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Have told CM to take action in sarpanch murder case irrespective of party affiliations: Ajit Pawar

Sanjay Kumar Mumbai, Jan.09: Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Thursday said no one will be spared in the Beed sarpanch



Santosh Deshmukh murder case even as he defended his party and cabinet colleague Dhananjay Munde. Massajog sarpanch Deshmukh was abducted, tortured and murdered on December 9 for trying to stop an extortion bid on an energy firm helming a windmill project in the region. A murder case and an extortion case linked to the killing are being probed by a special investigation team of the state CID. "I have told Chief Minister

Devendra Fadnavis to act against the guilty in the sarpanch murder irrespective of the party that person belongs to. Fadnavis has said action will be taken against anyone linked to the brutal killing." Pawar told reporters in Pune. Asked about the demand being made from various quarters for the resignation of Munde, Pawar said the latter has told him he was not involved in the brutal murder of Deshmukh. "The court, SIT, CID are probing the sarpanch murder case thoroughly. No one will be spared in the case," the Nationalist Congress Party chief asserted. Asked whether Munde should resign from the Fadnavis government on moral grounds, Pawar claimed, "He has said he is not even remotely linked to the case. He also said that any agency can probe the case. People levelling allegations must hand over evidence they have to probe agencies." Munde, MLA from Parli in Beed, is under attack from opposition parties and even some leaders of the ruling Mahayuti as Walmik Karad, the key accused in the extortion case linked to the sarpanch's murder, is his close aide.

Kejriwal targets Centre, demands inclusion of Delhi's Jat community in Central OBC list

Simmi Kaur Babbar New Delhi, Jan. 09: As Assembly elections draw closer in Delhi, AAP convenor and former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday accused the BJP-led Central government of renegeing on its promise to provide reservation to the capital's Jat community. Speaking at a press conference, Kejriwal said he wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, demanding the inclusion of Delhi's Jat community in the Central OBC list. He also accused the Centre of misleading the community for the past decade, and failing to deliver on its promises. "In 2015, the BJP invited Jat leaders to the prime minister's residence and assured them that Delhi's Jat community would be included in the Central OBC list. Union Home Minister Amit Shah promised the same in 2019. However,

nothing has been done to fulfil these promises," Kejriwal said. Drawing comparisons, he questioned why Jat stu-



dents from Rajasthan benefit from reservations in Delhi University (DU), while Jat students from Delhi are denied the same. "Thousands of children from the Jat community in Delhi are unable to

secure admission in DU because they are not part of the Central OBC list," he said. Kejriwal also alleged that despite Delhi's Jats being recognised under the OBC category in the state, the Central government has refused to extend the benefits to them. "This is nothing but betrayal. The Centre must include Delhi's Jat community in the OBC list to ensure they receive reservations in Central government institutions, including for jobs and college admissions," the AAP supremo said. Central agencies like the MCD, DDA, and PWD operate extensively in Delhi, and including Jats in the OBC list would open up significant opportunities for them, Kejriwal said, as he vowed to continue the fight until the community's demands are met. The 70-member Delhi Assembly will go to polls on February 5. The results will be out on February 8.

Future does not lie in war, but in Buddha: PM Modi

ST Correspondent

New Delhi, Jan. 09: Asserting that the world today listens to India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said that due to the country's heritage, it is able to tell the international community that the future does not lie in war but in Buddha. Addressing the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention in Bhubaneswar, Modi said India is not only the mother of democracy, but democracy is a part of people's lives here. He said the world today listens to India, which not only presents its own views strongly but also those of the Global



South. "Due to the strength of its heritage, India is able to tell the world that the future does not lie in war, but in Buddha (peace)," he said. Modi said he has always considered the diaspora as India's ambassador to the countries they live in. "We consider it our responsibility to help our diaspora during crisis situations no matter where they are," he said. The PM said the diaspora played a major role in Independence in 1947, and sought their help to make India a developed country by 2047. He said India is not only a young country but also a country of skilled youths. "The government is trying to ensure that whenever Indian youths go abroad, they go with skills," Modi said, noting the demand for skilled workers across the world. He said G20 meetings were organised in various parts of the country to give the world a first-hand experience of India's diversity. "We don't need to learn diversity because our lives run through diversity," he added.

Delhi court to pass order on Naresh Balyan's bail plea on Jan 15

New Delhi, Jan. 09: A Delhi will on January 15 pass orders on the bail application of AAP Uttam Nagar MLA Naresh Balyan in a case under the stringent MCOCA. Special judge Kaveri Baweja on Thursday extended till February 1 the judicial custody of Balyan in the case, after he was produced in court on its completion. The judge reserved order on the bail plea after hearing arguments from the accused and the prosecution. The fixed for January 22 for hearing arguments on the chargesheet in the case in which Balyan was arrested on December 4.

Three Naxalites killed in encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Sukma

Sukma, Jan. 09: Three Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Thursday, state Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma said. The security forces have achieved success in the anti-Naxal operation in Sukma, he said. So far, bodies of three Naxalites have been recovered and the search operation is still underway, Sharma, who holds the Home portfolio, told reporters in Raipur. Referring to the IED blast triggered by Naxalites on January 6 wherein eight security personnel and a civilian driver of their vehicle were killed in Bijapur district, the deputy CM said, "There is huge anger among security forces after what Naxalites have done." "I have met them (security forces). I reiterate that with the strength and courage of our jawans, the (Naxal) menace will be eliminated within the stipulated time," he said. Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday vowed to eliminate Naxals from the country by March 2026 and asserted that the sacrifice of those killed by the extremists in Chhattisgarh will not go in vain. On Thursday morning, the encounter broke out in a forest along the border of Sukma and Bijapur districts when a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, police said.

If INDIA bloc was only for parliamentary polls, better wind it up: Omar Abdullah

Navdeep Singh Sahni

Jammu, Jan. 09: Asserting that there was no time limit attached to the INDIA bloc, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday expressed dismay over the lack of clarity regarding its leadership and agenda, saying the alliance should be wound up if it was meant only for the parliamentary elections. Abdullah said the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Congress, and other political parties on the ground will decide how to effectively compete with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). "After the Assembly elections in Delhi, they should call all the alliance members for a meeting. If this alliance was only for the parliamentary elections, it should be wound up, and we will work separately. But if it is meant for Assembly elections as well, we will have to sit together and work collectively," Abdullah told reporters here. The National Conference leader was replying to a

question about an RJD leader's statement that the INDIA bloc was meant only for Lok Sabha elections. "As far as I



remember, no time limit was set for this. The issue is that no meeting of the INDIA bloc is being convened," he said. Claiming that there is no clarity regarding the main leadership, the party, or the agenda for future strategy (in the INDIA bloc), he said, "Whether this alliance will continue is also unclear." Abdullah also

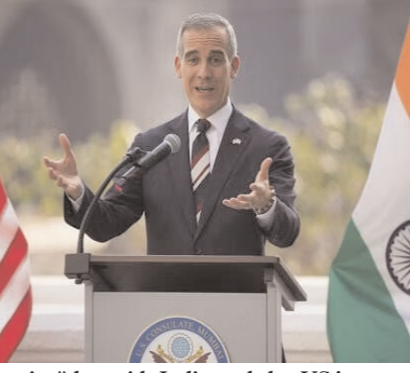
said that perhaps the members of the INDIA bloc will be called for a meeting after the Delhi elections, and a clarity would emerge. Replying to another query on increasing support for AAP ahead of next month's Delhi elections, Abdullah said, "I cannot say anything about this at the moment because we have no involvement with Delhi polls. The Aam Aadmi Party, Congress, and other political parties on the ground will decide how to compete with the BJP strongly." Stating that AAP succeeded twice in Delhi previously, Abdullah said, "This time, we will have to wait and see what the people of Delhi decide." The Jammu and Kashmir Assembly is convening an orientation programme here on Thursday for the newly-elected legislators. "Many of us have been members of this House before, but that was when Jammu and Kashmir was a state.

