lakshmi guarantee scheme. They should guarantee the survival of pregnant women first,” he told reporters here. As many as 736 maternal deaths have been reported in the state. The state government should be held responsible for these deaths, he said.

Ashoka took strong exception to senior Congress ministers not visiting hospitals where maternal deaths were reported. Instead of visiting the hospitals and ensuring proper supply of medicines, they were busy attending rallies, he alleged. During the winter session, Gundu Rao said all measures had been taken to prevent maternal deaths. Though the government stated that an audit of maternal deaths will be conducted, it is yet to bring out a report, Ashoka said.

He alleged that the government did not give convincing replies to Opposition parties’ queries on the reasons for maternal deaths during the winter session. “Intravenous (IV) fluids and other medicines are supplied by the state government and the Centre has no role in it. The state government should have tested the fluids and medicines as no such deaths have been reported in other states.

## Police bust fake cement godown, two held in Bhubaneshwar

**BHUBANESWAR.** Police on Thursday busted a fake cement manufacturing godown at Tankapani Road and seized around 140 bags of hardened UltraTech cement, empty packets of different brands, two cargo vehicles and other materials.

Two persons have been arrested in the connection. Acting on a tip-off, Badagada police conducted a raid at the godown named Stutee Enterprises owned by one Durgacharan Sasmal. Sasmal along with his associate Sanjay Routray was allegedly involved in making and selling the fake cement in the market. During the raid, Sasmal and three labourers were present in the godown. Cement bags bearing UltraTech



Super and Dalmia DSP brand were stored there. Sasmal failed to produce any document to support his business. He reportedly revealed that he was procuring the damaged and hardened cement of UltraTech and Dalmia brands from different shops and godowns since over a year. After crushing the hardened cement, he packed it in bags of different brands and sold them. Investigation revealed Sasmal sent the recycled cement to Routray’s shop in Pahal.

## Peeping Tom at CMR college in Hyderabad? Cops send 11 phones for analysis

**HYDERABAD.** Cyberabad police on Thursday said that 11 phones of five persons — who are suspected to have secretly recorded videos of girl students using the bathrooms in the hostels of CMR Engineering College, Medchal — have been sent for forensic analysis after no objectionable clips were found on the devices. The cops, acting on allegations by the students, carried out a preliminary probe to verify if any such video were on the devices. Medchal ACB Srinivas Reddy told TNIE: “Although no obscene videos were found, we wanted to make sure that the suspects did not delete them.” On Wednesday and Thursday, the students staged a protest against the college management and hostel warden Preethi. They accused the mess staff of secretly recording their videos and peeping into bathrooms. After questioning the five suspects and examining their phones on Wednesday night, police released them. However, their fingerprints were collected for verification. Earlier, based on a complaint, police registered a case under Sections 77 (watching or capturing images of a woman engaged in a private act) and 125 (endangering personal safety or life) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. A student said the management has provided accommodation to the mess staff at the back of the hostel, giving them opportunities to access the girls’ bathrooms after their work.



Srinivas Reddy said after being alerted, Medchal Inspector A Satyanarayana and other cops went to the college where students told them that they had complained about the issue to the warden, but their concerns were dismissed. The police called a fingerprint team to collect samples from the location where suspicious activity was reported. Two sets of fingerprints were found and are being analysed, it is learnt. “During our visit, we observed negligence on the part of the management. They had not installed grills on the bathroom ventilators, which contributed to the entire problem. When we questioned the principal, they claimed that the issue had never been brought to the management’s attention,” the ACB said, adding, “If we find evidence of negligence by the principal or warden in this

case, we will take criminal action against them as well.” Addressing rumours circulating on social media platforms about 150 to 300 obscene videos on the phones of suspects, the ACB clarified that no such content was on their devices. A student from the college stated that they became aware of the incident on December 31. “We complained to the warden, but she dismissed our concerns as baseless,” the student said. Commenting on the absence of obscene videos on the suspects’ phones, another student remarked, “There wasn’t even a single application on their phones. They had deleted all their data. If they didn’t do

anything wrong, why did they delete everything?” District secretary of the National Students’ Union of India (NSUI), Ravi Teja, said he had spoken to the students. “The students told me that catering staff targeted four or five bathrooms on the ground floor and recorded videos using their phones. When the students approached the warden, she responded negligently and even made inappropriate remarks,” he said. On Wednesday, several parents arrived at the college to express their anger over the incident. One parent, who said he had paid Rs 1.3 lakh in fees, criticised the management not only for the lack of safety but also for poor food quality. “When I told my daughter I would speak to the management, she warned me that they might retaliate.

## Contractor Sachin Panchal's family speaks out on delay in investigation

**KALABURAGI/BIDAR.** The family of contractor Sachin Panchal, who died by suicide in Bidar on December 26 alleging harassment and demands of bribe by former Kalaburagi corporator Raju Kapnoor, has expressed apprehension that any delay in the probe would lead to the destruction of evidence. Panchal’s sister Surekha said even after eight days of the incident, no action has been taken against anyone. She said let the inquiry be conducted by the CBI or CID or any independent organisations, but justice should be served. “Whoever is the guilty, they should be punished. I am frustrated at the delay in the investigation and have decided to write to the prime minister as well as the Union home minister in this regard,” she said at a press conference in Bidar on Thursday.

Surekha said no one should play politics over the suicide of her brother, and demanded action against all those whose names were mentioned in her brother’s death note. She also wanted the

government to take action against police of Gandhi police station in Bidar and Dhannur police station in Bhalki for neglecting her brother’s complaints. “My family is in grief, but government is not taking any action. I suspect that common people would not get justice in this system. Police officers have checked the death note written by my brother. They are instead investigating whether he is a contractor or not. I am sure that the handwriting in the

death note is of my younger brother and have filed a complaint,” Surekha said. This is the first time that a family member of the deceased has come out seeking an impartial inquiry into the death, suspecting that the family may not get justice. Vishwakarma Federation state unit president Vijaykumar Pattar, who accompanied Surekha, said the government should hold an impartial probe. He said the government should find out who is Raju Kapnoor, why the deceased mentioned his name and the names of Kapnoor’s followers in the death note and why they were demanding money from Panchal. Meanwhile, contractors association state unit president Jagannath Shegji said the deceased was not a member of the association.

Speaking to Shegji said the family members of Panchal should show documents to prove his membership as well as alleged harassment by Raju Kapnoor or anybody, an the association will fight for him.

## Justice League: Telangana HC dismisses Spectrum Power's appeal in insurance dispute

**BENGALURU.** From January 5, fares of state-owned KSRTC, BMTC, NERTC and NWRTC buses will be increased by 15%. The state cabinet on Thursday approved a proposal to revise fares of ordinary and air-conditioned buses run by the four RTCs. Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil told reporters that the cabinet has given administrative approval for revision of bus fares. Patil said the RTCs spent Rs 13.21 crore a day on fuel. Ten years ago, diesel price was Rs 60.98 per litre and the RTCs spent Rs 9.16 crore a day on it. The expenditure on employees, which was Rs 12.85 crore, has increased to Rs 18.36 crore. The financial burden on the RTCs has increased and hence, fares have been revised. The proposal was for a fare hike by



13 to 15%. “We decided to hike it by 15%. Fares in buses run by RTCs in Karnataka are lesser than those in Maharashtra, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh,” he said. He, however, said that the state government will not stop its ambitious Shakti free ride guarantee for women. With the fare revision, the RTCs are expected to generate an additional revenue of Rs 74.85 crore a month. “We have earmarked Rs 50.15 crore for Shakti scheme in our budget, and Rs 41.7 crore is released to the four RTCs every month. This has not affected the state’s finances. Karnataka is one of the best states in managing finances,” he said.

Hearing the appeal, a bench of Chief Justice Alok Adarsh and Justice J. Sreenivas Rao upheld the trial court’s

judgment. The bench ruled that the trial court had thoroughly considered all relevant evidence and correctly interpreted the policy terms. Finding no merit in Spectrum Power’s appeal, the court reaffirmed the trial court’s decision to award Rs 17.79 crore along with interest and costs.

However, the trial court rejected the company’s claim for business interruption losses, stating that adequate evidence had not been provided. Aggrieved by the ruling, the company moved the high court arguing that the trial court had misinterpreted the insurance policy, particularly concerning the business interruption claim. It sought directions to the insurers, including United India Insurance, Oriental Insurance and ICICI Lombard, to compensate it for the interruption of business. The insurers defended the trial court’s ruling, maintaining that Spectrum Power had failed to substantiate its claim for business interruption losses.

The Telangana High Court was on

Thursday informed that preliminary

notifications on the demarcation of Full

Tank Levels and buffer zones have been

issued for 2,793 out of 3,342 lakes under

HMDA limits while an additional 57

final notifications, in addition to the 708

mentioned during an earlier hearing,

have been issued. A bench of Chief

Justice Alok Adarsh and Justice J.

Sreenivas Rao was hearing a suo motu

writ petition alleging inaction by the

authorities in curbing illegal

LPG tanker detaches on Avinashi road flyover; schools within 500-metre radius closed

**COIMBATORE.** An LPG-filled tanker detached from a truck on the old flyover on Avinashi Road in the early hours of Friday. The incident occurred when the truck negotiated a turn at the roundabout atop the flyover, leading to a gas leak from the tanker. As liquefied petroleum gas began to leak from the tanker, police sealed off the entire flyover, while the fire and rescue personnel worked to pour water on the tanker to prevent further hazards. The Coimbatore District Collector, Kranthi Kumar Pati, declared a holiday for schools within a 500-metre radius of the site as a precautionary measure. According



to sources, the tanker, en route from Kochi in Kerala to Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited’s (BPCL) LPG bottling plant in Ganapathy, detached from the truck’s trailer around 3 a.m. due to damage to the turn plate pin.

The tanker fell onto the flyover, causing gas leakage from its rear end. The truck driver immediately alerted the fire and rescue services, who arrived promptly. Police sealed off the flyover and adjacent underpasses, setting up barricades to divert traffic. Fire and rescue personnel sprayed water on the tanker to mitigate any potential hazards while BPCL officials and technical experts worked to contain the leakage. A crane was deployed to lift the damaged tanker, with plans to transfer the LPG to other vehicles. Coimbatore City Police Commissioner A. Saravana Sundar inspected the site and coordinated with BPCL officials. “The tanker was carrying 18 tonnes of LPG, and the leakage has been temporarily sealed. A team from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) is expected to arrive shortly to relocate the tanker to a safe location,” he said.

constructions in the FTL and buffer zone of the Ramamma Kunta in Medak district.

During the hearing, the Special Government Pleader assured the court of rapid progress in issuing final notifications for the remaining lakes. The SGP informed that an updated status report would be filed before the next hearing. The court took note of these submissions and stressed the importance of expediting the process to protect the integrity of water bodies. The bench, underscoring the significance of safeguarding lakes and their buffer zones, listed the next hearing on February 4, 2025.

Justice K. Lakshman of the Telangana High Court on Thursday directed various authorities to file their counters to an appeal filed by 12 farmers and agricultural labourers seeking anticipatory bail in the Lagherla attack case. The judge issued notices to the state government, represented by the Public Prosecutor and the Bomraspet SHO to file their counters by January 9, 2025, the next date of hearing. The petitioners, including Devidas Pawar Nayak, are accused in FIR No. 153 of 2024, dated November 11, 2024, for their alleged involvement in a violent incident during a public hearing.

## Resentment among Wayanad landslides victims over ‘inadequate allocation of land’

**KALPETTA.** The victims of the Wayanad landslides have expressed their resentment over “inadequate allocation of land for building houses” in the proposed township project in Kalpetta. Estimated to cost Rs 750 crore, the state government has started the process to set up townships on 58.5 hectares and 48.96 hectares of the Nedumbala Estate in Meppadi panchayat and Elstone Estate in Kalpetta municipality, respectively. As per the government decision, houses will be constructed on five-cent plots in Elstone estate and 10 cents in Nedumbala. However, the action committee of the disaster victims said they cannot accept the decision to allot just five cents of land to build a house. “The people in the disaster-affected areas of Mundakkai and Chooralmala have been living in vast lands with farming. The land allotment for houses should be increased to 10 cents like in Nedumbala. However, we are fine with the selection of spots — in



estate and Nedumbala estate will be completed within 15 days and 20 days, respectively,” Rajan said. Detailing the plans for the township project, the minister said KIIFCON and Uralungal Labour Cooperative Society have been instructed to start the land preparation processes once the survey process is completed.

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## News box

## Blinkit launches 10-minute ambulance service in Gurgaon

**MUMBAI.** Blinkit has rolled out a 10-minute ambulance service in select areas of Gurgaon, starting Thursday. The service is currently in the testing phase and has been launched with five ambulances. "Profit is not a goal here. We will operate this service at an affordable cost for customers and invest in really solving this critical problem for the long-term," founder and CEO Albinder Dhindsa said. The company plans to scale up the service and expand it to all major cities in the next two years. It is not yet understood if Blinkit will tie up with hospitals to provide the service or how the model will work.

## Pipeline burst floods road, but taps run dry in houses

**Gurgaon.** Residents across several parts of the city faced water shortages on Thursday following a major burst in a 1,400mm diameter pipeline along the Southern Peripheral Road (SPR). The leak, discovered near Vatika Chowk on Wednesday evening, prompted GMDA to partially shut down the supply from the Sector 51 boosting station to carry out repair work.

"We have partially shut down the supply from the boosting station in Sector 51 to address the issue. Our team is on the ground, ascertaining the extent of the damage. We hope to complete the repairs by late Thursday evening or Friday morning, after which normal supply will resume," said a senior GMDA official. The disruption impacted water supply in Sectors 48, 49, 50, and 57 through 74. While limited supply from stored water was provided in the morning, the reservoir has since run dry, leaving residents scrambling for alternatives. Vijay Shiv Nath, secretary of the Malibu RWA Federation, expressed concern over the recurring water issues. "Since morning, many residents have reached out to us about empty water tanks. Our township is spread across 204 acres and is home to 10,000 residents, yet the storage reservoir, built in 1995, is inadequate for such emergencies. We approached MCG last year for constructing an additional reservoir, but no progress has been made on the ground," he said. Echoing similar sentiments, Shalini Mehra, a resident of Sector 50, said, "Water is essential, and these disruptions cause chaos in daily life. Authorities must ensure better storage facilities and quicker resolutions." Last year in April, a leakage was detected on the 800-diameter pipeline near Kanhai Chowk, which took GMDA more than six hours to fix the fault.