India and USA united in fight against terrorism

Tejinder Kaur Babbar

Mumbai, Jan. 09: US ambassador to India Eric Garcetti on Thursday said India and America are united in the fight against terrorism, and expressed satisfaction over the "increased" intelligence sharing and cooperation between the two countries to bring perpetrators to justice. The American Dream and the Indian Dream are flip sides of the same coin, he said, adding that the relationship between the two countries was "multiplicative" and that they have responsibility beyond their borders. Addressing a gathering on 'Peace and the role of the US - India defence and security partnership' here, Garcetti said many innocent lives were being snuffed out due to terrorism. "Both the countries face the threat from terror organisations like Lashkar, Jaish, ISIS. These terror outfits operate across borders and we must meet this threat together. Our collaboration extends beyond fighting terrorism but we must also see how we can de-

radicalise communities," he said. "We have to invest in opportunities in some of our poorest areas. We have to reach out to communities who feel they are on the brink and ensure those who threaten peace and stability face accountability. Peace is linked to



prosperity," he said. India and the USA are united in the fight against terrorism. There is increased intelligence sharing and cooperation between the two countries to bring perpetrators to justice, he added. Violence

occurs if there is no prosperity and jobs, Garcetti said, stressing the need to build economic pathways. History can be brought back to life again, like the Silk Route and the Spice Route, he said. "The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) will link nations in Saudi, Mediterranean and go all the way to Europe. The conflict in the Middle East has put a pause, but the planning continues. I would encourage the USA and India, our Gulf partners and others to see IMEC as one of the greatest things we can work on in our lifetime," he said. The US ambassador described Mumbai as an "incredible industrial hub" that is rich with ideas and filled with people who are always looking at tomorrow differently from today. He said the Taj Hotel in Mumbai was a sacred ground and an iconic hotel that was attacked by terrorists on November 26, 2008. "We are commemorating the 16th anniversary of the 26/11

attacks. It was here where the bravery of the country was shown," he said. According to Garcetti, discussion about Indo-US ties is not about sharing common goals, but how we get to those common goals which require principles that we articulate, partnerships that we build and practice of getting to know how we operate together. "Our relationship is not additive but multiplicative...Developing vaccines, international trade. We aren't countries that just think what is best for us and our people, but also about the world and how the impact of what we do, whether militarily, in terms of health, climate and women's empowerment," he said. "Peace is more than defence. It is about how we build a peaceful world," he said. Diplomacy and people-to-people contact is so critical that without them all we have is war and weaponry, the US envoy said. "To keep peace together, we have to tackle transnational threats - from trafficking to drugs. There is a need to build civil society and uplift the disempowered and minority communities.

UCC to be implemented in Uttarakhand this month: CM Dhami

Naresh Malhotra

Dehradun, Jan. 09: Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Thursday highlighted the various initiatives undertaken in the state, reaffirming the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the "Devbhoomi" this month. Uttarakhand is the first state in the country to have UCC Act, which seeks to establish a uniform and an equal set of rules on marriage, divorce, succession and inheritance for all citizens in the state, except the Scheduled Tribes (STs), irrespective of religion. It makes registration of all marriages and live-in relationships mandatory. "We have formulated the Uniform Civil Code law in Devbhoomi Uttarakhand. This is the state's first honour and will be implemented within this month," Dhami said during the inauguration of the 29th Uttarayani Mela in Bareilly. He compared the UCC to India's sacred rivers such as Sharda, Ganga, Saraswati and Kaveri, stating that just as they sustain life across the country, the UCC will work similarly. Regarding the state's tourism and infrastructure initiatives, Dhami said, "In Haridwar and Rishikesh, we are planning to develop the

Ganga Corridor. Work on a corridor along the Sharda River has also begun." He added that Uttarakhand continues to see an increasing influx of devotees and tourists which would be bolstered by the reconstruction efforts in Kedarnath and the master plan underway at Badrinath Dham. Dhami also announced beautification and restoration efforts for temples in the Kumaon region and development at Purnagiri. "It gives me immense joy that more devotees from Uttar Pradesh visit Purnagiri. We are creating the Sharda Corridor, which will enhance the ghats and beautify the area," he said. The chief minister expressed hope for Uttarakhand becoming a hub for destination weddings and tourism, emphasising the state's growing reputation. "Handicraft products from Uttarakhand are gaining recognition among multinational companies and women in the state are doing excellent work. Over one lakh

women in Uttarakhand are now earning a substantial income. We will provide them with interest-free loans," he said. On governance and security, Dhami shared progress on several legal reforms, including the anti-conversion law, the introduction of anti-riot legislation and measures to counter exam

malpractice. "We have taken strong steps by enacting an anti-riot law. Any damages caused during riots will be recovered from the perpetrators." "Similarly, with our anti-cheating law, over 100 individuals involved in exam malpractice have been jailed. This ensures fair opportunities for deserving candidates," he added. Dhami mentioned initiatives to combat "land jihad", stating that 5,000 acres of encroached land have been freed. He also discussed tackling issues like "spit jihad" with new laws to maintain public order. Looking ahead, the chief minister announced that the 28th National Games would commence on January 28 in Uttarakhand, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi set to inaugurate the event. Earlier, Dhami inaugurated the 29th Uttarayani Mela where he was accompanied by Bareilly MP Chhatrapal Singh Gangwar, Mayor Dr Umesh Gautam and Cantonment MLA Sanjeev Aggarwal. The three-day fair, held at Bareilly Club Ground, showcases

Uttarakhand's culture, music and dance, delighting attendees with performances by local artists and food stalls featuring traditional delicacies. The UCC has been on the BJP's agenda nationally for many years. But the party's government in Uttarakhand became the first to take a concrete step towards implementing it just before the Lok Sabha elections last year. An expert committee formed by Dhami and headed by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai submitted a comprehensive draft in four volumes to the state government in February 2024. Acting on the draft, the state government presented the Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code Bill in the Assembly a few days later and it was passed on February 7. The UCC Act received President Droupadi Murmu's approval on March 11, making the hill state the first in independent India to have a UCC Act. A nine-member state government-appointed panel, chaired by former chief secretary Singh to lay down the rules for the UCC's implementation panel, submitted its final report. Dhami has previously said in no unclear terms that the UCC will be implemented in January.



## NEWS BOX

## KSRTC increases contract bus fares due to diesel, salary hikes

**BENGALURU.** Just days after hiking bus fares by 15 per cent, the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) has increased the contract carriage fares. One of the most popular Karnataka Sarige services, which are provided on a contract basis for pilgrimages, political rallies, marriages, and other activities, at a rate of Rs 47 per km, is now revised to Rs 54 within the state, translating to a hike of Rs 7 per km. For services outside Karnataka, the rates have been hiked from Rs 50 to Rs 57 per km. Ashwamedha services, which were operated at Rs 52 per km within the state, has been increased to Rs 58 per km, a hike of Rs 6 per km. All the bus services -- Rajahamsa, Airavata, Pallaki, Ambari, Midi Bus, Non-AC Sleeper, Fly Bus and others -- have witnessed a hike. Those who had booked



the services in advance will be charged as per the old rates. The rates for Ashwamedha are Rs 58 per km within Karnataka, and Rs 61 outside the state. Rajahamsa rates are Rs 59 per km within Karnataka and Rs 63 outside, while the rates for Pallaki buses are Rs 80 per km within Karnataka, and Rs 85 outside the state. In a circular dated January 7, the bus corporation stated that an increase in the cost of diesel and salaries of its employees had resulted in the increase in operational costs, further leading to hike in fares for contract carriages, with effect from January 8.

## PRRD, WCD departments seek increase in budgetary allocation

**HYDERABAD.** The Panchayat Raj & Rural Development (PRRD) and Women & Child Welfare (WCD) departments have sought increased allocation in the state Budget. Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka held a pre-Budget meeting with the officials of the two departments here on Wednesday. During the meeting, which was also attended by minister Dansari Anasuya alias Seethakka, the PRRD department asked the Finance department to allocate Rs 30,000 crore in the 2025-26 Budget as against Rs 28,500 crore allocated in 2024-25. Similarly, the WCD department sought an increase of Rs 700 crore from the allocation made in the last Budget. During the meeting, Seethakka asked the Finance department to clear pending bills immediately. "Various works are proposed to be taken up at village level. To start those works, pending bills need to be cleared," she said. The minister also proposed various new initiatives to be taken up in the next financial year by Women and Child Welfare department. Meanwhile, it is learnt that Energy and Finance department asked the Rural Development department to clear electricity bills of Mission Bhagiratha. Sources said that power bills to the tune of '6,000 crore are pending under Mission Bhagiratha.

## ISRO's space docking postponed second time

**BENGALURU.** The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has postponed the much-awaited docking of two satellites under the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) mission citing that the drift of one satellite towards the other was "more than expected". Earlier, the exercise was scheduled to take place on January 7, but was postponed to January 9. However, on Wednesday evening, ISRO took to X, stating: "Initiated the drift on the Spacecraft-A to move closer from 500m to 225m." Following this, another post read: "While making a maneuver to reach 22m between satellites the drift was found to be more than expected, post non-visibility period. The planned docking for tomorrow (January 9) is postponed. Satellites are safe (sic)." On December 30, 2024, ISRO PSLV-C-60 launched two satellites at an inclination of 55 degrees to the equator. The SpaDeX mission, undertaken at the cost of Rs 375 crore, was aimed at achieving a successful autonomous docking of two unmanned spacecraft in space -- SDX01, known as Chaser, and SDX02, called Target, each weighing 220 Kg. They were released at intervals with the Chaser having a marginally higher velocity than the Target spacecraft to enable the former to close in on the latter and dock on January 7. Post docking, electrical power transfer between the two spacecraft was to be demonstrated before separation of the two to begin operations of their respective payloads for an expected mission life of up to two years. Union minister for state for Department of Space, Jitendra Singh, was scheduled to attend the docking at ISRO Telemetry, Tracking and Command Network campus in Bengaluru on Thursday. This is also scheduled to be cancelled now, said an ISRO official.

## Tirupati stampede: Why Vaikunta Ekadasi attracts massive crowds

**TIRUMALA.** At least seven people were killed, and dozens were injured in a stampede at the Venkateswara Swamy Temple in Tirumala on Wednesday during the distribution of tokens for Darshan through the Uttar Dwaram or Vaikunta Dwaram (north entrance). But why is there such a huge footfall to the sacred Tirumala during Vaikunta Ekadasi days?

The sacred Tirumala temple experiences a surge in footfall during Vaikunta Ekadasi, with devotees flocking from across the country to partake in the auspicious rituals. Historically, two major events -- Brahmotsavam, a nine-day festival, and Vaikunta Ekadasi, initially observed for a single day -- have drawn massive crowds. In the 1980s and 1990s, temple authorities extended the festivities by recognising Vaikunta Dwadashi as an additional sacred day. Both days, preceding the Makara Sankranti festival, are considered highly auspicious. Devotees believe that Lord Vishnu, worshipped as Lord Venkateswara in Tirumala, bestows heavenly blessings on those who get a glimpse of him during this period. For ages, devotees have prepared for Vaikunta Ekadasi by wearing the Govinda Mala 41 days in advance, donning yellow clothes, and walking barefoot as a mark



of devotion. Many pilgrims embark on foot from distant locations, sometimes hundreds of kilometers away, often starting their journey a week or ten days prior to reach Tirumala in time for the celebrations. Considering the influx of devotees, the administration, after consulting Hindu religious heads across the country, decided in 2021-2022 to extend Vaikunta Ekadasi and Dwadashi to a ten-day event. After this decision, the Uttar Dwaram around the sanctum of Lord Venkateswara is kept open for ten days, allowing devotees to enter through the Uttar Dwaram and perform a parikrama around the sanctum. This was aimed at managing the huge crowds and

provide all devotees the opportunity for darshan. The TTD expanded Vaikunta Ekadasi and Dwadashi to ten days to accommodate the growing number of devotees. What do the Puranas say? According to the Puranas, Lord Vishnu holds a meeting in Vaikuntam with his disciples, and devotees are also allowed into his sabha. This celestial meeting, symbolically reflected on earth, lasts ten days. Therefore, pontiffs and the TTD administration decided to keep the Uttar Dwaram open for ten days, allowing devotees to enter and perform darshan around the sanctum. This shift from one day Vaikunta Ekadasi to two days (Ekadasi and Dwadashi) and now ten days is based on the strong belief that devotees who have darshan during these days will attain moksha, making the huge congregation inevitable. The TTD has traditionally conducted rituals and annual events while arranging for visiting devotees. However, during the previous government, a local MLA, serving as the TTD chairman, sought to gain an advantage by introducing Vaikunta Dwara darshan tokens in Tirupati.

## Seven devotees killed in stampede during distribution of darshan tokens in Tirupati temple

**Andhra Pradesh.** Seven people were killed and at least 40 others were injured in a stampede at the Venkateswara Swamy Temple in the Tirumala Hills on Wednesday during the distribution of tokens for Vaikunta Dwara Darshan.

The incident occurred when a large crowd of devotees rushed to collect tokens, causing the stampede. The deceased were identified as Malika (49) from Tamil Nadu, and Rajini (47), Shanti (40), Naidubabu (51), Rajeswari (47) and Alaga Rani (42) -- all from Andhra Pradesh. Another woman is yet to be identified. "The gates and immediately everybody pushing ahead led to this stampede and reports are emerging that seven persons died," Naidu told while addressing the media. Chaos erupted when a staff member at the Bairagi Patteda centre fell ill, prompting officials to open a queue for his evacuation. Mistaking this as the commencement of token distribution, devotees surged forward, resulting in a stampede. Eyewitnesses alleged that security measures at the queue lines were inadequate and that the police officers responsible for monitoring the queues were absent. Meanwhile, videos of police administering CPR on a couple of woman devotees and injured persons being shifted in ambulances went viral. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed shock over the incident and condoled the deaths.

The Prime Minister's Office posted on X, "Pained by the stampede in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. My thoughts are with those who have lost their near and dear ones. I pray that the injured recover soon. The AP Government is providing all possible assistance to those affected." Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu spoke to officials over the phone about the treatment being provided to the injured in the incident. Naidu has ordered higher officials to go to the scene of the incident and take relief measures to ensure that the injured get better treatment. YSRCP President and former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy also expressed sorrow over the incident, calling the deaths deeply saddening.