## 3 police stations in Noida get ISO tag

**Noida.** Three police stations in Noida—Expressway, Badarpur, and Knowledge Park—received ISO 9001:2015 certification on Thursday after their infrastructure, quality management, and office procedures were found to meet international standards for public and police services. Prashant Kumar, the director general of Uttar Pradesh police, praised the achievement in a video message, saying it enhances the state's reputation and could serve as an inspiration for other jurisdictions. Police commissioner Laxmi Singh said the certified stations underwent a special campaign to standardise their operations, focusing on improving public services, ensuring prompt grievance redressal, and strengthening administrative management. "We prepared standard operating procedures for branches like CCTNS, IGRS, the women's help desk, and the cyber desk to ensure efficiency," she said. Singh added that efforts were made to align protocols with international standards, particularly to deliver justice quickly and effectively, especially for women and the general public. The measures included the establishment of a special cell at the commissionerate office to oversee grievance redressal under IGRS. After auditing by Royal Impact Certification Ltd, the stations were certified.

Gautam Buddh Nagar became the first police commissionerate to be awarded ISO certification in Aug 2024, when Royal Impact Certification audited and certified the police commissioner's office in Sector 108 and Surajpur.

## Restos to resorts, now a highway pit stop to tackle illegal eateries

**Ghaziabad.** The Ghaziabad Development Authority (GDA) has proposed a highway facility corridor along major speedways passing through the city to address the growing concern of unauthorised commercial establishments along them.

The initiative aims at transforming agricultural land along these major thoroughfares into regulated commercial zones. According to a senior GDA official, Ghaziabad's network of national and state highways and expressways is currently surrounded by agricultural land where only farming-related activities are permitted. However, the construction of illegal commercial establishments like motels, dhabas, and hotels has become a persistent challenge for the authorities.

The proposed highway corridor, officials said, will involve changing the land use from agricultural to commercial in specific areas along these major routes. This transformation will not only generate revenue for the development authority but also help regulate construction activities more effectively. To implement this change, GDA has initiated a survey of potential land parcels and plans to modify its master plan for 2031.

Officials said the new land use would permit various commercial activities, such as resorts, hotels, motels, guest houses, and parking facilities. Additionally, cottage industries would be allowed in rural areas, which would benefit not just the agricultural community but also create revenue opportunities for the govt. The existing illegal commercial establishments will have the opportunity to regularise their status by submitting plans to the GDA and get them approved against a compounding charge. The initiative will impact areas along major routes like Delhi Meerut Expressway, NH9, and Eastern Peripheral Expressway. "This comprehensive approach aims at balancing development needs and creating new economic opportunities for the region."

# Mothers of paralympic winners get govt awards

**Gurgaon.** The Haryana govt on Thursday honoured the mothers of athletes from state who won medals in the 2024 Paris Paralympic. India won 29 medals at the games, out of which eight were won by athletes from Haryana. The 'winners' mothers received 'Veer Mata Jijabai' award, a state-level honour, in a ceremony organised by sports organisation Kreed Bharati, in Gurgaon. Chief Minister Nitin Saini, who gave out the award, said that the state was celebrating the role of mothers in sports in the city of guru Dronacharya. "This ceremony is an opportunity to express gratitude not only to our athletes but also to their mothers," the CM said, adding that honouring such mothers was a societal responsibility and would help inspire the new generation. He highlighted the historical contributions of mothers, noting that Mata Jijabai, after whom the ceremony was named, prepared her son Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to be a true warrior and leader. Her vision and efforts gave the country a great warrior in Shivaji Maharaj, who laid the foundation of Swaraj at that time. "An athlete's first coach is their mother, and there is no coach greater than a mother. What a mother can teach, no one else in the world



can," said CM Saini. The CM also lauded the Haryana unit of Kreed Bharati for this initiative and announced Rs 21 lakh for the organisation. Previously, in the Tokyo Olympics 2020, 30 athletes from the state participated, with India winning 7 medals, out of which 4 were won by athletes from Haryana. During Birmingham Commonwealth Games, 2022, 43 athletes from Haryana

participated, winning 20 medals.

CM Saini, highlighting that Haryana had become a source of national pride in the field of sports, said that the central govt had recently selected several athletes from the state for Major Dhyan Chand Award and Arjuna Award, including Manu Bhaker and Sweety Boora.

Haryana has a sports policy for athletes, service rules to ensure employment for

exceptional athletes and provision for direct recruitment for athletes from class-1 to class-2 positions. To further encourage athletes, 298 of them who gave outstanding performances were being presented with honoriariums, the CM said, adding that scholarships were being provided to students who won medals in state, national, and international sports competitions.

Since 2014, more than 29,000 students have been awarded scholarships, amounting to over Rs 53 crore. The govt has opened sports nurseries to nurture athletes from a young age. Currently, there are 1,489 sports nurseries in the state, training 37,225 athletes. These nurseries provide monthly incentives to athletes aged from 8 to 14 and 15 to 19. During the event, industry and commerce minister Rao Narbir Singh said although Haryana's population was only two percent of the country's total, medal-winning athletes made it number one in sports.

Sports minister Gaurav Gautam, also present at the event, said that over the past decade, Rs 592 crore were spent on athletes and the govt was committed to the welfare of athletes and their families.

## IFFCO Chk service road crumbles, agencies spar over repairs

**Gurgaon.** A road running along the IFFCO Chowk flyover has turned into an accident-prone area after the stretch was dug up to repair a water pipeline and is now riddled with craters a few metres long. While there have been multiple incidents of vehicles getting stuck in waterlogged craters on this road, officials of GMDA and NHAI both say the responsibility to repair this stretch lies with the other. The damage to this road was initially caused by a leak in the water pipeline. Last month, GMDA officials fixed the leak, but said road maintenance is the

job of National Highways Authority of India (NHAI). "If the road is broken due to a faulty pipeline, repairing it also falls under NHAI's purview. The damage happened because of their pipeline. We have been asking GMDA to repair it, but they are reluctant," an NHAI official said on Sunday. Rebutting this stand, a senior GMDA official said on

recurring damage. This is the second time that we repaired it because of oversight during the construction of the flyover by NHAI's contractor," the official said. In Jan this year,

**NAME CHANGE**  
I, SURESH BISHOKARMA, alias SURESH BISHOKARMA S/O HUM SUNAR R/O HOUSE NO-172, GOVERNMENT SCHOOL WALI GALI, OLD DELHI GURGAON ROAD, SECTOR-21, INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX DUNDAHERA, GURGAON, HARYANA-122006 have changed my name to SURESH BISHOKARMA.

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I, hitherto known as SURESH BISHOKARMA, alias SURESH BISHOKARMA S/O HUM SUNAR R/O HOUSE NO-172, GOVERNMENT SCHOOL WALI GALI, OLD DELHI GURGAON ROAD, SECTOR-21, INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX DUNDAHERA, GURGAON, HARYANA-122006 have changed my name to SURESH BISHOKARMA.

**NAME CHANGE**  
I, PAL Father of No. 15202290X, Rank-HOD, Name- VIRENDRA KUMAR residing at VILLAGE-NARAYANPUR, POST-PANCHDEO-RA, NAIBASTI, HARDI, UTTAR PRADESH-241213 have changed my name to VIRENDRA KUMAR for all future purpose.

**NAME CHANGE**  
I, SHRI CHANDRIKAPAL RAI, alias CHANDRIKAPAL RAI, residing at VILLAGE-NARAYANPUR, POST-PANCHDEO-RA, NAIBASTI, HARDI, UTTAR PRADESH-241213 have changed my name to CHANDRIKAPAL RAI for all future purpose.

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## NEWS BOX

## Concerns Rise As Covid-Like HMPV Virus Spreads Across Asia

**World.** As respiratory illnesses alarmingly increase in China, there are complaints of congested hospitals and overburdened healthcare systems. Health experts are especially worried about the spread of the human metapneumovirus (HMPV), a respiratory virus in other parts of the region afflicting a number of Asian countries. According to China's health authorities, the virus is spreading across the northern regions of the country. The Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention has confirmed that northern China is the worst affected. HMPV, which can infect people of all ages, is most common in children, raising further public health concerns. Although social media reports describe a critical situation, neither Chinese officials nor the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared a state of emergency at this stage.

**No Vaccine Yet For Virus Discovered 20 Years Ago**  
The outbreak has heightened awareness about the need for preventive measures, especially since no vaccine exists for HMPV despite the virus being known for nearly two decades.

Health experts are urging vigilance and adherence to public health guidelines to limit the virus's spread. The common people have been advised by the authorities to wash their hands and wear masks and other precautions. Authorities in all of Asia are keeping a close watch on the flu outbreak and the respiratory virus spread in China. Regions surrounding China are implementing strict monitoring measures. Hong Kong, for example, has reported very few cases. Meanwhile, Japan's health authorities are actively working to address the issue. Following a significant influenza outbreak, Japan reported thousands of cases nationwide, as reported by local media on Saturday. According to Japan Broadcasting Corporation, 94,259 flu patients were reported in one week leading up to December 15th across 5,000 hospitals and clinics throughout the country. The total number of cases in Japan for the current season has now reached 718,000.

## Tahlequah, The Grieving Orca, Loses Another Calf, Carries Dead Body Around

**World.** In a tragedy of Shakespearean proportions, an orca who made headlines in 2018 after it carried her dead calf for more than two weeks, has once again lost her baby, according to a report in The Guardian. The mother whale, known as J35 aka Tahlequah, was seen with the new calf on December 20 but on Wednesday (Jan 1), it could be photographed, carrying the baby whale's carcass on her head. "We were able to confirm J35 had lost the calf and she was pushing it around on her head," said Brad Hanson, a research scientist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The scientists were initially hopeful that the calf, known as J61 would survive, despite the health complications but the situation turned pear-shaped quickly. As per the researchers, whenever the calf appears to be sinking, Tahlequah does a "high arch dive to go down" and recovers the dead body. However, scientists are unsure whether or not she's pushing it at that point or grabbing it.

Notably, Tahlequah's first calf was born 14 years ago and is still alive while her third was born in 2020 and is also healthy. The two calves to die were both female. "The death of any calf in the [endangered southern resident population] is a tremendous loss, but the death of J61 is particularly devastating, not just because she was a female, who could have one day potentially led her own matriline but also given the history of her mother J35 who has now lost two out of four documented calves - both of which were female," Washington state-based Center for Whale Research. Also Read | Killer Whales Are Hunting Whale Sharks And Scientists Have The Evidence Now J35 first shot to prominence in 2018 when she pushed the body of her calf around the Salish Sea for 17 days. Experts suggest that carrying the dead calves is most likely an expression of grief from the mother killer whale. Since orcas have the same neurotransmitters and hormones as humans, it is highly plausible that their feelings highly resemble that of us with grieving and mourning a central part of it.

## With 2,42,334 newborn babies in 2024, South Korea records rise in birthrate after nine years

**SEOUL.** The number of newborns in South Korea increased last year for the first time in nine years, according to government data released on Friday. This marks a significant shift for a country facing one of the world's lowest fertility rates, Yonhap News Agency reported. Resident registration data from the ministry of the interior revealed that 2,42,334 babies were born in 2024, representing a 3.1 per cent rise compared to the previous year. This is the first annual increase following eight consecutive years of decline.

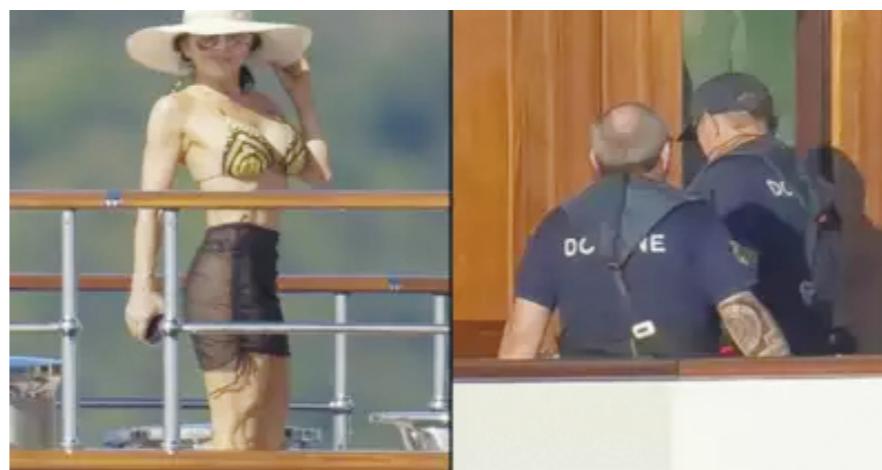
Meanwhile, the total number of registered population stood at 51,217,221 last year, shrinking for five years straight since 2020, Yonhap reported. Earlier on December 24, South Korea officially entered the category of a "super-aged" society, with individuals aged 65 and older making up one-fifth of its population, as per government data. South Korea's ministry of interior and safety reported that 10,24 million people in the country are now aged 65 or above, representing 20 per cent of South Korea's total population of 51 million, CNN reported. The data also revealed that women in this age group comprise around 22 per cent of the female population, while men aged 65 and older account for nearly 18 per cent of the male population.

## Jeff Bezos' \$500 million yacht faces surprise customs raid while fiancée Lauren Sánchez sunbathes

**World.** Jeff Bezos' luxurious \$500 million yacht, Koru, became the center of unexpected drama when customs officers conducted a surprise inspection near St. Barts on New Year's Eve. While the Amazon founder was notably absent, his fiancée, Lauren Sánchez, turned heads as she relaxed on deck, seemingly unfazed by the intrusion. Photos captured by Page Six showed Sánchez, clad in a chic Versace bikini and wide-brimmed hat, smiling for the cameras as uniformed customs officers scoured the vessel. The inspection lasted approximately three hours, with officers methodically combing through the yacht under the guidance of a stewardess.

Calm amid the storm

Sources confirmed the search was a routine procedure, though it briefly disrupted the yacht's otherwise opulent ambiance. Sánchez, however, kept her cool, mingling with friends, including her ex-boyfriend, former NFL star Tony Gonzalez. Gonzalez, who shares a 23-year-old son with Sánchez,



even took a dip in the ocean as officers worked. Though the inspection created a momentary buzz, the mood aboard remained lighthearted. A stewardess was spotted briefing Sánchez on the situation, but the relaxed atmosphere suggested there was little cause for concern.

—BarkJack\_(@BarkJack\_)

A winter wonderland to high seas glamour. The yacht inspection followed a whirlwind holiday season for Bezos and Sánchez. The couple had recently been in Aspen, Colorado, where their extravagant celebrations sparked rumors of a \$600

## Israel Confirms September Raid On Syrian 'Underground Missile Factory'

**Jerusalem.** Israel's military revealed that around 100 of its troops conducted a raid in Syria in September last year to dismantle an underground missile factory allegedly funded by Iran.

In a rare admission of its activities in Syria, the military confirmed in a statement that the September 8 operation targeted and "destroyed an underground compound for manufacturing precision missiles" in the Masyaf area, near Syria's Mediterranean coast, Xinhua news agency reported. The Israeli military claimed that the facility housed "advanced assembly lines designed to manufacture precision-guided missiles and long-range rockets." These weapons, it said, would have

significantly bolstered supplies to Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed

intelligence documents. These materials were brought back to Israel for further analysis. No Israeli troops were injured in the raid.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, reported in September that the raid resulted in 27 fatalities. Since the onset of Syria's civil war in 2011, Israel has carried out numerous strikes in the country, claiming to target Iranian-linked sites and weapon shipments to Hezbollah.

In December, Israeli troops entered a United Nations-monitored buffer zone in the Golan Heights and seized Syrian territory in the area. The move drew widespread international condemnation. Israel described the incursion as temporary and defensive.



groups in the region. The operation involved a coordinated assault by helicopters, drones for intelligence support, fighter jets, and naval vessels. Israeli forces destroyed the facility, seizing equipment, weapons, and

## New Orleans Attacker Shamsud Din Jabbar Had Remote IED Detonator In His Truck: Biden

**New Orleans Terror Attack.** US President Joe Biden revealed on Thursday that the New Orleans attacker had a remote detonator in his vehicle. The detonator was used to trigger Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) placed in ice coolers in the French Quarter before the attacker drove into a crowd on Bourbon Street. The FBI has recovered the two IEDs, which were hidden in the coolers, according to CNN. "They've established that the attacker is the same person who planted the explosives in those ice coolers in two nearby locations in the French Quarter just a few hours before he rammed into the crowd with his vehicle. They assessed he had a remote detonator in his vehicle to set off those two ice chests," Biden said. Biden told reporters in the White House's East Room that he plans to visit New Orleans. He also confirmed that 15 people, including the attacker, died in the attack on New Year's night. New Orleans Attacker's ISIS



Connection The FBI has confirmed that the attacker was an ISIS supporter. An ISIS flag was found in his vehicle, and the suspect admitted his allegiance in videos posted online.

President Joe Biden vowed to act against ISIS and similar groups. "We are going to relentlessly pursue ISIS and other terrorist organisations where they are, and they will find no safe harbour here," he said.

On the potential link between the New Orleans attack and the Las Vegas Cybertruck explosion, Biden said investigations are ongoing but no evidence of a connection has been found so far.

In Las Vegas, a Tesla Cybertruck exploded outside the Trump International Hotel, killing one person and injuring seven. Both vehicles in the incidents were rented through the car rental platform 'Turo,' prompting authorities to investigate possible links, CNN reported.

## 10 Years After Attack, Charlie Hebdo Is Uncowed And Still Provoking

**Paris.** French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo is set to publish a special God-mocking edition next week to mark 10 years since an attack on its offices by jihadist gunmen that left eight staff members dead. The anniversary of the shocking attack on freedom of expression is being used by the atheist publication to send a message of defiance to the extremists who burst into its offices on January 7, 2015, then fled shouting they had "killed Charlie Hebdo." "They didn't kill Charlie Hebdo," editor-in-chief Gerard Biard told AFP in a recent interview, adding that "we want it to last for a thousand years". The attack by two Paris-born brothers was revenge for Charlie Hebdo's decision to repeatedly publish caricatures lampooning the Prophet Mohammed, Islam's most revered figure. The massacre of some of France's most famous cartoonists signalled the start of a gruesome series of Al-Qaeda and Islamic State plots that claimed hundreds of lives in France and western Europe over the following years. Next week's edition is set to feature the results of a typically provocative competition launched in November to



draw the "funniest and meanest" depictions of God. It will be revealed on Sunday evening. It is intended for "everyone who is fed up with living in a society directed by God

wave of "Je Suis Charlie" ("I Am Charlie") solidarity with its lost contributors including famed cartoonists Cabu, Charb, Honore, Tignous and Wolinski.

But it also led to questioning and in some cases a furious backlash against Charlie's deliberately offensive, often crude strain of humour, part of a long-standing French tradition of caricaturing. Since its founding in 1970, it has regularly tested the boundaries of French hate-speech laws, which offer protection to minorities but allow for blasphemy and the mockery of religion.

Free-speech defenders in France see the ability to criticise and ridicule religion as a fundamental right acquired through centuries of struggle to escape the influence of the Catholic Church. Critics say the weekly sometimes crosses the line into Islamophobia, pointing to some of the Prophet Mohammed caricatures published in the past that appeared to associate Islam with terrorism. The idea is not to publish anything, it's to publish everything that makes people doubt, brings them to reflect, to ask questions.

## Ahead Of Trump's Inauguration, Debate On H1B Visas Intensifies

**Washington.** Three weeks ahead of Trump's inauguration here on January 20, the debate on foreign guest workers visas for highly skilled professionals, the H-1B, has intensified which has literally created divisions in both the Democratic and the Republican parties. Indians are the main beneficiaries of the H-1B visas, which bring in the best of the talent and brains from across the world. Highly skilled professionals from India walk away with the overwhelming number of H-1B visas - which is Congressional mandated 65,000 every year and another 20,000 for those who received higher education from the US. President-elect Donald Trump, who will be sworn in as the 47th President of the United States on January 20 in front of the US Capitol, has come out in support of the H-1B, so has two of his close confidants, Tesla owner Elon Musk and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, both of whom have been tasked to head the newly created Department of Government Efficiency.

"I've always liked the visas, I have always been in favour of the visas. That's why we have them," Trump told the New York Post over the weekend. I've always felt we have to have the most competent people in our country. We need competent people, we need smart people coming into our country, we need a lot of people coming in. We're going to have jobs like we've never had before," Trump told reporters at a New Year's Eve party hosted by him at Mar-a-Lago. Both Musk and Ramaswamy have argued that H-1B visas are essential to attract the best of the talent, as the US falls short in many of the specialised fields. They have been joined by Indian American Democratic lawmakers including Ro Khanna, Raja Krishnamoorthi and Shri Thanedar who have come out in support of H-1B visas, after a sudden backlash against it as soon as Trump appointed Sriram Krishnan as his Senior Policy Advisor for Artificial Intelligence. Such a backlash initially



came from the supporters of Trump who argued that this is eating away at the jobs of Americans. Both Musk and Ramaswamy immediately weighed in and supported the H-1B visas. On Thursday, influential Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders asserted that the two close confidants of Trump are wrong. "Elon Musk and a number of other billionaire tech company owners have argued that this federal programme is vital to our economy because of the scarcity of highly skilled American

engineers and other tech workers. I disagree. "The main function of the H-1B visa programme and other guest worker initiatives is not to hire 'the best and the brightest', but rather to replace good-paying American jobs with low-wage indentured servants from abroad. The cheaper the labour they hire, the more money the billionaires make," Sanders said on Thursday. His own party colleague Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi disagreed on Monday. "The number one competitive advantage America has is our workforce. The H-1B programme attracts the best and brightest talent from around the world and strengthens that advantage as we also invest in American workers," he told CNN as he supported Musk and Ramaswamy in the debate. "The reason I'm in America along with so many critical people who built SpaceX, Tesla, and hundreds of other companies that made America strong is because of H1B."

## NEWS BOX

**Motorists shun CMCH paid parking facility, say charges are exorbitant**

COIMBATORE. The paid parking facility which was opened by the Coimbatore City Municipal Corporation (CCMC) on Sunday in front of the Coimbatore Medical College Hospital (CMCH) on the Valankulam lake bund has found very few users. Staff handling the facility said less than 20 motorists used it in the last three days. Motorists said the charges are high and vehicles continue to be on the road from Lanka Corner up to Classic Tower junction. Also, they slammed the CCMC, CMCH and police saying the parking facility is seen as means to generate income rather than serving people. Speaking to on Thursday, M Karthikeyan from Sulur, who had brought his mother for a check-up after her knee replacement surgery, said, "The government-run hospital has barred entry of private vehicles, citing concerns like vehicle theft and space constraints. This forces visitors to park on the road. Soon after, the police began penalising roadside parking. When the situation escalated, the corporation opened paid parking and started enforcing its use." He added that many low-income families, including him, rely on bikes to bring sick family members for treatment. "One department is closing its parking while two others are forcing us to pay for parking," he said. V Ravikumar, a college student who has been staying in CMCH to take care of his brother, said if he uses the parking, it will cost around Rs 120 per day. "It is not acceptable to force people to pay for parking while treatment is free. No other government hospitals are lacking in parking.

**Soon, Karnataka government to issue smart cards for Shakti scheme**

BENGALURU. To streamline the Shakti scheme, the state government will issue smart cards to beneficiaries soon. As of now, as the scheme is applicable only for residents of Karnataka, women need to produce identity cards with their local addresses and after verification, conductors issue zero tickets. The smart cards with photo will be issued after the beneficiaries submit their local domicile proof. One of the major complaints by conductors was that they had to verify ID proofs of every women passenger before issuing zero tickets under the Shakti scheme, which is time consuming. Also, there are incidents of clashes between women passengers and conductors over ID cards and there are instances where women, who are not residents of Karnataka, are also trying to avail the free scheme, said sources from the bus corporation. In peak hours, as conductors have to issue tickets to all passengers before the bus enters the next stage (after which the tariffs change), they have to halt the vehicle for a few minutes and then proceed resulting in delays. As the verification of the local domicile will be done before issuing the cards, this will make conductors' work easier and also give a clear picture on the total beneficiaries, the sources said. Since June 11, 2023, when the Shakti scheme was launched, till December last year, a whopping 356 crore women have travelled under the scheme. The zero-ticket value of passengers stood at Rs 8,598 crore. Speaking to , Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy said, "The Shakti scheme has received overwhelming response from women. With this scheme, not only women ridership, but the overall ridership in all four bus corporations-- the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), Kalyana Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (KKRTC), North West Karnataka.

**Builders in Telangana struggle as property market signals slowdown**

KARIMNAGAR. Newly constructed apartments and independent houses in areas like Alkapuri, Satavahana University, Bank Colony, and Theegala Guttapally in the erstwhile Karimnagar district remain unoccupied due to a lack of buyers. Builders are finding it difficult to repay bank loans amid the slowdown in the real estate market. The slowdown has been posing serious challenges for realtors and builders. Customers are increasingly reluctant to invest in properties, including land and buildings. Land prices have remained stagnant, showing no increase and decrease in rates, with no substantial transactions. R Sampath, a local realtor, said, "Since August, there have been no major transactions or land sales. The number of sale deed registrations has dropped to 10-15 per day, compared to 70-90 during the market's peak at the Karimnagar sub-registrar office." Document writers are also struggling with reduced work. Speaking to TNIE, G Kumar, a document writer, noted: "I have been mostly idle over the past month, preparing only one or two documents a day." However some builders are thriving despite the slowdown. Krishna Chaitanya, a licensed builder, stated, "All flats in a recently constructed apartment near Reddy Function Hall.

## Illegal biomedical waste dumping: Is Kerala aiding violator, asks NGT

CHENNAI. The southern bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on Thursday questioned the Kerala government as to whether it is colluding with the alleged violator in the illegal dumping of biomedical waste in Tamil Nadu and directed the secretary of Kerala's environment department to submit a detailed report on the issue. The tribunal also directed Tamil Nadu to enhance monitoring along the border by setting up a dedicated task force to track vehicular movement. Criticising the Kerala authorities for their failure to take decisive action, the tribunal flagged inaction and lack of accountability in addressing this serious environmental and public health issue. The bench, comprising Justice Pushpa Sathyanarayana and expert member Satyagopal Korlapati, expressed displeasure with the report submitted by Kerala, which did not specify the quantity of waste removed from the border villages in Tamil Nadu's Tirunelveli district. The tribunal found Kerala's response inadequate and vague. Kerala State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) informed the tribunal that it had issued a show-cause notice on December 19, 2024, to the Regional Cancer Centre, Credence Multispecialty Family Hospital, and Leela Kovalam resort. However, apart from Credence, none of the entities responded, and the KSPCB failed to take any further action. The counsel of Credence Hospital, in its defence, stated that it had



handed over its biomedical waste to IMAGE, the only agency authorised to handle such waste in Kerala. The hospital argued that it could not be held liable for any illegal dumping. The tribunal expressed surprise and concern that IMAGE, despite being an alleged violator, had participated in a high-level meeting chaired by the Kerala Chief Secretary on December 19. The bench questioned whether the state government was colluding with IMAGE and criticised the authorities for not issuing a show-cause notice to IMAGE despite its alleged involvement in the violations. It suggested that Kerala consider entering into agreements with authorised waste management agencies in

Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, rather than relying solely on a single agency, to ensure better accountability. The bench said issuing show-cause notices alone was insufficient and that authorities must ensure the matter is resolved comprehensively. It observed that the timeline for revoking the consent to operate had expired, allowing violators to continue their activities without any hindrance. The tribunal suggested that authorities could have temporarily halted operations of entities such as holiday resorts involved in the violations until a proper investigation was completed. The tribunal noted that the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) was earlier directed to draft

## Capital ready to host 63rd Kerala State School Arts Festival

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM. The capital is all set to transform into a vibrant hub of arts, culture, and youthful energy as the 63rd Kerala State School Arts Festival unfolds this Saturday. Celebrated as one of Asia's largest cultural extravaganzas for students, the festivities will commence at 9 am at the Central Stadium, with the director of public education hoisting the flag. The official inauguration, led by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, will take place at the Central Stadium (MT-Nila) venue at 10 am. Students from Wayanad's Vellarmala School will perform at the inaugural ceremony. The Sanskrit Festival will take place at the Government Model HSS and LPS, Thiruvananthapuram, while the Arabic Festival will be held at Sishu Kshema Hall and Government Model HSS, Thiruvananthapuram. The events will include seminars, exhibitions, and cultural programmes.