## 'My award is a recognition for swimming itself': Indian swimmer Sajan Prakash

**KOCHI.** Swimmer Sajan Prakash's name is one that by now should have been familiar in every Indian household, but sadly, it is not so. His feats of achievement in Indian swimming are nothing short of unprecedented; being the only Indian swimmer to have been nominated for two consecutive Olympics is just one of many. The recent announcement of him being poised to receive the prestigious Arjuna Award on January 17 would have created waves had he been involved in a sport like cricket, but it seems like waves are not meant to lash in the country when it comes to a sport that creates them, literally. It is a sign of great level-headedness to be winning an award as monumental as the Arjuna Award, and still be pragmatic about the tangible elements that go into play. Sajan, who hails from Idukki attests, beginning by calling it 'a huge win' and goes

on: "The government is taking steps, I would request them if they can see different sports differently because the capacity or the intensity of sports are different in this country, where well-established sports get more recognition, more money, more everything, as swimming has not got its due yet (sic)." Sajan's words, true as they are, are unfortunately not as unprecedented as his feats. For years, myriad personalities in the country, with the common mass, have echoed this sentiment of discontent, with cricket enjoying a monopoly at the cost of disenfranchising other sports from the podium they deserve. When asked about how the Arjuna Award measures up to the numerous records he has broken so far, Sajan, who is currently training at the JSW Centre in Ballari, is full of confident candour. "Records are meant to be broken," Sajan, 31, quips, following the oft-

repeated aphorism with an invocation to others: "I set a standard and I think the next generation will be more inspired to look at it, and break it." Calling the 'award a recognition for swimming itself', he also reiteratingly highlights the bigger issue here. It is noteworthy that Sajan, who first struck gold on a national level in 2015, has had a career long and illustrious enough to already be able to consider it as a stalwart in Indian swimming and indeed Indian sports in general. Such a glittering expanse allows him the balance to not just contextualise himself into the wider arena of Indian swimming and sports, but also simultaneously hold the door open for the next wave of aspiring swimmers. Sajan's success, unsurprisingly, is down to his hard work; in fact, this interview was conducted while he was in the gym, training.

## Bhubaneswar Pradhan to step down as King Kansa from next year

**BARGARH.** Bhubaneswar Pradhan, the iconic actor portraying the character of King Kansa, has announced his retirement from the Dhanuyatra festival. Interacting with mediapersons on Tuesday, Pradhan said he will be stepping down from the demanding role due to health concerns after the 77 edition of Dhanuyatra which is being held from January 3 to 13 here.

"It has been an honour to perform as King Kansa and bring joy to countless fans over the years. However, my health no longer permits me to continue as an actor in the festival. Dhanuyatra is a grand stage and it is a very tiring affair to perform continuously for 11 days while doing justice to the character I play. So I have decided not to act on this stage from next year," he said. Though he will step down from the role, Pradhan said he wished to remain connected with the festival by mentoring upcoming actors and collaborating with the team of directors for future editions.

I look forward to nurturing the next generation of performers and contributing to the festival's legacy in a different capacity," he said. Pradhan also said he would continue to act and play the role of King Kansa and other popular characters on smaller stages to keep the actor in him alive. Owner of opera party Samaleswari Gananatya, Pradhan had played Kansa's role for three years from 2017 to 2020. He also reprised the role from 1998 to 2000.

This year, Pradhan was selected again after the previous actor Hrusikesh Bhoi was dropped by the organising committee over bribery allegations. Pradhan's portrayal of Kansa has been a cornerstone of Dhanuyatra, drawing large crowds and rave reviews year after year. The announcement left his fans upset with many taking to social media to express their gratitude for his unforgettable performances and their dismay over his decision.

## Non-Resident Indian Day: Celebrating the global influence of the Indian diaspora

**CHENNAI.** Ask any middle-class Indian household if they have members of their clan in distant shores and the answer would certainly be in the affirmative. Until the 90s, the annual return of these kinsmen was a spectacle indeed. As the yellow and black Ambassador taxi arrived at the doorsteps, ferrying the travel-wear passengers with their baggage precariously tied onto the roof, there was palpable excitement in the air.

It reached a crescendo with the long-awaited opening of 'The Suitcase'. Yardleys and Camays soon briefly replaced the Lifebuoys and Lirlis in many bathrooms while children were presented with toys and chocolates they had never seen before. The imported alcohol further elevated the status of the foreign returnee to dizzying heights. Nothing much has changed except that the non-resident Indian now has a fleet of cabs to choose from and 'The Suitcase' has lost its sheen, thanks to our supermarkets stocking up on everything that once filled those bags. Today, the 9th of January, is the day we celebrate this goods-laden traveller. It is Non-Resident Indian Day, originally celebrated to



commemorate the return of Mahatma Gandhi to India from South Africa in 1915. The art world has had its share of artists who settled in faraway lands from the 1940s onwards. Their brief or extended stay went on to influence their art practice. SH Raza, one of India's iconic artists, lived in Paris for the most part of his life. His journey began from Madhya Pradesh to Mumbai and led him to Paris. After a visit to India in 1979, he started questioning the lack of Indianness in his paintings. Eventually, he adopted the bindu (point) as his muse, thus creating a new vocabulary. His contemporary, FN Souza, on the other hand, who was born in Goa, was disillusioned after the controversy that broke out during his 1949 exhibition in

Mumbai which featured nude paintings. He even had to cover up his nudes with a fig leaf! In 1950, he left for London, and later, shifted to New York in 1965 where he started chemically altering the glossy pages of magazines to paint over it, creating a new medium.

V Viswanathan, lived in the Chalamandal Artists Village for years until he decided to leave for Paris where he now lives and works, still returning to his roots in Chennai annually. There was also the sculptor Sadanand Bakre, who made his mark in Mumbai, and then shifted to London where life wasn't initially easy. Along with his wife, a German nurse, he sold his artworks from a wheelbarrow in Hyde Park.

Although his artworks were noticed, he had to do odd jobs to support his family. He had to return to India in his twilight years under unfortunate circumstances when his wife eloped with his brother. The humiliation forced him to settle in a nondescript town where he lived relatively unknown until his death in 2007. The Indian diaspora has contributed immensely to India's development.

## Tharoor now working on Sree Narayana Guru's biography

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM.** After authoring short biographies of the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the chief architect of the Constitution B R Ambedkar, author-parliamentarian Shashi Tharoor is now working on the biography of one of Kerala's greatest social reformer Sree Narayana Guru. Tharoor disclosed this while delivering talk on the topic 'A Myth and an Idea - Tracing the Roots of Modern India' at the Kerala Legislature International Book Festival on Wednesday. "It's a short biography similar to my volumes on our first prime minister and first law minister Nehru and Ambedkar respectively. However, while these two visionaries are known throughout India, the subject of my next biography is sadly not known much outside Kerala even though he should be (known) in today's

India," Tharoor said. In his talk, Tharoor referred to Narayana Guru as "the well-spring of the Kerala renaissance" and the inspiring figure of the Vaikom Satyagraha. "It was he who spearheaded one of the most sweeping social revolutions not only of the 19th century but of all times," Tharoor said, adding that the Guru had a vision of what an enlightened state should look like and how a modern society should conduct itself.

"His formidable crusade against caste system and untouchability played a role in eventually shaping the contours of modernity, liberalism and progressiveness reflected in our Constitution and in today's Kerala," he added. Tharoor said the very notion of Indianness, that was born in the crucible of reform -- forged in the flames of the freedom struggle and immortalised in the



Constitution -- is endowed with a resilience unlike any other. "It is a resilience that can tear through such veils of darkness as long as we remain committed to our foundational values," he said. In an oblique reference to the BJP-led government at the Centre, Tharoor noted that a disillusionment with the expansive liberal idea of India has crept into the hearts of many Indians

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NEWS BOX

Stop, stop: Chaos inside plane as man opens exit door just before takeoff in US

**Boston.** A person on board a plane at Boston Logan International Airport that was taxiing for takeoff suddenly opened an exit door and was quickly restrained by other passengers, authorities said. The JetBlue passenger, Angel Luis Torres Morales, of Puerto Rico, was arraigned Wednesday in the East Boston division of the Boston Municipal Court on charges of interfering with the operations of an aircraft, according to The Boston



Globe. He pleaded not guilty and his next court appearance will be March 4. The door was opened about 7.30 pm Tuesday "suddenly and without warning," Massachusetts State Police spokesperson Tim McGuirk said in a statement. The opening of the overwing exit door caused an emergency slide to deploy aboard JetBlue flight 161 from Boston to San Juan, Puerto Rico, the airline said in a statement.