General Education Minister V Sivankutty will preside over the event. Ministers, including G R Anil, K Rajan, A K Saseendran and others, will



participate as chief guests. The inauguration will feature a cultural performance choreographed to the festival's theme song, with contributions from students of Kalakshetra and public schools. Students from Vellarmala GHSS, Wayanad, will present a group dance. Following the inaugural ceremony, the first competition - Mohiniyattam for high school girls - will begin at Central Stadium, the primary venue. A QR code system has been introduced to provide participants

with comprehensive information about the facilities like accommodation, registration centres, dining, venue locations, contact numbers of nodal officers, and more. It also offers access to the festival brochure and official notices. Minister V Sivankutty launched the system by handing it over to the organising committee chairman and Minister G R Anil. Competitions will be held across 25 venues, all named after major rivers in the state, with the Central Stadium serving as the main hub. The events will be telecast live on the KITE Victors channel, while real-time updates and results will be displayed digitally near the venues. 'Utsavam', the KITE mobile app on Play Store, will provide live updates. The Golden Cup procession that kicked off in Kasaragod will reach Thiruvananthapuram on Friday. Sivankutty will formally receive the gold cup, weighing 117.5 sovereigns, at PMG Junction at 5 pm. The procession will then proceed to the Central Stadium.

## Call for starting Kochi Metro services early following rise in commuter patronage

KOCHI. With Kochi Metro turning out to be a popular transportation mode, demands have arisen from various quarters to start the services early, which would facilitate a lot of rail commuters heading to Ernakulam Junction railway station early in the morning. Currently, metro services start at 6 am on weekdays, while the first trains from Aluva and Tripunithura stations (both directions) on Sundays depart only at 7.30 am.

We request the metro authorities to start the services at 4.45 am so that long-distance commuters could catch the early morning trains to both directions (Thiruvananthapuram and Thrissur) from Ernakulam South station (Ernakulam Junction railway station). They could easily operate one or two services before 6 am, when the regular services now start. The frequency of services doesn't matter here," said Paul K J Manvettom, president, All Kerala Railway Passengers Association.

A number of trains, including Intercity Express (16341; 5.15 am), Kannur Express (16305; 6 am), Ernakulam-Kottayam-Kollam Memu (6 am), Guruvayur Fast Passenger (56370; 6.10

am), Tatanagar Express (18190; 7.15 am), and Dhanbad Express (13352; 7.25 am) depart from the Ernakulam Junction railway station, he said. "A lot of regular commuters are currently affected by the lack of public transport facilities early in the morning. Earlier, private buses used to operate early morning trips from Tripunithura region and all. Now after the coming up of Kochi Metro, they have stopped the trips, but the metro services will start at 6 am only. A lot of commuters travel in the Intercity Express at 5.20 am. Hence, running one or two trips would turn out to be beneficial for a number of passengers," said V C Jayendran, secretary of Tripunithura Rajanagar Union of Residents Associations.

However, Paul Manvettom pointed out that there is no need for services at the usual frequency of 8 minutes 30 seconds and that one or two trips would suffice.

Meanwhile, All Kerala Railway Passengers Association has submitted a memorandum to the Railways to coordinate with the KMRL and construct foot overbridges (FoBs) at three metro stations - Tripunithura, Ernakulam South and Ernakulam North. "Now that the metro is operating from near Tripunithura railway station, we have also demanded stops for more trains there. This would facilitate commuters in reaching the destinations in the city quickly. Many of the trains now halt in between Tripunithura and Ernakulam South/North stations, due to traffic congestion. Also we request the metro authorities to provide a 30% discount in ticket rates instead of the current 20% to woo more passenger patronage," Manvettom said.

## Mocha Muse: Soft warm brown shade on the demure side

KOCHI. As we step into 2025, the canvas of our wardrobes remains open, ready to be filled with new inspirations. And one colour promises to define the year ahead, Pantone's Colour of the Year — mocha mousse. A soft, warm brown, the shade is more on the demure side. "With its sophisticated, earthy elegance, mocha mousse can stand alone or serve as a versatile foundation, enhancing a wide range of palettes and applications — from minimalist to richly detailed designs," says US-based Pantone Colour Institute.

Mocha mousse is a progression of last year's colour of the year, peach fuzz, which reflected the need for comfort and cosiness. According to Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of Pantone Colour Institute, the shade "expresses a level of thoughtful indulgence. Sophisticated and lush, yet at the same time, an unpretentious classic."

Before Pantone announced the colour, the fashion world was abuzz with predictions about which way its colour wheel would turn. Many experts anticipated shades of blue, green, and even black to make the final cut — though black had never been selected by Pantone before. Others leaned toward earthy tones, particularly shades of brown, as the growing appreciation for nature and the resurgence of the '70s style hinted at a shift toward grounded aesthetics. Pantone's choice comes at a time of significant political turmoil, and as the institute's vice president Laurie Pressman explains, the selection of colours is driven by "what's taking place in the world, expressed through the silent language of colour. Mocha mousse is a colour that highlights the need for harmony." However, the announcement sparked mixed reactions — some embraced it, while others



dismissed the brown as too ordinary. However, fashion stylist Zoya Joy argues that brown often gets overlooked as a luxurious colour. "Brown is seen as common, never quite associated with luxury. Yet, this shade radiates class and sophistication, offering timeless elegance." The shade is minimal and rich, she says. For those who prefer understated styles, experts suggest pairing a simple mocha midi dress

## PFA decries drive to relocate dogs in Bhubaneshwar

BHUBANESWAR. The ongoing drive to capture and relocate street dogs in the state capital for Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is a violation of Supreme Court guidelines and will result in more dog bite cases, alleged People for Animals (PFA) on Thursday. The state chapter of the animal welfare organisation has sought immediate intervention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and the Housing and Urban Development department to halt the drive.

PFA Odisha secretary Jibin Ballav Das alleged that ahead of the PBD conclave, the BMC has launched a mass relocation of community dogs in which the canines are being lifted from one location and dropped in another place.

"Dogs are territorial animals. Shifting them from their own places causes territorial fights and makes them more aggressive. This results in attacks on humans and a rise in dog bite cases," Das said. The relocation also contravenes the animal protection laws and verdict of the Supreme Court and violates BNS 325 and section 11 of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, he said. "While the number of dog bite cases in the city had increased to around 120 a month at a point of time, this exercise may aggravate the situation further," Das said.

The PFA Odisha members demanded the dogs lifted for sterilisation under animal birth control drive must be released at the same place. Besides, they also demanded that more dogs should be sterilised and appropriate care should be given to them at such facilities. Mayor Sulochana Das, however, refuted the allegations and said neither they are carrying out any drive to relocate street dogs ahead of PBD convention, nor there is any such direction from the government. The lifting of dogs from streets to the canine shelters at present is because of the grievances we are receiving from different areas. In a recent case, a canine was lifted from VSS Nagar area of ward no 11, where people alleged that the dog had attacked at least 10 persons.

Tripunithura Rajanagar Union of Residents Associations. When contacted, Kochi Metro sources said, the KMRL had earlier conducted a study on the commuter patronage for the early morning trips and the outcome wasn't much encouraging.

However, Paul Manvettom pointed out that there is no need for services at the usual frequency of 8 minutes 30 seconds and that one or two trips would suffice. Meanwhile, All Kerala Railway Passengers Association has submitted a memorandum to the Railways to coordinate with the KMRL and construct foot overbridges (FoBs) at three metro stations — Tripunithura, Ernakulam South and Ernakulam North. "Now that the metro is operating from near Tripunithura railway station, we have also demanded stops for more trains there. This would facilitate commuters in reaching the destinations in the city quickly. Many of the trains now halt in between Tripunithura and Ernakulam South/North stations, due to traffic congestion. Also we request the metro authorities to provide a 30% discount in ticket rates instead of the current 20% to woo more passenger patronage," Manvettom said.

or wide-legged trousers, complemented by a crisp white shirt or a cosy and chunky cream sweater. To up the lux game, Zoya suggests pairing a white Victorian top with a fit and flare dress, gold jewellery, stilettos, and a bag. And for that extra brown oomph, a brown jumper paired with faux leather trousers, a trench coat, accessorised with gold jewellery and boots. "Brown is not tricky to style. Whether casual, formal or as a party wear, it works effortlessly. A sea blue top and a brown plaid skirt, with a saddle bag and boots will create a stylish, eye-catching look. For evening wear, a strappy dress in mocha mousse, accented with metallic accessories and a clutch, is sure to turn heads," says Zoya. Prescilla Joseph Chungath, designer and founder of Ektha, believes Mocha Mousse is a flattering shade that complements all skin tones.

## MSP & policy alternatives for a fragile sector

THREE farm laws enacted by Parliament for improvement in the agricultural marketing system led to the eruption of farmers' protests in August 2020. After prolonged agitation, the government repealed these laws in November 2021, but the farmers have once again resumed the protest, alleging that the government has failed to fulfil their demands, including that of a guaranteed minimum support price (MSP) for all crops.

Declining agricultural incomes, rising production costs and shrinking employment opportunities have exacerbated the Indian agricultural crisis. It is impacting small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers disproportionately. For millions of farmers, MSP is a beacon of hope, promising a reasonable return on their toil.

The high-level committee constituted by the Supreme Court of India, while sounding an alarm over the country's agricultural crisis, has echoed the sentiments of the protesting farmers in recommending a loan waiver for farmers and the legal recognition of MSP to protect their income.

Historically, the MSP was introduced in 1965-66 to achieve increased foodgrain production by encouraging the adoption of high-yielding varieties of wheat and rice. It is an administered price of agricultural produce fixed by the Union Government for its purchase from farmers for the public distribution system (PDS) and to ensure that they get a reasonable margin on the cost of production. It also protects the farmers against a distress sale due to a drop in output prices during gluts. However, more than 60 per cent of India's population relies primarily on agriculture for its livelihood despite the sector contributing less than 20 per cent to the nation's economic output. Unfortunately, the underlying core issues of the agricultural crisis have been pushed under the carpet due to the farmers' protests for a legally binding MSP. A legally binding MSP is necessary to make farming a more stable and successful business as no one will be able to purchase farm produce below this price, and doing so would be punishable by law.

The Standing Committee of Parliament on Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food Processing has also recently recommended the implementation of legally binding MSP for (a) safeguarding farmers' livelihoods, promoting rural economic growth, and enhancing national food security; (b) stimulating economic activity in these areas and benefiting local businesses and economies; and (c) providing an assured income to farmers to encourage them to invest in agricultural practices, potentially increasing farm productivity and sustainability. However, the MSP is only a part of the problem and farmers will still be struggling for optimum income due to small-sized and highly fragmented landholdings, increasing production costs, lack of demand-driven production and depleting natural resources, namely soil health and water, including groundwater.

Despite its appeal to the farmers, the guaranteed MSP may incentivise them to produce more without paying attention to the market demand and may increase the expenditure of the government and divert funds away from other crucial investments. The purchase of the surplus produce beyond the need for buffer stocks will lead to its offloading to the general public at a discount or losses during storage, causing a financial loss.

Further, the MSP also got tied up in the web of vote-bank politics to garner public support during the recent elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. These states fixed prices higher than the MSP fixed by the Union Government. Accordingly, apart from a guaranteed MSP, a comprehensive policy to address these concurrent concerns is required to put the agricultural sector back on the high growth path. A new policy alternative may be to provide a region-specific rather than a pan-India universal MSP.

WITH the onset of the year in which the Indian republic will celebrate 75 years of its establishment, the fervent hope of the majority of its citizens is for social peace and harmony. This can only be achieved if there is a realisation that the path to right the 'wrongs of history' lies through cementing a common nationhood that is respectful of the traditions and faiths of all Indians. That acceptance and respect are also the premise and promise of the republic's foundational principle, so eloquently expressed in the Constitution. A deviation from this basic constitutional proposition will

damage India's capability to successfully navigate the enormous strategic challenges that are growing because of the technological changes underway in a turbulent global environment. The regional situation, too, presents difficulties that can be ignored only at the peril of hurting national interests. And, for India, the key country connecting its regional and global challenges is China. China's threat goes far beyond the border issue. A process of 'normalising' the relationship, which was acutely impaired by China's actions in eastern Ladakh in the summer of 2020, may now have begun. The Ministry of External Affairs' readout of the Narendra Modi-Xi Jinping meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in October last year noted, "The two leaders affirmed that stable, predictable and amicable bilateral relations between India and China, as two neighbours and the two largest nations on earth, will have a positive impact on regional and global peace and prosperity. It will also contribute to a multipolar Asia and a multipolar world".

In 2018, Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, had said, "The popular conception is that companies come to China because of low labour costs. I'm not sure what part

## Close ranks to fortify the republic

The collective will of people is needed to safeguard India's interests

of China they go to, but the truth is that China stopped being the low-labour-cost country years ago. And that is not the reason to come to China from a supply point of view. The reason is because of the skill, and the quantity of skill in one location and the type of skill..." He went on to say that the products that were Apple's requirement needed advanced tooling capable of working with state-of-the-art material. He added, "That tooling skill is very deep here. In the US, you could have a meeting of tooling engineers and I'm not sure we could fill the room. In

anymore. This will pose a challenge to US supremacy in AI, which is destined to change the world. The US will pose impediments in China's path, but will it succeed? It is difficult to predict how deep and extensive will be the transformation of individual lives and international power equations, but it is certain that this will happen, and that too early. Where does India stand in all this and other frontier and emerging areas of science and technology (S&T)? The truth is that while India's economic growth has led it to become the fifth

largest global economy, there is a wide and perhaps growing gap in S&T not only with the West but also with China. Jawaharlal Nehru was acutely aware that European domination of the world, beginning with the 18th and 19th centuries that led to all the horrors of colonialism in Asia, Africa and South America, had occurred because of its Industrial Revolution. Hence, his determination that India should catch up in S&T, both in terms of human capital and industrialisation. In this context, it is good to become aware of the advances Indians had made in S&T in ancient times and convey that to the world, but is that really the path to becoming a strong and powerful country — a genuine pole in a multipolar world? The answer is obvious.

All the digging out of glories from our ancient past, which was ravaged by invaders, will not help us meet the challenges of today. They may satisfy emotional urges of certain sections of the people, and their long-standing feelings of hurt and anguish may be addressed too, but they will not address the strategic threat that the country faces from China. In the current year and beyond, China's involvement in India's immediate neighbourhood will only increase. Its intrusion in India's western neighbourhood, substantial for decades, will continue. The situation in Bangladesh is ripe for its pernicious intervention and it will increase its presence in the Indian Ocean Region. In such circumstances, it is the collective will of cohesive people — shedding prejudices, not dwelling on the past but taking India forward to become a leader in S&T innovation and applications and strong in defence — that is needed to safeguard India's interests.



China, you could fill multiple football fields..." That was over six years ago. China's drive to develop human capital in the areas of frontier manufacturing continues relentlessly. It is, however, not satisfied with becoming the factory of the world. It is now seeking to reach US and Western European levels in design and innovation in large frontier technology sectors, including artificial intelligence (AI). Till recently, it was commonly and correctly believed that in AI, the US excelled in 'technical innovation' while Chinese companies were competent at 'application innovation'. There was generally a gap of one or two years before the application occurred. However, the Chinese are now realising that there is a fundamental difference between 'technical innovation' and thereafter applying it. Hence, Chinese companies like DeepSeek have come up; they are going rapidly ahead in 'technical innovation'. They do not wish to be followers

## Children in peril

Kapurthala trafficking case a wake-up call



(Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, prohibits the employment of children below 14 years in any occupation; those in the age group of 14 to 18 years

cannot be forced to work in hazardous occupations where their health and safety are at risk. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act have strict provisions as well, but enforcement leaves a lot to be desired. Timely response to complaints about child labour holds the key to curbing this scourge. Synergy between Central and state governments — and among the states too — is another prerequisite. In many cases, it's poverty that drives parents to take desperate measures. They force their kids into labour to support the family; this not only disrupts the children's studies but also exposes them to the big, bad world. Targeted welfare schemes must go hand in hand with efforts to strengthen the justice delivery system. Let no one's childhood be ruined, for that would be a great loss to the entire nation.

## Navigating Bangladesh's internal strife & external pressures

While India should not get involved in the internal affairs of Bangladesh, it should continue to provide Hasina asylum.



DESPITE facing a strange and virtual US-China alliance during its birth in 1971, Bangladesh has had a record of rapid economic growth in recent years. Also, notwithstanding the uncertainties and frequent natural disasters since its independence in 1971, it has witnessed a robust economic growth and poverty reduction. One of the world's poorest nations at birth, it reached the lower-middle income status in 2015.

In the meantime, its former PM Sheikh Hasina has recently sought refuge in India after being threatened with arrest by the local "authorities", headed by an interim administration led by a US-educated agriculturist and Nobel Prize recipient, Muhammad Yunus. Yunus and the Bangladesh Grameen Bank were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, for their work to "create economic and social development from below." Established in 1983, the bank's objective has been to grant poor people small loans on easy terms, also known as 'micro-credit'.

Sheikh Hasina, now living in exile in India, has seen her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman killed in a bloody military coup in 1975. He had led his people to freedom and democratic rule in 1971. Both the US and China appear to have had a distrust and dislike for Sheikh Mujib and his daughter.

Hasina, who was naturally friendly to India, had faced the none-too-friendly feelings displayed by the then blossoming anti-Soviet alliance of the US and China. She was succeeded by regimes not exactly friendly to India. Things, however, changed with time. If Sheikh Mujib faced US and Chinese hostility in the 1970s, his daughter and successor appears to be facing a similar situation today. Today, the US and China are not exactly the best of friends, as they were

in the early 1970s. Despite facing a US-China opposition, Hasina has had a track record of commitment to her country's strategic autonomy, economic growth and secularism. She has also not forgotten India's role in the liberation of her country from Pakistani military excesses. Bangladesh is now facing a situation where the US-backed Yunus has become a key player in the country's leadership. It is no secret that Yunus has strong pro-American leanings, which have helped in him being appointed head of the Bangladesh government recently. Interestingly, Hasina's ouster evidently has the backing not only the Biden administration but also its rival China. What is also interesting is that both China and the US appear to share identical views on the appointment of Yunus as her successor. It needs to be borne in mind that Yunus has high political ambitions. There is no doubt that a concerted effort has been made, including by the US and China, to discredit Hasina. This effort ignores the economic progress that Bangladesh achieved in the years when Hasina headed the government. Moreover, it is for the people of Bangladesh, and not foreign powers, to both determine its leadership or undermine an elected government.

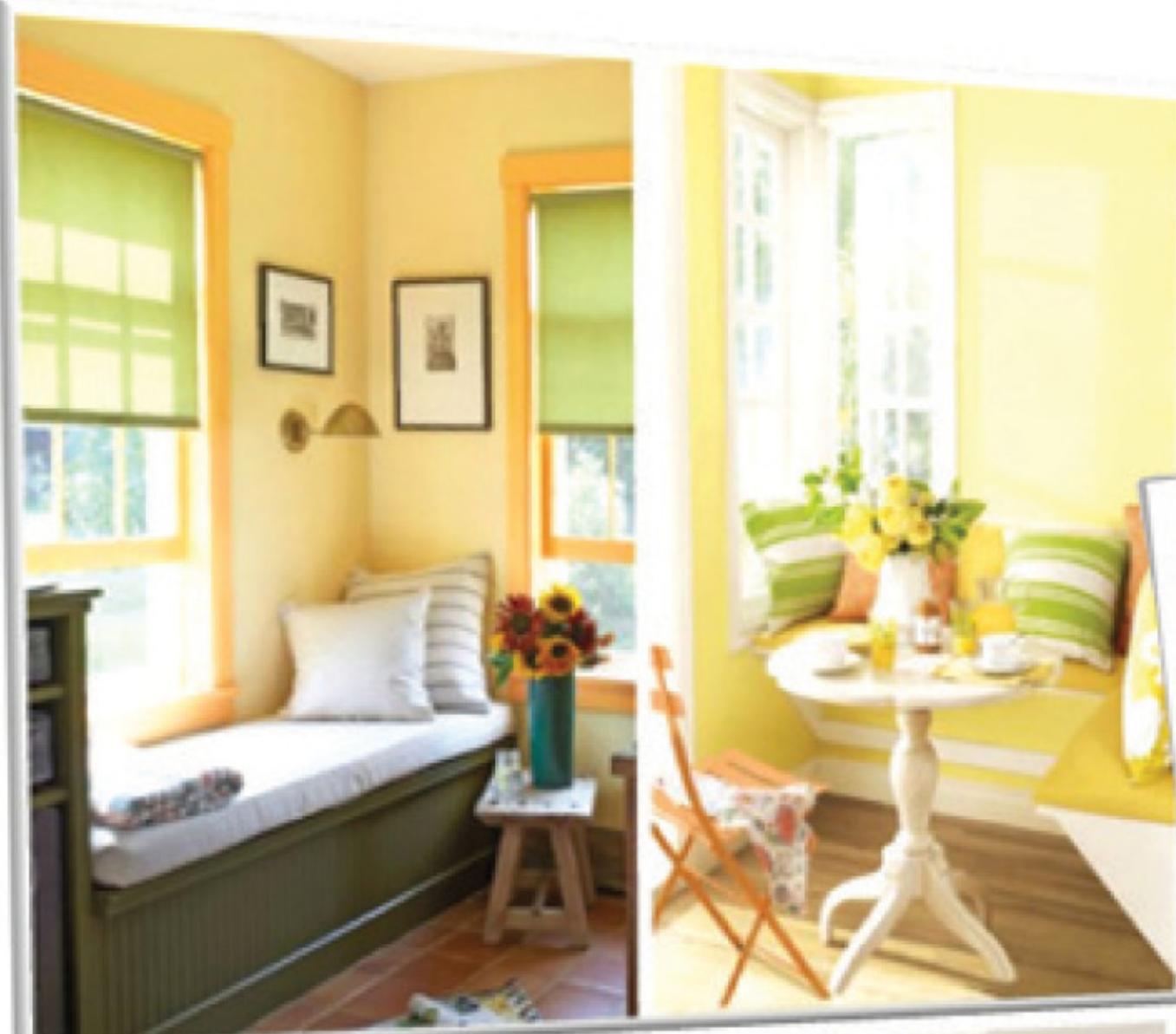
Bangladesh is the largest development partner of India today. New Delhi has provided it three lines of credit, amounting to \$8 billion, for the modernisation and development of such sectors as shipping, ports, roads

and railways. China and Pakistan are, by all accounts, determined to curb and limit India's influence across the Indian Ocean, through which oil supplies flow from the Strait of Hormuz to the Strait of Malacca and beyond. As the Trump administration assumes charge, India must hold a comprehensive dialogue with the US and other like-minded countries across the Indo-Pacific region. This is needed to ensure the security of its sea lines of communication. India is, meanwhile, developing its maritime capabilities in weapons systems, ranging from aircraft carriers and warships to missile power. This enables it to cooperate with the US, Japan and other like-minded

countries, as also, most importantly, countries in the Persian Gulf. Insecurity and instability across this region can have serious implications for global energy supplies. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's interest in this region is evident from his recent visit to Kuwait.

Looking back, it was the budding Nixon-Mao-General Yahya Khan alliance of the US, Pakistan and China in 1971 that led to a virtual genocide in Bangladesh and the flow of an estimated 10 million refugees from the then East Pakistan into India. It was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who led the freedom struggle of Bangladesh. One also recalls that the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had no interest in keeping the Indian forces deployed indefinitely in Bangladesh. She was, however, shocked at the brutal assassination of Sheikh Mujib.

Things have moved on significantly since then, but India would need to obtain US support to contain a possible Chinese thrust into Bangladesh. China has recently strengthened access to the Bay of Bengal at the Kyaukphyu deep sea port in Myanmar. While India should not get involved in the internal affairs of Bangladesh, it should continue to provide Hasina asylum. It should work with the US and others to see that Bangladesh strengthens its democratic institutions and holds free and fair elections in which Hasina and her party men are also free to participate.



**Love plants, but not sure if you can maintain them with ease? Ashok Kumar Mundetiya tells you how to add an extra edge to your balcony garden and interiors this season...**

The glory of gardening: hands in the dirt, head in the sun, heart with nature. To nurture a garden is to feed not just on the body, but the soul. With space being a rarity these days, it is difficult to dream of a garden space — more so, if you are staying in a small apartment. But fear not! For terrace garden — big or small — is a wonderful way to add colour to your otherwise dull life. You can just sit there, listen to music, read books or simply pull up a couch to lie down and soak in the natural beauty. Low space in metros and big cities has also compelled plant lovers to grow vegetables on their balconies. It is not only a great stress-buster, but the benefits of consuming home-grown vegetables also compensate for the time spent on pruning it. But wait... Before you start painting your house green, a few things should be taken into account, because no matter how much you care, your plants aren't going to thrive if you are ignorant of their specific needs. CT provides the basic guidelines to beginners...

#### Know your plants

Before adding a plant to your potted collection, it is advisable to ask an expert at a nursery about the conditions the plant needs. "It's usually much easier to grow plants that do well in your region, temperature and soil. For instance, don't try to grow a flower like a rose — which requires six hours in the sun — on a porch that gets sunlight only for an hour in the morning. While it's important to maintain a steady temperature for indoor plants, a terrace garden needs adequate sunlight. Again, if you notice your plant becoming thin and reaching out toward the light, it needs to be closer to sunshine," informs AB Karmakar, executive/ administrator for The Globe Nursery on Lindsay Street.

#### Maintenance of indoor plants

- Most indoor plants do best in partial shade, which works out well since indoor areas don't usually get direct sunlight. Keep this in mind before you decide to put a potted plant in a place where it will get hours of direct sunlight; you may end up exposing it to too much light.

- One must select the right size of the pots. For indoor plants, go for pots either 4 inches or 6 inches in size. Allow enough space for the roots to grow. Make sure the pots are light and strong, so as to hold the plant for a long time.

- Place plastic saucers under the pots to avoid soil and water spillage.

- Ficus Elastica, Areca Palm, a variety of philodendron or dracaena are best suited for indoors. These plants can do without sunlight for 7-10 days with minimum

requirement of water.

#### Water the plants carefully

"Water the plants as and when required. Many first-time gardeners or potted plant owners water plants more than necessary, believing that the more water the plant gets, the better they grow. While it holds true for certain plants, it can kill others," suggests Dr SL Rahman, consultant at Agri-Horticultural Society of India.

#### Kitchen garden in pots

- If you thought a kitchen garden only works in bigger houses, you are highly mistaken. Get creative. Don't throw away buckets, containers etc. Use them along with hanging baskets for smaller plants. You can even grow vegetables in the little balcony of your apartment.
- Do not use soil from the garden. It can be filled with weed seeds, insects, and fungal diseases. It is better and easier to buy ready-made potting soil (a mixture comprising clay, bone dust, vermicompost, neem cake and mustard cake) from the local nursery. You can also go for coco peat, which are made from coconut husks and is a medium for growing plants.
- Get various seedlings from the nursery. Remove the plants from its nursery container. Never pull a plant out by its stem. If it is stuck, tap the sides of the pot to loosen it. Gently tease the ends of the roots free before planting it in the bigger pot.
- For the proper growth of vegetables in your balcony, the pot size should be between 8-10 inches.

- Make one or more drain holes in the pot. Place small chips right over them so that they don't clog and excess water can pass through.

- Do not pile soil on top of the plant; make sure the stem is completely above the surface. Leave about an inch between the soil surface and the rim of the pot.

- All vegetable plants need constant moisture. Some plants need water on a daily basis.

#### Veggies for beginners

**Coriander:** How many times did you get sad looking at half-dried coriander leaves (dhania) in the market? Coriander is something that is used in everyday cuisine to spice it up. And that makes it a must-grow for every kitchen garden. The seed is technically a fruit containing two seeds in it. When split, it increases the germination rate since it scarifies the seed.



## Paint your house Green this Winter

they produce!

**Tomato:** With a little water and a lot of sun, tomato plants are quick to grow. Roots of a tomato plant grow deeper into the soil. So, choose a bush variety like 'Cherry Cascade' that can be planted in hanging baskets and window boxes. Just cut a tomato into four pieces and bury it about 1/2 an inch into the soil. Wait for 3-4 weeks for the seeds to start sprouting.

**Cucumber:** These grow best when the soil is warm. Cucumber plants tend to sprawl all over. Provide your plants with ample space to stretch their roots. Again, since these are climbers, you must get a proper support. Go for smaller varieties if there's less space.

**Green chili:** These are good companion plants for tomatoes and coriander. Just take two or three dried red chilies. Slit them open and sprinkle the seeds in a pot filled with soil and a little manure, available in the nurseries. Ensure the seeds don't go too deep. Cover it with little soil and water it. It takes about a week or so for the seeds to sprout. If the pot is not large enough, you can replant the sprouts into a bigger pot. You may need to tie up the chili plant to a pole to

let it grow and avoid bending.