Some passengers panicked. "They were like freaking out," passenger Fred Wynn told WCVB-TV. "They were like, 'Stop, stop!'" Wynn said the passenger was seated behind him and was arguing with his girlfriend over a cellphone, then "the the guy got up and ran down the aisle" toward the door. JetBlue said the flight was eventually swapped to another aircraft and landed in San Juan.

UK Universities Retreat From Elon Musk's X Citing Misinformation On Platform

Universities and other higher education establishments have joined a retreat among British institutions from Elon Musk's X social media platform, citing its role in spreading misinformation that fuelled race riots last year. Reuters survey on Tuesday showed several universities have scaled back usage of X to the bare minimum or quit completely, following scores of academics who have left the platform. The role of X, formerly Twitter, came under the spotlight in Britain last year during violent racial disturbances. Musk - a close aide to US President-elect Donald Trump - has since called for Prime Minister Keir Starmer to be jailed and for anti-Muslim activist Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, who co-founded the far-right English Defence League and is known as Tommy Robinson, to be released from prison. Reuters surveyed X accounts of over 150 universities, their colleges and art conservatoires and contacted those that had made little or no posts in recent months.

They cited concerns over misinformation, content that promotes violence and declining engagement. "London Business School continually reviews its communications channels and decides which to use based on levels of effective audience engagement," LBS told Reuters. It last posted to its 182,000 followers on X in September. It is one of the top-ranked business schools in the world. Reuters was first to report in October that several British police forces had quit X or cut their usage. The university survey points to a broader withdrawal among public institutions, even though many universities still post regularly to X. At least seven of the University of Cambridge's 31 colleges have stopped posting to X.

"We know this platform is becoming increasingly toxic, so we will continue to assess our presence on X and monitor emerging alternatives," said Homerton College, the university's largest in terms of student numbers. The University of Cambridge told Reuters it continued to use X alongside other channels. At Oxford, Merton College - the university's top-ranked college academically - has deleted its X account. It did not respond to a request for comment.

14-Year-Old Boy Stabbed To Death On London Bus

**London, United Kingdom.** A 14-year-old boy was stabbed to death in broad daylight on a London bus on Tuesday in the latest knife-crime incident in the British capital, police said. The victim was killed on one of the city's familiar double-decker red buses in Woolwich, southeast London, police said in a statement. Paramedics treated the boy for stab wound injuries at the scene, "but he very sadly died shortly after medics arrived," the statement added. No arrest was immediately reported. The incident comes after an 11-year-old girl was seriously injured in a stabbing in the busy Leicester Square area of London last August.

A 32-year-old man was later arrested. In September, a teenager was stabbed to death in the same area of Woolwich. Three young men have been charged and will face trial over the killing that the prosecutor described as "tit-for-tat violence with all the hallmarks of a turf war". Prime Minister Keir Starmer has called knife crime a "national crisis".

London Mayor Sadiq Khan wrote on X on Tuesday that his "thoughts are with the family, friends and wider community in Greenwich following the appalling fatal stabbing of a 14-year-old boy." Matthew Pennycook, the Labour MP for Greenwich and Woolwich, said he was "deeply saddened that yet another young life has been lost in our community". Office for National Statistics data released in October said that knife crime in England and Wales was up four percent in the 12 months to June compared to the previous year. It was still lower than pre-pandemic levels, however. The Labour government, in power since July, has pledged to halve knife crime in the next decade.

Pak politician's jihad call against India slammed for risking peace possibility

**World.** The Prime Minister of Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK), Anwar ul Haq, recently echoed the long-standing rhetoric of terrorists by calling for jihad against India. He declared that his government would mobilise all available resources to oust Indian forces from Jammu and Kashmir. His remarks have been widely criticised, with many condemning them as a threat to the possibility of maintaining peace between the two nations.



Haq's assertion at a 'Right to Self-Determination Day' rally in Muzaffarabad on January 5, punctuated by chants of "Al-Jihad, Al-Jihad," marked a significant escalation in Pakistan's political discourse. "If providing electricity for 3 rupees and 2,000 maunds (approximately 37 kilograms per maund) of flour does not sink the state, then jihad in the way of Allah is justified," Haq asserted, further

advocating for a revival of jihadist culture to "liberate Indian Kashmir" and expel what he described as "10 lakh Indian troops" stationed in the valley. Jihad refers to Muslims' efforts to follow the teachings of Islam, as well as to fight in defence of the religion or against perceived enemies of Islam.

**WIDESPREAD CONDEMNATION** Haq's inflammatory remarks have drawn

widespread condemnation from human rights activists and political leaders. Amjad Ayub Mirza, a prominent human rights activist, denounced the speech as a desperate attempt by Haq to regain lost political ground. Mirza warned that such rhetoric risks escalating violence in the already volatile region, potentially endangering secular voices and exacerbating tensions along the Line of Control (LoC). "This is a reckless move," said Mirza, urging the United Nations and the International Court of Justice to take immediate action. "The international community must not allow such dangerous adventurism to undermine regional stability". Mirza also called for Haq's removal, accusing him of exploiting religious sentiments for political gain. Sajid Hussain, leader of the United Kashmir People's National Party (UKPNP), joined the chorus of criticism. In a video statement, Hussain described Haq's call for

jihad as a serious threat to both regional and global peace. "This rhetoric is rooted in extremism and represents a dangerous departure from diplomatic norms," he said, adding that it could incite violence and derail efforts to resolve the Kashmir issue through peaceful means. Hussain urged the international community to take strong action against such terrorist provocations. "We call on the UN, FATF, and other global institutions to hold leaders like Haq accountable for their incitement to violence," he said.

**REGIONAL STABILITY AT RISK** The implications of Haq's statements are far-reaching. Analysts warn that such inflammatory rhetoric could embolden terrorist groups, destabilise the region, and derail peace initiatives. India has consistently maintained that Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of the country, and any attempts to disrupt peace in the region will be met with firm resolve.

Ex-FBI informant sentenced for lying about fake bribery story about Bidens

**WASHINGTON.** A former FBI informant who admitted to lying about US President Joe Biden and his son Hunter Biden's interactions with a Ukrainian energy company was sentenced to six years in prison on Wednesday, court records showed.

Otis Wright in Los Angeles to sentence Smirnov to six years in federal prison. "The defendant decided in 2020 to exploit the position of trust he enjoyed with the FBI in order to provide false information about one of the

sentence, arguing Smirnov had accepted responsibility and suffered a "personal downfall" resulting from the case. Smirnov falsely claimed in conversations with the FBI that executives at Burisma told him in 2015 or 2016, while Joe Biden was vice president, that they hired Hunter Biden to "protect us, through his dad, from all kinds of problems."

Smirnov also fabricated a claim that Joe and Hunter Biden were each paid \$5 million in bribes from Burisma executives, according to court documents.

Republican lawmakers learned of an FBI record documenting Smirnov's claims, which briefly became a focus of a since abandoned effort to impeach Joe Biden. Weiss, the special counsel, also brought two criminal cases against Hunter Biden on tax and gun charges. Joe Biden issued a sweeping pardon for his son last month, ending both prosecutions.

Alexander Smirnov pleaded guilty last month to causing the creation of a false record after falsely telling his FBI handler that he had knowledge of bribes paid by executives at Burisma Holdings to Joe and Hunter Biden, according to court documents. Hunter Biden served on the board of Burisma, a role that has attracted years of scrutiny from Republican lawmakers. Smirnov also admitted to tax evasion.

Prosecutors working with Special Counsel David Weiss, who investigated matters related to Hunter Biden, had asked US District Judge



candidates for President of the United States in an attempt to influence the outcome of the election," prosecutors wrote in a court filing, referring to Joe Biden's 2020 campaign. Lawyers for Smirnov sought a four-year prison

Safe From Looting, Damascus Museum Reopens A Month After Assad's Fall

**Damascus.** Syrians returned on Wednesday to the national museum in Damascus, reopened for the first time since Islamist-led forces seized the capital and ousted president Bashar al-Assad. The antiquities museum closed its doors on December 7, a day before Damascus was taken by rebel forces, over fears of looting.



"We firmly shut the museum's iron doors after we saw the situation was unstable," said Mohamed Nair Awad, head of the national antiquities authority. In the early hours of December 8, after Assad had fled and as rebels approached the capital, many soldiers and police officers from the forces of the deposed president's government quit their posts. With checkpoints unmanned and no security personnel outside public institutions, looters were able to enter the central bank, several government ministries and other buildings. Awad said his team immediately reached out to the new

authorities, led by Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. "They sent us a group of fighters to protect the museum," and it survived unscathed, he said. On Wednesday, members of the public walked around the building and admired its collection. Archeology student Shahanda al-Baroudi, 29, was giving a friend abroad a tour of the museum via video call. "When the regime fell, I remembered scenes from the Baghdad museum after the fall of Saddam

Hussein and feared I wouldn't see the artefacts again," she said. "I cried when I came back and discovered it had not been damaged."

The Baghdad museum's collection was decimated by looters in the chaos that followed the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. Outside the Damascus museum, Iyad Ghanem was among a group holding up signs demanding the new rulers help preserve the country's cultural heritage. Some artefacts at the museum date back more than 10,000 years, he said. The museum's vast collection includes tens of thousands of pieces, ranging from prehistoric blades and Greco-Roman sculptures to Islamic art. The museum was closed for six years during Syria's civil war, which broke out in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-Assad protests, to protect its precious artefacts from violence or looting. It reopened in 2018, after Assad clawed back control of large swathes of the country.

"Not Happening": Antony Blinken Dismisses Donald Trump's Greenland Takeover Plan

**Paris.** Outgoing US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has asked the world "not to waste a lot of time" President-elect Donald Trump's threat of seizing Greenland as it is "not going to happen." President Joe Biden's top diplomat also underscored the importance of maintaining strong alliances, saying the United States will remain "stronger" by working closely with its allies, not alienating them. Addressing a press conference in Paris, where he is as part of a farewell tour meant to highlight US alliances, Blinken said, "The idea expressed about Greenland is obviously not a good one, but maybe more important: it's obviously one that's not going to happen, so we probably shouldn't waste a lot of time talking about it." Soon after his election victory was confirmed, Donald Trump in a free-form news conference in Florida reiterated his interest in taking control of Greenland, an autonomous territory of Denmark. He even refused to rule out force to take control of the vast Arctic island, saying the US needed it "for economic security." In a less direct rebuff of the Republican leader's combative "America First" approach, Mr Blinken said the Biden administration has operated under the belief "that we're stronger, we're more effective, we get better results when we're working closely with our allies - not saying or doing things that may alienate them."

France's Foreign Minister, Jean-Noel Barrot, who was also present at the media briefing, also played down any possibility of US forces being deployed against Denmark, an American ally in the NATO military alliance. However, Mr Barrot warned nevertheless that Europe must brace for turbulence ahead - as other powers throw their weight around. "Do we think the United States will invade Greenland? The answer is, 'No'. But do we think that we're entering into a period that sees the return of the law of the strongest, the answer is, 'Yes,'" the French minister said.

Politics Over Greenland

Donald Trump, who takes office on January 20, has signalled he will pursue a foreign policy unbound by diplomatic niceties. He even did not rule out using military or economic action to acquire the Greenland. In his first term, Trump suggested that Denmark should sell Greenland. Greenland is the world's largest island and is part of the Kingdom of Denmark, a founding NATO member. It was a Danish colony until 1953 and is now a semi-sovereign territory under the Danish realm. Both Denmark and Greenland have consistently rejected Trump's notion of the island being for sale. Donald Trump's pick for national security adviser, Congressman Mike Waltz, on Wednesday, said Greenland is important for the national security of the United States as "Russia that is trying to become king of the Arctic"

"You have Russia that is trying to become king of the Arctic, with 60-plus ice breakers, some of them nuclear power. We have two, and one just caught on fire," he said. During an interview with Fox News, Waltz added, "This is about critical minerals. This is about natural resources. This is about, as the polar ice caps pull back, the Chinese are now cranking out ice breakers and pushing up there as well. So it's oil and gas. It's our national security."

Los Angeles Residents In "Panic Mode" As Fireballs Cause Devastation

**World.** Dozens of evacuated Los Angeles residents stared incredulously at the thick cloud of black smoke blotting out the sun, scarcely able to believe the scale of the wildfires, and fearing that their homes could be destroyed next. They have gathered above Santa Monica Canyon, near the upscale Pacific Palisades neighborhood where devastating flames first broke out among multi-million dollar mansions on Tuesday.



Residents continue to evacuate, or return briefly to collect their belongings. Gusts are still so strong that expensive Teslas and Alfa Romeos rock on their tires. A police car with a megaphone orders bystanders to "leave the area now." "You got the ashes to worry about in your lungs. You got your life to worry about with these 80- to 100-mile an hour gusts," Sarahlee Stevens-Shippen told AFP. The 69-year-old retiree has lived here since the 1970s. Clad in a mask, she returned to her home at dawn to retrieve a few cherished possessions that she had

been unable to gather in her hurry to flee the night before. "When I saw the glow of the fire coming over the mountain yesterday about eight o'clock, I took off," she said. The flames had "already jumped the coast highway nearby and some palm trees were catching on fire," she recalled. During the night that followed, at least two more substantial fires broke out to the north of the Los Angeles urban sprawl, in Altadena and the San Fernando Valley. Two

people are confirmed to have died so far. Tens of thousands have evacuated their homes. And authorities warn that the danger is far from over, with treacherous windy conditions set to remain until later in the week. "This has been a shock that is still sinking in. But we're in survival mode, so we're just grabbing certain necessities and getting out," said Stevens-Shippen.

'Never imagined'

Carrying a large blue plastic bag stuffed full of clothes, Martin Sansing also emerges from the canyon. A television producer, he and his wife have just fled their four-bedroom villa. When Sansing bought the home for \$1.6 million 15 years ago, he thought this neighborhood below the mountains that surround Los Angeles would be safe.

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NEWS BOX

Two die as car rams truck in Dharapuram

**TIRUPPUR.** Two people were killed in a head-on collision between a lorry and a car near Dharapuram in the district on Tuesday night. Another person was injured in the accident and is receiving treatment at a private hospital in Coimbatore. The deceased were identified as Rajendran (40), from Alangiyam in Tiruppur and Shanmuga Pradeep (36), of Pazhani in Dindigul. Selvaraj, (40) from Alangiyam was injured. Police said, "Rajendran ran a jewellery store at Alangiyam and Shanmuga Pradeep was a real estate tycoon. Selvaraj runs a bar on Dharapuram-Alangiyam road. The trio were friends and travelled to Pollachi in Coimbatore by car on Tuesday for business.



The three were returning that night to Alangiyam, when the incident occurred. "While nearing Dhasarpatti village in Dharapuram, the car suddenly lost control and rammed into an oncoming lorry. The trio in the car were seriously injured. Dharapuram police rescued the trio and sent them to Udumalaipet GH for treatment. However, both Rajendran and Shanmuga Pradeep died on the way. Selvaraj was taken to Udumalaipet GH and later referred to a private hospital in Coimbatore where he continues.

VMC sets Rs 36 crore tax target, focus on growth

**VIJAYAWADA:** The Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) aims to collect Rs 18.46 crore in water tax, Rs 11 crore in sewerage tax, and Rs 6.59 crore in water meter charges by the end of the 2024-25 financial year, Mayor Rayana Bhagya Lakshmi announced. The Mayor emphasised the importance of maintaining city hygiene, commending VMC staff for ensuring timely garbage disposal at



Naidupeta dumping yards, park upkeep, and meeting project deadlines in the three municipal circles. The VMC manages 2,18,531 property tax assessments, 15,097 VLT assessments, 1,18,663 water tax assessments, and 1,05,993 sewerage assessments. The town planning department is also actively processing housing construction applications.