#### Winter blossom

According to Nirupom Sen, secretary-cum-CEO, Agri-Horticultural Society of India, if you have a garden without flowers, you have got to do something about it. So, before deciding where to plant your flowers, you should know when the best time to grow flowers is. "During winter, the best flowers to grow in Indian climate are Petunia, Cockscomb, Antirrhinum, Cineraria, Zinnia, Calendula, Chrysanthemum, Marigold and Dahlia," he says.

- Flower plants need up to 5 inches deep soil. So take an earthen pot of 6-8 inches in height. Dig a hole in the potted soil. Bury the seed about 2 inches deep. Flowers do not need to be smothered with the soil. Do not bury them too deep. After 6 weeks, you will see the seeds sprout into saplings.
- The after-care is very essential. Sprinkle water as and when required.

#### Terrace talk

- As the main element of a terrace garden comprises watering of plants and keeping the

soil wet, it is important that the best quality water-proofing material is selected.

- One has to bear in mind that the area selected to build a terrace garden should have a slight slope, so that it can drain water easily and has the capacity to bear the load.

- It is always advisable to pick plants which don't grow big in size.

- You can install a separate tank to store water or have a mechanical watering arrangement. But most often, people love to water their garden themselves and see the plants grow.

#### Preparing the potting mixture & sowing seeds

These days, one can easily get exotic and hybrid seeds of capsicum, chilly, cabbage, broccoli, coriander, tomatoes, brinjal, basil and parsley. The potting mixture should have 20% of leaf mould, 40% sand and 40% soil. You can add mustard cake and cow dung cake as fertilizers. After the seeds are sown, one should cover the soil with a layer of fine sand. Sand makes the soil porous and helps the roots grow. Keeping insects away

'Use neem-based organic pesticides. Or you can take 100 gram of chillies, 4-5 cloves of garlic and a few bulbs of turmeric, paste it and mix it in 1 litre of water. Pour the liquid in a container and simmer it till it is reduced to half. Refrigerate it and use it whenever necessary. All you need to do is take out about 20 ml of the concentrated paste, mix it in a litre of water and sprinkle it on the plants.'

However, if insects or diseases do strike your plants, go for the safest botanical or microbial pesticides'

- For the proper growth of vegetables/ flowers, the pot size should be between 8-10 inches. Make one or more drain holes in the pot

- Place small chips right over them so that they don't clog and excess water can pass through

- Do not pile soil on top of the plant

- Get various seedlings from the nursery

- Carefully remove the plants from its nursery container. Make sure the stem is completely above the surface

- Leave about an inch between the soil surface and the rim of the pot

# Wife not wearing 'purdah' is not cruelty, can't be ground for divorce: High Court

**The Allahabad High Court ruled that a woman's choice to not wear a 'purdah' (veil) does not amount to cruelty and cannot justify divorce.**

New Delhi. The Allahabad High Court has stated that a woman's choice to forgo wearing a 'purdah' (veil) does not constitute cruelty towards her husband and, therefore, cannot be used as a basis for seeking divorce. A division bench comprising Justice Saumitra Dayal Singh and Justice Donadi Ramesh made this observation while hearing an appeal filed by a man whose divorce petition had been dismissed by a lower court. The court granted the divorce, citing desertion, as the husband and wife had been living apart for over 23 years.

The husband had cited two reasons for seeking divorce: mental cruelty, claiming that his wife was independent, frequently went out on her own, and did not observe the practice of 'purdah'; and desertion. The couple married on February 26, 1990, and their 'gauna' ceremony occurred on December 4, 1992. Gauna is a Hindu wedding ceremony in northern India when the bride goes to her husband's house after marriage. They welcomed a son on December 2, 1995. While



they lived together sporadically, they have not cohabited for more than 23 years, and their son is now an adult.

► **Allahabad HC rules no cruelty in wife forgoing 'parda'.**  
 ► **Husband's divorce plea initially dismissed by lower court.**  
 ► **Couple married in 1990, separated for over 23 years.**

The court allowed the man's appeal, saying, "The appellant may claim mental cruelty committed by the respondent to the extent she

has deserted the appellant for very long. In any case, the respondent (wife) is found to have deserted the appellant and to have sustained that desertion for a long period, which has now exceeds 23 years. That wilful act of the respondent and her refusal (even now) to cohabit with the appellant to revive her matrimonial relationship appears to be an act of desertion committed of degree as may itself lead to dissolution of her marriage. Here, we note, the respondent has not only refused cohabitation with the appellant, but

she has also never made any effort to seek restitution of her conjugal rights," the court added.

**Right To Property A Constitutional Right, Says Supreme Court**

New Delhi. The Supreme Court has said that the right to property is a constitutional right and an individual cannot be deprived of his property without him being paid adequate compensation in accordance with the law. A bench of justices B R Gavai and K V Viswanathan said the right to property ceased to be a fundamental right due to the Constitution (Forty-Fourth Amendment) Act, 1978, however, it continues to be a human right in a welfare state and a constitutional right under Article 300-A of the Constitution.

Article 300-A of the Constitution provides that no person shall be deprived of his property, save by authority of law. The top court delivered its verdict on Thursday on an appeal challenging a November 2022 judgement of the Karnataka High Court in a matter pertaining to land acquisition for the Bengaluru-Mysuru Infrastructure Corridor Project (BMICP). "As discussed hereinabove, though the right to property is no more a fundamental right, in view of the provisions of Article 300-A of the Constitution of India, it is a constitutional right," the bench said.

"A person cannot be deprived of his property without him being paid adequate compensation in accordance with law for the same," it said in its verdict on the compensation related to the infrastructure corridor project. The bench noted that in January 2003, a preliminary notification was issued by the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (KIADB) for acquiring lands for the project and in November 2005, the possession of land of the appellants was taken over.

The top court said the land owners, who were appellants before it, were required to knock at the doors of the courts on a number of occasions during the last 22 years and they have been deprived of their property without any compensation for the same. It noted there was no delay which could be attributed to the appellants in not getting compensation, but it was on account of the "lethargic attitude" of the officers of the State/KIADB that the appellants were deprived of compensation. The bench said that only after notices were issued in contempt proceedings, the compensation was determined by the Special Land Acquisition Officer (SLAO) on April 22, 2019, taking guideline values prevailing in 2011 for determining the market value of the acquired land.

It said if the compensation to be awarded at the market value as of 2003 was permitted, it would amount to permitting a travesty of justice and making the constitutional provisions under Article 300-A a mockery. It was a fit case for the apex court to exercise its powers under Article 142 of the Constitution and direct the shifting of the date for determination of the market value of the land of the appellants.

## Delhi bakery owner suicide case: Family, in-laws likely to be questioned

**In a bid to verify the statements recorded by Khurana on his mobile phone before hanging himself, the police will be sending a team to his house and will also be questioning his friends**

New Delhi. The Delhi Police are likely to take the family members and the in-laws of Puneet Khurana, a Delhi-based cafe owner who died by suicide allegedly over an ongoing dispute with wife, in for questioning, news agency PTI reported. In a bid to verify the statements recorded by Khurana in a 54-minute video on his mobile phone before hanging himself, the Delhi Police will be sending a team to Khurana's home and will also be questioning his friends, according to PTI. Khurana hanged himself at his home in Delhi's Model Town on Tuesday. His family has alleged that Khurana's wife, Manika Pahwa, and his in-laws were mentally harassing



him. Khurana's family further claimed that his wife had kept on pressurising him to give away a share of his bakery business, prompting him to take the extreme step. Khurana's family said that he was "upset with his wife", who co-owned the For God's Cake bakery

and food joint called Woodbox Cafe, which shut down a while back. Khurana's sister claimed that Manika, her parents and her sister forced her brother to take his own life by saying, "you can't do anything, die by suicide if you dare," reported news agency ANI. "Manika threatened to throw our parents out of the house," she further told ANI.

Meanwhile, Khurana's mother also claimed that her son silently suffered at the hands of Manika and didn't inform them in the fear that they will be upset. Khurana's distraught mother said that she thought that the divorce would bring some peace to her son's life. However, that was not to be, following regular spats over the business, Khurana's mother further alleged.

## Dera Chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Gets Top Court Notice In 2002

**The notice comes after the CBI moved a plea challenging the Punjab and Haryana High Court's decision to acquit Ram Rahim and his co-accused in the case.**

NEW DELHI. The Supreme Court today issued a notice to Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh along with four others, in connection with the 2002 murder case of Ranjit Singh, a former Dera manager. The notice comes after the CBI moved a plea challenging the Punjab and Haryana High Court's decision to acquit Ram Rahim and his co-accused in the case. A bench comprising Chief Justice of India Sanjeev Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar noted that the case is already being heard by a bench led by Justice Bela M Trivedi and the matter will now be listed before her bench for further proceedings.

On July 10, 2002, Ranjit Singh was shot dead in the Khanpur Colony of Haryana's Kurukshetra. Mr Singh's murder was linked to his suspected role in the circulation of an anonymous letter exposing allegations of sexual exploitation of women by Gurmeet Ram



Rahim at the Dera's headquarters in Sirsa. The letter, which described how women followers were being abused, had caused public outcry.

In 2021, a special CBI court in Panchkula convicted Gurmeet Ram Rahim and four others - Avtar Singh, Krishan Lal, Jasbir Singh, and Sabdil Singh - for their roles in the murder. The court awarded life imprisonment to all five and imposed substantial fines: Rs 31 lakh on Ram Rahim, Rs 1.50 lakh on Sabdil Singh, Rs

1.25 lakh each on Jasbir Singh and Krishan Lal, and Rs 75,000 on Avtar Singh.

The CBI court's order concluded that Ram Rahim orchestrated the murder because he suspected Mr Singh's involvement in circulating the letter that exposed allegations of rape and exploitation. In May 2024, the Punjab and Haryana High Court overturned the CBI court's conviction and acquitted all five accused in the Ranjit Singh murder case.

Ram Rahim had appealed his conviction in all the cases against him, including the rape cases and the murder of journalist Ram Chander Chhatarpati.

Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh's conviction in 2017 for the rape of two women followers led to violence and unrest across Haryana, Punjab, and parts of Delhi. The violence resulted in the deaths of 30 people and injuries to over 250. The Army had to be called in to restore order.

## Delhi BJP Chief Will Not Contest In Assembly Elections: Sources

New Delhi. Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva will not be contesting in the upcoming Assembly elections, sources told . This comes amid talks that he might be contesting in the polls. The BJP is yet to release their first list of candidates for the elections, while the incumbent Aam Aadmi Party has released their full list. The elections in the National Capital are scheduled for February.

The Aam Aadmi Party has been in power since 2015, securing a thumping majority twice in the Assembly elections. But, in the Lok Sabha elections, AAP has failed to win a single seat since 2014 and BJP won all seven. The upcoming elections are being viewed as a fiercely contested battle between BJP and AAP, which is witnessing an aggressive poster war, with BJP alleging that AAP is resorting to voter fraud in a bid to retain power and the latter countering with a video poster

of Mr Kejriwal labelled "GOAT" (Greatest of All Time).

On January 1, the Delhi BJP chief wrote a letter to Mr Kejriwal, asking him to give up his "bad habits of lying and cheating."

"All of us, since our childhood, take a resolution on New Year's Day to give up bad habits and do something good and new. Today, on the first day of New Year 2025, all the people of Delhi hope that you will bring about meaningful change in yourself by giving up your bad habits of lying and cheating," Mr Sachdeva, the Delhi BJP chief, wrote in his letter. He asked the former Chief Minister to apologise to the people of Delhi for promoting liquor. The exchange of letters came after Mr Kejriwal wrote a letter to RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, raising questions



related to the actions of the BJP, including whether the RSS thinks that the ruling party is "weakening democracy." In the heated campaign, AAP alleged that the BJP is getting voters' names struck off the list in a desperate attempt to win the election, the BJP has accused them of getting fake voters' names added to the list to bolster its support. Mr Kejriwal said the BJP had officially sought the removal of names

of over 11,000 votes in Shahdara Assembly segment. "We won the Assembly seat last time by a margin of 5,000 votes. If these 11,000 names were struck off, there would be no chance for a win this time. But they were caught red-handed and those names were not deleted. We are thankful to the Chief Election Officer for stopping this."

State BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva, on the other hand, said the number of voters in Delhi saw a huge jump between the 2014 Lok Sabha polls and the Assembly election next year. The same, he said, was observed after the 2019 general election. "Who got these new voters? There are no answers. They are trying to play the same game this time. BJP is saying those who don't live in Delhi anymore, those who have died, why should their names be on the list?"

# A calmer home

Do you know that if your home is cluttered, disorganised and poorly designed it doesn't nourish your energy? A survey by London-based Ministry of Calm — that designs spaces to enhance wellbeing — found that a whopping 99 per cent of the respondents believe that changing your space can affect how you feel. Healing places of stillness and calm in your home are uplifting. Here are some ideas on how you can do that...

**Try minimalism:** Don't accumulate things - de-clutter. Japanese author Marie Kondo says that anything that doesn't make you happy or isn't necessary should be touched, thanked and sent on its way.

**Keep your home clean :** Keisuke Matsumoto writes in his book A Buddhist Monk's Guide to a Clean House and Mind: "We remove dust to sweep away our worldly cares. We live simply and take time to contemplate the self, mindfully living each moment." Keeping



your home clean brings Zen peacefulness.

**Use natural light:** For a relaxing space, replace harsh fluorescent lights with natural light or use candles. Place different sources of light which will allow you to control the intensity. Avoid projecting a direct light from the ceiling.

**Calming colours:** Energy healer

Seema Midha says, "The colours you use will calm you as a person. Use green plants to take away negative energy." Simplify the bedroom: Don't pile on fancy things, as they bring a negative chi. Feng shui expert SBS Surendran says, "Keep harsh lights and all technology out of the bedroom. Add a soft white rug and swing where you can lounge."

**Use minimum decorations:** Simplicity should be a ground rule if you want to bring in calmness to your home. Avoid collections of paintings or photos and keep only those that are dear to you.

**Go green:** Greenery soothes your nerves. Caring for plants is a big stressbuster

**Keep it soft:** Keeping soft rugs and throw pillows around brings softness in your home



## Easy decorating ideas to instantly Update your home



If you are planning to refurbish your home, there is nothing better than including small changes which will make your pad look different and interesting. From a colourful wallpaper in your living space to a clever lighting fixture — these are instant ways to brighten up your dull room.