Key development initiatives, including Anna canteens, underground drainage systems, road under bridges, and park upgrades, are funded through tax revenue, 15th Finance

Nine Tamil Nadu fishers rescued after five days stranded in Sri Lankan waters

**PHULBANI/BERHAMPUR.** The special POCOS court in Kandhamal's Phulbani on Wednesday sentenced a youth to undergo 20 years of rigorous imprisonment for raping a minor girl in 2020. The convict is 28-year-old Suratha Behera of Kalabag Jamihari village within Sadar police limits.

Sources said in November 2020, the 13-year-old victim was on way to meet a friend near Phulbani ITI when Suratha and another accused Agasti Behera offered her a ride on their scooter. They took the girl to a forest near Bhetakhal ghat and raped her. When the minor protested, the duo threatened to kill



her if she disclosed the matter to anyone. After nearly one month, the girl narrated her harrowing experience to her family members following which a complaint was filed in Town police station. Police later arrested Suratha but Agasti absconded. The court also imposed a fine of Rs 20,000 on Suratha. Failure to pay the fine will result in additional six months of RI. The district legal services authority has been directed to pay a compensation of Rs 10 lakh to the victim.

Centralised kitchens to supply nutritious meals to over 7,000 students in hostels across Tamil Nadu

**CHENNAI.** Hostels under the Adi Dravid Welfare and Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes and Minorities Welfare departments in Chennai, Madurai, and Tiruchy will soon receive food from centralised kitchens. The ADW department has also called for expressions of interest to implement centralised kitchens in Coimbatore. This will be carried out through firms that have established kitchen facilities, and food will be supplied to 689 students in nine hostels. In Tiruchy and Madurai, the ADW and BC, MBC, and Minorities Welfare departments will collaborate to deliver food from centralised kitchens.

This initiative will benefit 686 students in 10 ADW hostels and 1,417 students in 17 BC, MBC, and Minorities Welfare hostels in Tiruchy. In Madurai, it will serve 893 students in 17 hostels and 741 students in 12 hostels. The department will also revise the menu to include more protein and vegetables, ensuring balanced nutrition for students.

The Adi Dravid Welfare department had already piloted the initiative in 21 hostels accommodating about 2,200 students in Chennai through two centralised kitchens located at Saidapet and Vepery. The department has now mapped 12 of the 18 hostels run by the BC, MBC, and Minorities Welfare department in Chennai along the same distribution route and will start delivering food to these hostels as well. For the remaining six hostels, the BC, MBC, and Minorities Welfare department will set up a new centralised kitchen. Officials from



the Adi Dravid Welfare department stated that the initiative aims to standardise food quality and address any complaints of poor food quality in specific hostels. Previously, the department allocated Rs 1,500 per college student and Rs 1,400 per school student for food, excluding salaries for cooks and other operational costs.

Now, the department is spending approximately Rs 1,900 per student, inclusive of all charges. The ADW department has also called for expressions of interest to implement centralised kitchens in Coimbatore. This will be carried out through firms that have established kitchen facilities, and food will be

supplied to 689 students in nine hostels. In Tiruchy and Madurai, the ADW and BC, MBC, and Minorities Welfare departments will collaborate to deliver food from centralised kitchens. This initiative will benefit 686 students in 10 ADW hostels and 1,417 students in 17 BC, MBC, and Minorities Welfare hostels in Tiruchy. In Madurai, it will serve 893 students in 17 hostels and 741 students in 12 hostels.

All the hostels will continue to maintain their existing kitchen infrastructure to ensure a stop-gap arrangement in case of supply disruptions from the centralised kitchens due to natural calamities.

Lack of speed breakers, haphazard parking turn Tiruchy road a 'death trap' for commuters

**TIRUCHY.** The absence of speed breakers in the 700-metre-long stretch and the haphazard parking at the curves have reduced Anna Nagar Link Road along the Uyyakondan canal in the city into a death trap for many a road user, complain commuters. They demand urgent measures to uphold public safety. A total of three accidents, including one in which a woman fatally fell down from a bus, alone have been reported in the road over the past four days. Recalling an accident he witnessed in the stretch on Monday, A Rajkumar, a regular user of the walking track on the road, said, "Minor accidents like this are all too common in the evenings, especially when speeding vehicles try to overtake each other at the turn." "I've seen drivers get into arguments, accusing the other of causing chaos at the bend. It's a serious safety concern that needs to be addressed." S Anand Kumar, a



resident of the locality, said, "It's terrifying to even use the road. Youngsters treat it like a racing track. Speed breakers should have been installed long ago. How many more lives must be lost before action is taken?" Fingers are also pointed at the "haphazard" parking, particularly at the road curves, by walking track users. "Bikes are often parked mindlessly

at the curves. This reduces visibility and creates a bottleneck for vehicles, thereby increasing the risk of an accident," said H Rajadurai, a daily commuter.

P Ayyarapan, a member of the district road safety council, stressed for stringent measures to curb reckless driving on the road. "Regular monitoring of the CCTV cameras can help identify the offenders and in penalising them, serving as a deterrent," he said. "Additionally, the traffic police should collaborate with the city corporation to install speed breakers and to put other safety measures in place.

Functional CCTV cameras are a must to ensure road safety." When contacted, a senior police official said, "We are aware of the issues and are considering heightening patrolling. Discussions on installing speed breakers are also on."

Last among known Maoist cadre in Kerala surrender in Karnataka

**KOZHIKODE.** Six hardcore CPI-Maoist activists, including Jisha from Wayanad, surrendered before Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in Bengaluru on Wednesday. The surrender of the last known ultra-left cadre operating in Kerala marks a decisive turn in the third phase of the Naxalite movement in the state that began with the formation of the Western Ghats Special Zonal Committee in 2011-12. Kunikkal Narayanan, Ajitha, Philip M Prasad and A Varghese led the first phase of the movement in the late 60s. K Venu, K N Ramachandran and others were in the forefront after the formation of the CRC-CPI (ML) that was disbanded in 1991. CPI-ML (Naxalbari) led by M N Ravunni and Kannamballi Murali was the only remnant of the militant Naxalite movement in Kerala though there were a few other peripheral groups.

The third phase in Kerala began with the formation of the state unit of the CPI-Maoist in 2004. The party came into being in India after the merger of the CPI-ML (Peoples War) and the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI). Their activities gained momentum in Kerala after carving out a guerrilla zone that included areas in the Western Ghats coming under Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu states. Kuppup Devaraj, a central committee member of the party, was in charge of the guerrilla zone and at one point of time there were four armed squads or dalams of Peoples Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) in Kerala.

More than 50 persons attended the party camp organised inside the forests in 2015. The party mounted 10 symbolic attacks in Kerala as part of the politico-military campaign (PMC) in 2014 to mark the tenth anniversary of the formation of the party. CPI-Maoist in Kerala was further strengthened when the CPI-ML (Naxalbari) merged with the party on May 1, 2014.

Huge relief for passengers, Yesvantpur station opens market side entry after 1.5 years

**BENGALURU.** In a major relief to passengers arriving or departing from Yesvantpur railway station, the Bengaluru Railway Division has after one-and-a-half years fully opened the entry towards Platform One, popularly known as the market side entry. A revamped parking facility has been readied here, said railway officials.