### Add a splash of colour to your living room

Whether it is by way of having some colourful throws into the room or adding some vibrant cushions — you can easily

brighten a corner of your living space. Choose wooden furniture for your room to make it look vintage. Instead of the usual curtains, opt for floral ones for an interesting look. Vibrant lantern to spruce up your kitchen. For those who are thinking of ways to make their kitchen look bright, there is nothing better than adding a vibrant lantern. This festive season, you can choose from a variety of lanterns which are available in colourful shades — pink, blue, purple, orange, yellow, red and even turquoise to add a statement to your

### Choose sunshine yellow for your bedroom

Many a times when you are planning a colour option for your bedroom, you end up picking hues like pink, blue or beige. But, adding a colour like yellow can instantly make a drab room come alive. You can either have a side table in that colour or maybe wall hangings or lights to make your room look inviting. You can also go in for various shades of yellow in case you feel one shade may look boring.

# Tips to keep Woollens as never as ever!

Avoid washing machines to clean your sweaters and avoid hanging your sweaters for drying, says an expert.

Bhavya Chawla, chief stylist, Voonik, an online stylist-handpicked apparel store, has suggested some tips to keep woollens as new as ever!

### Use the right brush

Avoid washing machines to clean your sweaters as they may lose their sheen. Instead, use an electrostatic garment brush after every wear as woollens tend to accumulate a lot of dust and are vulnerable to moths. Airing them and spot-cleaning is another effective way to keep them new.

### Gently clean tough stains

If you accidentally stain your sweater or scarf, take it to the dry cleaner. In case the stain is not that tough and you feel you can manage to clean it at home, use a high quality detergent meant for woollens. Mix it in lukewarm water and soak your woollens in the mixture. Gently wash the piece of clothing with your hands. But remember to do this only for items that don't come with a "Dry clean only" tag!

### Avoid hanging

Woollens should never be hung up on a clothes line like other articles as this causes the fabric to stretch and it may lose its shape eventually. Lay the sweater or cardigan on a flat surface and allow it to dry at room temperature. Steer clear of sunlight and intense heat as these can sap all colour and life from your precious woollens.

As they are really prone to stretching out of shape, you must also avoid hanging woollens on hangers in the closets. Instead, fold them neatly and place them.

### Don't iron when dry

Woollens shouldn't be ironed when they are completely dry as this won't ease out the deep creases. They can also scorch easily under direct dry heat. Instead, use a steam press. If that's not an option, wet a plain white cotton cloth very slightly and use this as a buffer between the iron and the woollen. It's also advisable to keep the sweater turned inside out when not in use.

### Prevent moth attacks and germs

Wool is very vulnerable to moth attacks and germ

**Winter is here and your woollens are your best companions during this season. It requires extra care as the fibres are more delicate and are prone to being damaged very easily.**



build-ups. That is why it's imperative to never stack even remotely damp woollen clothes in your wardrobe as you will end up creating a breeding ground for germs. Remember to stash some moth balls in the section of your cupboard where you are placing your woollens.



## Khadi drapes for home

**A**re you ready for an 'interiors renaissance' from India? How about some khadi curtains and swadeshi bed covers for the lounge? After celebrating the success of 'Make in India' in fashion and food, the world is now falling for khadi for their homes. In fact, khadi rugs have become a hot favourite in Europe, and khadi throws keep you ultra warm in winter.

### Wooing the world

Designer Peter D'Ascoli, who works with khadi for interiors, says, "Khadi is becoming a new hot favourite in the world of interior design for its weave, simple elegance and understated look." From its humble beginnings, it has now reached Hollywood. Actor Goldie Hawn loves her khadi cushions, director Mira Nair swears by khadi rugs and Deepa Mehta shops for khadi napkins.

Clothing designer Christina Kim's khadi home textiles have been bought by the likes of Michelle Obama and Jennifer Aniston.

### Earthy appeal

Being an eco-friendly fabric, khadi in your home adds a sense of warmth and well-being. Take your pick from khadi gamchha and mats to khadi pillows and bags. Design director Mani Singh showcased khadi sofas at Milan design fair to a great response. Says Singh, "We didn't showcase exotic materials. We visited our neighbouring villages, met some weavers and asked them about fabric which has an Indian touch. And what did they come up with? Khadi!"

As the world moves towards ethical shopping, khadi is turning out to be the most sustainable yet fashionable buy.

## IT companies may report surge in Q3 revenue growth

**BENGALURU.** Though there will be seasonal furloughs, IT services firms are likely to perform better and will report improvement in growth momentum in the third quarter of this financial year.

Starting next week, IT firms will announce their December quarter results. The country's largest IT services firm Tata Consultancy Services will report its Q3 results on January 9 and the board will consider and approve the third interim dividend for FY25. The record date for dividend will be on January 17.

Emkay Global Financial Services in its research report said recovery in BFSI will aid growth, while weakness in manufacturing, mainly auto, is likely to weigh on growth. "BFSI is showing signs of healthy recovery, but uncertainties remain on pace of recovery in other verticals. Seasonal furloughs and lower working days should keep revenue growth muted on a QoQ basis," it said. HCLTech might lead organic revenue growth in tier-1 companies. It says the IT firm will raise its guidance to 4.5-5.5% (from 3.5-5%), factoring in CTG (Communications Technology Group) acquisition. In May, it acquired the CTG, a business division of HPE for \$225 million. In Q2, Infosys revised its FY25 revenue guidance from 3.4% to 3.75-4.5% on the back of performance in Q2 and ramp up of mega deals pipeline. Emkay said in Q3, deal wins might remain similar to Q2. However, absence of mega deals and weak discretionary spending should continue to weigh on deal intake in Q3.

Brokerage firm Motilal Oswal Financial Services expects tier-2 firms to continue to outpace tier-1 firms in growth during third quarter. While the initial phase of recovery in 1HFY25 was sluggish, it sees clear signs of an acceleration. "Recovery appears to be expanding beyond US BFSI, which continues to strengthen, into additional industry verticals like Hi-Tech, which is recovering ahead of schedule. The most important catalyst for the sector would come after 3QFY25, when client budgets for CY25 would be finalised and the magnitude of change in client behavior would become clearer," it said.

## US no longer among India's top crude oil suppliers; Russia leads with 31% share

**NEW DELHI.** The United States no longer remains one of the top five crude oil suppliers to India as African nation Angola nudged ahead of the US in December. Russia continues to be the top suppliers of oil to India even though India's dependence on Russian oil has fallen. According to energy cargo tracking firm Vortexa, Russian crude made up 31% of India's imports, the lowest share of the year, while the US accounted for just 1%. This marks the second consecutive month of declining Russian imports, driven by reduced discounts. Meanwhile, the US dropped out of India's top five crude suppliers, with Angola moving into the fifth position. Not long ago (in August 2024), US accounted for 8% of India's crude oil imports.

"In December 2024, the top five supplies included Russia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Angola, with Angola overtaking the United States as the fifth largest crude supplier. Indian refiners turned towards African and Middle Eastern producers for crude as Russian crude exports fell. India's crude imports grew 2% year over year, summing to 4.57mbd in 2024," said Xavier Tang, Market analyst at Vortexa. However, India's overall crude imports in December increased by 4% to 4.46 million barrel per day.

Meanwhile, comedian Kunal Kamra asked Blinkit CEO to reveal wages of delivery partners. He asked Dhinda on X, "Can you also enlighten us with data on the average wages you paid your delivery partners in 2024."

## Over 100 flights delayed due to fog in Delhi, visibility zero in many parts

**NEW DELHI.** More than 100 flights were delayed at the Delhi airport on Friday morning as visibility dropped to zero in some areas due to dense fog. A thick blanket of fog engulfed the national capital in the morning, with the weather department predicting cloudy skies for much of the day. Delhi's minimum temperature was recorded at 7 degrees Celsius, the



weather office said. An official said over 100 flights have been delayed at the Delhi airport due to bad weather conditions but there are no diversions so far. "While landing and takeoffs continue at Delhi Airport, flights that are not CAT III compliant may get affected. Passengers are requested to contact the airline concerned for updated flight information. Any inconvenience caused is deeply regretted," Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) said in a post on X at 6:35 am. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said the IGI Airport experienced very dense fog with visibility recorded at 0 metres. It said all runways are operating under CAT-III, which allows aircraft to operate in low visibility conditions. The IGI airport handles around 1,300 flight movements daily. At 8 am, Palam weather station reported very dense fog with 0 metres visibility and calm winds over the past two hours, while the city's primary weather station, Safdarjung, reported visibility of 50 metres with calm winds, according to a weather department official. The weather office has predicted very dense fog for Friday, with the maximum temperature expected to settle around 17 degrees Celsius. Delhi's air quality was in the "very poor" category, with an AQI reading of 351 at 9 am. The humidity was recorded at 100 per cent at 8:30 am.

# Markets up nearly 2 per cent, investors richer by Rs 6L crore

**NEW DELHI.** Domestic equity markets surged on Thursday, the second trading session of 2025, driven by optimism over improved third-quarter earnings. Robust performance by auto companies in December further bolstered buying sentiment, fueling the rally. Benchmark indices, BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty 50, gained about 2% with the former breaching the 80,000 mark in intraday deals. At close, the Sensex was up 1,436.30 points or 1.83% at 79,943.71, and the Nifty surged 445.75 points or 1.88% to close at 24,188.65. The sharp rally added more than Rs 6 lakh crore to investors' kitty as the market capitalization of all BSE listed companies grew from Rs 445.94 lakh crore on Wednesday to Rs 452 lakh crore on Thursday. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) also joined the part as they were net buyers (purchased shares worth Rs 1,507 crore) on Thursday.

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## NEWS BOX

**Honour equally belongs to team: Salima Tete**

**CHENNAI.** For her contribution to Indian hockey, women's team captain Salima Tete was named amongst the Arjuna Awardees in the National Sports Awards 2024 list announced on Thursday.

The 23-year-old took over captaincy from Savita Punia last year and was instrumental in India defending their Asian Champions Trophy title in Rajbir, Bihar. As a team player, Tete dedicated the award to her team. "I believe this is my team's award. It has my name on it but, truly, this honour equally belongs to my team. You cannot simply do all things by yourself in the team game so I would like to thank my team first. I know this award will work as a motivation for everyone," she told TNIE. One of the players from the famous Simdega hockey nursery, Tete made her debut for the national side in 2017 and has 122 caps so far. She was part of the side that came close to winning the country's first-ever women's hockey medal when Rani Rampal led the side to fourth-place finish in Tokyo. Known for her speed and precision, Tete was given the responsibility of leading the side ahead of the ACT last year. With the Women's Hockey India League approaching soon, Tete was at practice with her Soorma Hockey Club teammates when her former captain and Arjun Awardee herself, Rani Rampal, told her the happy news. "I was at the practice and it was Rani di who told me that I had received



the award. I could not believe it at first and couldn't put my emotions into words.

All of my teammates were hugging me and congratulating me so it felt really good to celebrate it with them. The first thought that came to my mind was that I should call my family and let them know, but they knew before I could tell them."

"I would like to thank my coaches including national coach Harinder Singh, teammates, and family. I wouldn't have achieved this without their support," Tete added.

Award motivates athletes: Swimmer Sajan Double Olympian Swimmer Sajan Prakash was also named in the list for the Arjuna Award. "This national Award will help me in my endeavour to do well in the future. I applied but was not sure whether I would be getting it.

**Bumrah captains in Sydney, India opts to bat first**

**SYDNEY.** While it seemed clear that Rohit Sharma will not play, there was a sense of anticipation to see who would walk out of the Indian dressing room donning the India blazer in front of a sell out crowd at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday. At about 9.58 AM, whatever doubts were there were castled. Jasprit Bumrah walked out of the pavilion with the team sheet in hand joining Australia captain Pat Cummins and Ravi Shastri in the middle. Two minutes later, he won the toss and opted to bat first. Shubman Gill had come in for Rohit Sharma while Prasidh Krishna replaced injured Akash Deep.

"Our captain has opted out of this game, it shows his leadership and that there is no selfishness in the team. Two changes, Rohit misses and Akash Deep is out due to injury, replaced by Prasidh (Krishna)," said Bumrah



when asked about Sharma.

The Indian captain had been in poor form averaging 6.2 with the bat while losing two of the three Tests he captained since arriving in Australia. With tensions mounting within the team — especially captain and head coach Gautam Gambhir — speculations and murmurs started doing rounds after the loss in Melbourne. Instead of putting them to rest, Gambhir added fuel to fire when he did not confirm Sharma's spot in the playing XI. Later, it was confirmed that Sharma will not be taking part in the must-win contest. As things stand, India trail 1-2 and need to win the fifth and final Test to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and have a chance at qualifying for the World Test Championship final.

**SCG pitch has excessive grass, but no former Indian player is complaining: Gavaskar**

**Ground, adding that former Indian players have refrained from criticising the challenging surfaces in Australia.**

**New Delhi.** Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar referred to the unusually grassy pitch at the Sydney Cricket Ground while adding how former Indian players have refrained from criticising the challenging surface despite its apparent difficulty. The SCG wicket proved treacherous for the visiting Indian team, which struggled to adapt to the green surface. India were precariously placed at 134 for seven in the final session of Day 1, with their batting lineup once again failing to deliver. Openers KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal fell cheaply, with Shubman Gill, replacing the rested skipper Rohit Sharma, and Virat Kohli also dismissed before making substantial contributions. Amidst the collapse, Rishabh Pant stood tall, absorbing the brunt of Australia's relentless bowling attack. Pant endured a series of painful blows, including



hits on the biceps, helmet, and abdomen, necessitating frequent visits from the team physio. Despite his discomfort, Pant showcased his characteristic grit and flair. A straight six off debutant Beau Webster and a cheeky cutoff Nathan Lyon highlighted his

aggressive intent, even as he focused on survival. Pant's valiant knock, however, ended on 40 off 98 deliveries when Scott Boland's well-directed short-pitched delivery induced a mistimed shot. Pat Cummins completed the

**Sam Konstas built for Athis stage: Watson praises Australia opener's showmanship**

**New Delhi.** Sam Konstas' explosive batting debut in Melbourne didn't surprise his mentor, Shane Watson; however, the 19-year-old's showmanship during the Boxing Day Test did catch the former Australian all-rounder off guard. Konstas stunned Jasprit Bumrah-led Indian bowlers with his breathtaking strokeplay, showcasing ramps, reverse scoops, pulls, and powerful drives through the covers. The young teenage opener even took the attack to Bumrah, arguably the best bowler of his generation. Sam Konstas' explosive batting debut in Melbourne didn't surprise his mentor, Shane Watson; however, the 19-year-old's showmanship during the Boxing Day Test did catch the former Australian all-rounder off guard. Konstas stunned Jasprit Bumrah-led Indian bowlers with his breathtaking strokeplay, showcasing ramps, reverse scoops, pulls, and powerful drives through the covers. The young teenage opener even took the attack to Bumrah, arguably the best bowler of his generation. Reflecting on his experience mentoring Konstas, Watson added: "My



experience working with Sam has shown me a very quiet, reserved personality — a deep thinker and certainly not an extrovert. But what we saw in the Test match is that he's a showman, rising to the occasion without

being overawed. "I know from my own debut experience that you put a lot of pressure on yourself because it's your dream to represent your country and wear the baggy green. But for Sam, it's almost superhuman how he seemed unaffected by that pressure."

"You could see it wasn't an act — that's just who he is. And honestly, I hadn't seen that side of him before. It just shows he's built for the big stage, where most players take time

to adjust. Sam thrives on it." However, Konstas faced the harsh realities of Test cricket in the second innings, with Bumrah dismissing him for just 8 runs with a superb inswinger. Watson remains confident in Konstas' abilities, highlighting his technical soundness and adaptability as key to succeeding in red-ball cricket. "Now, it's going to be a different challenge for him. He's shown what his plan B is, and we already saw in that second innings that field positions were adjusted accordingly. This will be a good test of his evolution — how he can continue to take the game on against the world's best bowlers. But he's certainly got all the gears and the skills to make those adjustments quickly." He's technically very correct and waits for loose balls. But he's also got the ability to hit the ball down the ground. Of course, when the field is set with a fine third man and a fine leg, the ramp shot might be off the table. Then again, I didn't think he'd play the ramp shot in the first couple of overs, and he did! Sam will trust his instincts, and that's something truly special that sets him apart."

**Sydney.** Senior India batter Virat Kohli once again edged the ball to the slips in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. This was the 6th time out of 7 innings that Kohli got out edging the ball outside off stump. Senior India batter Virat Kohli once again edged the ball to the slips in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. This was the 6th time out of 7 innings that Kohli got out edging the ball outside off stump. This was the 6th time that Kohli got out by edging the ball outside off stump. The Indian No.4 has been



challenged in the corridor of uncertainty throughout the series, and has managed to edge the ball every time despite looking set. Kohli's exploits in series as follows: 5, 100\*, 7, 11, 3, 36, 5 and now 17.

The only time Kohli did not edge the ball to the slips was when he remained unbeaten in the second innings of the opening innings at Perth. In other note, Virat Kohli's love-hate relationship with Australia continued after the batter was booed by the SCG crowd on Friday, January 3. Kohli got jeered by the crowd while entering the arena.

The batter has been targeted by the crowd ever since bumping into Sam Konstas in the first innings of the Melbourne Test match. Kohli had rammed into the young Australia batter at the MCG when the youngster took on Jasprit Bumrah in the Boxing Day Test match. At the time of writing, India were 100/4 with Ravindra Jadeja and Rishabh Pant rebuilding for India. The team had lost Yashasvi Jaiswal, KL Rahul, Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli so far.

**Mohun Bagan start year with win over Hyderabad FC**

The hosts continued their dominance into the second half with Cummings getting into the scoresheet in the 51st minute. Cummings brought down a long pass from the right flank and released Maclare in space. The Australian served it back on a plate to Cummings, who beat Arshdeep in goal with a first-time finish.

**All-round Bumrah sparks India's hopes after batters fail in grassy Sydney**

**IND vs AUS, SCG Test: Jasprit Bumrah kept India in the hunt once again despite a team facing a torrid time for the larger part of Day 1 at the SCG Test on Friday. Despite resting Rohit Sharma, India batters were a no-show once again in the ongoing series and were bowled out for just 185 runs on a spicy Sydney pitch.**

**New Delhi.** Jasprit Bumrah's India were left in a heap of trouble on Day 1 of the New Year's Test match in Sydney. After opting to bat first on a spicy Sydney Cricket Ground deck, India were bowled out for just 185 runs. Big names - Virat Kohli, Shubman Gill, KL Rahul failed to put up resistance as Australia pacers rolled over the visitors by making use of the full 7mm of grass left on the pitch. The green tinged wicket mixed with overcast conditions made it perfect conditions for the Australian quartet to dominate the India

team, taking the upper hand in the final Test match of the series. Some semblance of balance was brought back into the encounter very late in the day when stand-in captain Jasprit Bumrah not only added a crucial 37 runs with Prasidh Krishna and Mohammed Siraj, but also fired up India with a terrific 2-over-spell in the final minutes on Friday.

The Indian team returned to bowl only 3 overs late in the day, and perhaps gave an idea of how this Test match is going to pan out. Jasprit Bumrah bowled India's two of three overs and made Usman Khawaja skip and hop throughout his short spell. Bumrah, managed to hand India the breakthrough of Usman Khawaja in the last ball of Day 1 - something that the team desperately needed for a mental boost after a tough day. Some semblance of balance was brought back into the encounter very late in the day when stand-in captain Jasprit Bumrah not only added a crucial 37 runs with Prasidh Krishna and Mohammed Siraj, but also fired up India with a terrific 2-over-spell in the final minutes on Friday.

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**IND vs AUS, 5th Test: Day 1 Highlights**

**IND vs AUS, SCG Test Day 1: As It Happened**

India were put on the backfoot at the toss itself after Jasprit Bumrah opted to bowl first on a greenish wicket at the SCG under overcast conditions. While India cannot be berated for opting to bat at the SCG, a track that is expected to break as the game goes on, but India could have taken the call based on more visual evidence than historical data. India chose to once again play 2 spinners on the track, that had

7mm of grass left on it. The result, as it turned out, was a horrible one for India - as they were bowled out for just 185 runs. India batters, already low on confidence, found it difficult to bat on in the seaming conditions and lost two wickets in the first 10 overs of the game (7.4 overs). Pegged back, India dropped anchor with Virat Kohli and Shubman Gill to bring up a steady partnership that lasted till the final over of the morning session.

# Khushi Kapoor

Smiles Bright As She Jets Off From Jamnagar With Vedang Raina

**K**hushi Kapoor and Vedang Raina's rumoured relationship is nothing unknown to their fans. They are often spotted hitting parties together and going on vacations with their close ones. Recently, they celebrated their New Year's Eve at Jamnagar, and were papped at the airport while jetting off from there. In a video shared by a paparazzo on Instagram, Khushi Kapoor and Vedang Raina were spotted entering the Jamnagar airport. The rumoured couple were also joined by Sky Force actor Veer Pahariya. In the clip, Janhvi Kapoor's sister was seen smiling brightly while posing for the shutterbugs stationed outside the airport. Her joyful mood reflected the fun and festivities of their gala New Year's Eve celebration in Jamnagar in the presence of her loved ones. Khushi even took a moment to pose after being approached by some of her fans for a selfie.

For the day, Khushi wore a black-hued tank top teamed with an olive green sweater and loose-fitted denim pants. She also opted for a middle-parted open hairdo, subtle makeup, a pair of white sneakers, minimal accessories and a pink handbag to amp up her uber-cool look. On the other hand, Vedang sported a black T-shirt paired with a matching leather jacket and denim pants. Veer looked handsome in an all-black ensemble. Khushi Kapoor, being an avid social media user, gave lovely glimpses of her New Year's Eve celebrations at Jamnagar. In a sweet Instagram post, Boney Kapoor was seen affectionately wrapping his hands around her as they posed for the lens. In the background, we got a sneak peek into the starry lights-filled decoration, which looked simply stunning. She captioned the photos as "Happy 2025."

Before that, Khushi Kapoor maximised the festive spirit with her rumoured boyfriend Vedang Raina in cute, cosy pictures for Christmas. In the photos, the actress wore a green sweater teamed with a short mini skirt and a red purse. In one of the frames, she was seen posing for a mirror selfie with the Jigra actor, who looked handsome in a reindeer-printed blue sweater. Khushi's Christmas special carousel also featured their close friend, Orry. Sharing it, she wrote, "A cute ugly Christmas sweater party."

On the work front, Khushi Kapoor will be next seen in the upcoming romantic comedy Loveyapa alongside Aamir Khan's son, Junaid Khan. Directed by Advait Singh Chandan, the film will hit the theatres on February 7.



## Disha Patani

Goes Out On Lunch In Mumbai, Looks Glam In A Floral Dress

**A** day after welcoming the New Year with a bash, Disha Patani stepped out for lunch in Mumbai. In a clip posted by a celebrity photographer on Instagram, the actress was seen entering the Mizu restaurant in Pali. Disha, a true-blue fashion icon, slipped into a floral mini-dress for the day out. Her OOTD featured flowy sleeves and a ruffled hem. Minimal jewellery and open hair sealed her avatar. She teamed up her pretty outfit with a furry pink sling bag. The clip showed Disha Patani getting out of her car and greeting the paparazzi. She smiled at the shutterbugs and posed briefly before entering the restaurant. Fans reacted to the video by dropping red hearts and fire emojis. A few also called her "beautiful."

Disha Patani celebrated New Year's Eve with BFF Mouni Roy and her husband Suraj Nambiar. Mouni suffered a mini accident as she was exiting the venue. The actress tripped on the stairs and fell while on her way out. Disha was seen helping Mouni by holding her hand. Suraj also rushed to his wife's aid. Take a look at the video here:

Workwise, Disha Patani was last seen in Kanguva. Directed by Siva, the film is led by Surya. The action drama also starred Bobby Deol as the antagonist. The film was released in Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Hindi, and English on November 14, 2024. Jagapathi Babu, Prakash Raj, Yogi Babu, KS Ravikumar, Harish Uthaman, Kovai Sarala, Vasundhara Kashyap and Anandrajan

played supporting roles. Kanguva is produced by KE Gnanavelraja and Vamsi Pramod under the banners Studio Green and UV Creations. Up next, Disha Patani will next be seen in Welcome To The Jungle. Helmed by Ahmed Khan, the upcoming film revolves around two police officers — Jay Bakshi and Sandhya who have



been assigned the task of tracking down a notorious criminal, Raj Solanki. Things take a turn for the worse after Jay learns that his partner Sandhya is related to the criminal. Besides Disha Patani, Welcome To The Jungle features a cast ensemble of Akshay Kumar, Sanjay Dutt, Suniel Shetty, Jacqueline Fernandez and Rajpal Yadav among others.

Arjun Kapoor, Rakul Preet Singh And Bhumi Pednekar Starrer Mere Husband Ki Biwi To Release On THIS Date



**A**rjun Kapoor, Rakul Preet Singh, and Bhumi Pednekar will soon be seen in a romantic comedy film titled Mere Husband Ki Biwi. The makers have released a quirky motion poster and also announced the release date. The film is all set to hit the theatre on February 21, 2025. Fans have also reacted to it. Taking to their Instagram handles, Pooja Entertainment shared the motion poster and caption reads, "Yahaan pyaar ki geometry thodi twisted hai—kyunki ye love triangle nahi, pura circle hai! #MereHusbandKiBiwi In Cinemas 21st February, 2025." Directed by Mudassar Aziz, known for his work on films like Pati Patni Aur Woh, Happy Bhag Jayegi, and Khel Khel Mein, the film promises to deliver a fresh and entertaining story.

One of the fans wrote, "Can't waitttttttt". Another wrote, "It would be Damn beautiful Chemistry between Arjun Kapoor and Rakul Preet." Mere Husband Ki Biwi is produced by Vashu Bhagnani, Jackky Bhagnani, and Deepshikha Deshmukh.

On the work front, Arjun Kapoor was last seen in Singham Again. Singham Again showcased a parallel narrative to that of the mythological epic Ramayana. The story focuses on Bajirao Singham, who ventures into a new journey to save his wife Avni along with his team, which includes Tiger Shroff, Akshay Kumar and Ranveer Singh. Rohit Shetty's recent release is the third in the Singham film franchise and the fifth instalment in his Cop Universe after Singham, Singham Again, Simmba and Sooryavanshi.

Rakul Preet Singh will be next seen in De De Pyaar De 2. Unlike the first part, which was helmed by Akin Ali, the sequel will be helmed by Anshul Sharma, known for the film Saare Jahaan Se Mehnga. Bhumi will be making her web series debut with Daldal in which she will be seen playing a cop. Filming of the series is already completed. It will be released on Prime Video next year. Apart from this, she also has another web show titled The Royals opposite Ishaan Khatter. The show also features celebs like Nora Fatehi, Chunky Panday, Sakshi Tanwar, Dino Morea and Milind Soman.

### Divyendu Sharma's Beard Game Is Strong As He Steps Out In Style In Black



**D**ivyendu Sharma is known for his portrayal of Munna Tripathi aka Munna Bhaiya in the popular series Mirzapur. Backed by Farhan Akhtar, the show was a big hit and gained him widespread recognition. On Wednesday night, the actor grabbed the audience's attention with his dashing look as he was spotted leaving a restaurant.

Several pictures and videos of the actor surfaced on social media. In one such video, the Madgaon Express actor is seen striking a pose at the restaurant entrance. As the clip moves forward, the actor is also seen interacting and clicking pictures with the paps stationed outside.

Divyendu looked handsome as he opted for an all-black formal look. He wore a shirt and teamed with matching pants. He was seen with a heavy beard look. Fans were quick to share their reactions on social media. An Instagram user wrote, "Hottie." Another one wrote, "Hero h hero apna munna bhaiya." One of them commented, "Stunning look."

Meanwhile, on the work front, the actor first gained recognition with his performance in the comedy film Pyaar Ka Punchnama which was released in 2011. The film also starred Kartik Aaryan, Nushrratt Bharuccha and Ishita Sharma in leads.

Post that he went on to feature in big-budgeted films like Toilet: Ek Prem Katha, Batti Gul Meter Chalu and others. His career shot to fame after he appeared in Farhan Akhtar's web series Mirzapur. He was part of the show's season 1, which was released in 2018 and season 2, which premiered in 2020.

After the grand success of Mirzapur, the makers recently announced a film based on the web series. Notably, the original cast including Pankaj Tripathi, Ali Fazal, Abhishek Banerjee and Divyendu will be seen reuniting for the project. Created by Puneet Krishna and directed by Gurmeet Singh, the Mirzapur film is scheduled for release in 2026.

He was last seen in the film Agni which premiered on the OTT giant Prime Video. Helmed by Rahul Dholakia, known for Raees, and produced by Farhan Akhtar, the film also featured Pratik Gandhi and Siyami Kher in the lead roles.