The entry was closed on July 18, 2023 for the massive redevelopment work of the station on the market side. It was opened for pedestrians alone a year later (June 2024), but it was opened fully for all vehicles with amenities on December 24 last year, said a railway official. Residents of many areas, including Mathikere, RT Nagar, Dollars Colony, Sanjay Nagar, Vidyanarayana, Malleswaram and Hebbal, stand to benefit. "When approaching the station from their residence, they had to take a detour from the Yesvantpur Circle to Mysore Sandal Soap factory, take a U-turn and then enter the station after travelling an additional 2.5 km. They can reach the station faster now. It is benefiting all passengers too as the Metro side entry is getting decongested," another official said. The entry was shut to complete the



construction of numerous amenities along this side which are ready now, except the arch. "A ramp running for 400 metres from the Yesvantpur Circle directly to the station, a five-floored multi-level car parking unit, offices of the Government Railway Police and the Railway Protection Force and a linen office are among the new buildings completed," he added. A massive arch is being built at present which will have the entry/exit boards and other indicators on it.

For this, we have temporarily shut the entry for three days from Wednesday (January 8) till Friday (January 10). It will be reopened after the arch work is over," he explained. A senior official of the commercial department said, "We used to have 1,000 visitors per day earlier and it has shot up to an average of 13,000 daily now and is set to go up

HYDRAA commissioner looks into Turkayamjal lake overflow complaints

**HYDERABAD.** Following complaints from locals, Hyderabad Disaster Response and Assets Protection Agency (HYDRAA) Commissioner AV Ranganath visited the Turkayamjal lake on Wednesday. During a recent Prajavani programme, residents expressed concerns that the lake was overflowing due to the closure of sluice gates, leading to damage to crops and even submerging houses. They also highlighted the issue of sewage entering the lake and the lack of proper drainage for sewage water. Ranganath said HYDRAA would impartially investigate the complaints regarding the shrinking or disappearance of some water bodies within the city.



He said a comprehensive study would be conducted in collaboration with engineering experts from IIT, BITS Pilani and JNTU. He also emphasised the importance of discussions with irrigation engineers and revenue officials to address the concerns effectively.

Furthermore, Ranganath promised that the full tank level (FTL) of the lake would be determined through scientific analysis after a thorough examination of all relevant data. This would involve studying National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) images and revenue maps of the surrounding villages. Earlier in the day, the HYDRAA commissioner also visited Rayan and Jilavarkhan lakes based on complaints received from the citizens. He assured the locals that he would look into the issues raised and enquired about not being allowed to pass through the Divyanagar layout in Pocharam municipality laid by one Nalla Mallareddy. Locals complained about Mallareddy blocking their access, the commissioner asked both parties to come to the HYDRAA office and show evidence. Ranganath also enquired about the encroachment of a park in West Kamalanagar Colony.

For five minutes we thought all of us were dead, says Tirupati stampede survivor

**TIRUPATI.** Survivors of the deadly stampede at Tirupati on Wednesday that left six dead, have recounted the horror, even as the Congress' state unit held the TTD that governs the Lord Venkateswara temple, responsible for the tragedy. Complaints by the devotees ranged from long waiting hours to get tickets for Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam to sudden opening of the gates that prompted the crowd to surge ahead. "For five minutes we thought all of us were dead. I have been coming to the temple for the past 25 years and it has never happened like this," D Venkata Lakshmi told a vernacular news channel on Wednesday night. She said six boys pulled her aside and gave some water to

drink. According to Lakshmi, people rushed forward and up to 10 people fell down where she was standing. "Though I was raising a hue and cry that I was falling on the side, people were still rushing from behind and could not be controlled. I don't know if they were pushing ahead, but the men were uncontrollable. People were walking over devotees. I could not even breathe for a long time," she said. Further, had the police allowed devotees to proceed in an orderly way, this disaster could have been averted, she said and highlighted that people could not make sense of what was happening. Another devotee said she came around 11 am on Wednesday and the gate was opened at 7



pm. "One person told devotees not to rush and go in a line, but who will listen? Police were outside, not inside," she said. A male devotee insisted the police were told about

the presence of 5,000 devotees. He claimed that police opened the gates suddenly, leading to the stampede. Expressing shock and grief over the stampede, YSRCP chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the families of the deceased and urged the government to ensure the best medical care for those injured. He described the loss of lives as deeply saddening and called for immediate and urgent measures to restore order at the location. In a party release, Reddy wished for the speedy recovery of the injured devotees undergoing treatment in hospitals.

## Perils of a Chinese mega dam

XINHUA reported on December 25 that the Chinese Government had approved the largest-ever hydropower project in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo river in Tibet. This announcement, reportedly made without informing India, a lower riparian state, is a reminder of the complexity of rebuilding relations with the northern neighbour. The proposed project, under preparation for several years and closely tracked by India, has major negative implications for India. As an upper riparian state, China has an unfortunate record of reluctance to cooperate, show transparency and safeguard interests of downstream states, as it is obliged to do. We have, therefore, another major irritant emerging in an already difficult relationship.

Xinhua lauded the venture as a "green project" without offering details. However, a report in Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post (SCMP) said the total investment in the dam could exceed 1 trillion yuan (\$137 billion). It is expected to generate nearly 300 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity annually, more than thrice the designed capacity (88.2 billion kWh) of the Three Gorges Dam in China, presently the largest in the world. According to the SCMP report, this would be the world's largest infrastructure project and involve drilling four to six 20-km tunnels and diversion of half the river's flow. Yet, the Chinese Foreign Office spokesperson claimed that it would have no negative impact on downstream countries (India and Bangladesh). The proposed project is likely to be at a site in the Big Bend area of the Yarlung Tsangpo, where the river takes a U-turn and enters India just over 20 km downstream. The adverse consequences of the project for us will manifest in many ways. It will disrupt water flows in the Siang, as the river is called after entering India and is the main channel of the Brahmaputra river system. According to an Assam Government website, the catchment area of the Brahmaputra is 2,93,000 sq km in Tibet; 2,40,000 sq km in India and Bhutan; and 47,000 sq km in Bangladesh. The bulk of the waters of the river flowing in India are generated within our territory, but this mega project will significantly impact the river flows and consequently, livelihoods of residents downstream. China's development of smaller hydropower projects in the upper reaches of the Mekong (called Lancang in that country) and its cascade operations are leading to irregular fluctuations, drying out of certain areas, declining fish catches and the loss of access to fertile sediment deposits in the Lower Mekong Basin, affecting riparian residents in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. This presages foreseen and unforeseen consequences of the proposed dam for India and Bangladesh.

Equally, there will be an ever-present danger of disasters linked to this humongous project undertaken in an ecologically fragile and earthquake-prone geography. Even if there is no damage to the dam by an earthquake, large-scale diversion and impounding of waters will affect ecosystems and biodiversity downstream. This writer recalls emergency management by a group headed by the Cabinet Secretary when an artificial lake had formed in 2004 on the Parechu river, a tributary of the Sutlej, in Tibet. Given the relatively good relations with China at that time, we could get advance notice and data, augmented by information generated by our geospatial resources and other means. The lake did not burst before freezing over, and drained partly the next year with only limited damage downstream in India due to preventive measures. Risks stemming from the planned project will be exponentially larger, even if we do not talk of weaponisation of stored waters, as some experts are doing. It is with patient diplomacy that we have been able to put in place limited collaborative arrangements with Beijing, including three memoranda of understanding (MoUs) on the provision of monsoon season data by China for the Brahmaputra, on monsoon season data for the Sutlej (signed after the Parechu scare) and on "strengthening cooperation on trans-border rivers". The first two MoUs are renewed every five years and have now lapsed. No project has been possible under the umbrella MoU.

## The hidden health fallouts of a warming world

How can individuals help? Eat less meat, avoid air travel, recycle clothes, reduce plastics, use sustainable heating and adopt eco-friendly lifestyle practices

Climate change has is the single largest global health challenge in the 21st century. The Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines climate change as "a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere beyond the natural variations." A multi-country study has suggested that climate change is responsible for four lakh additional deaths each year and will contribute to seven lakh annual deaths by 2030. As per the UN, the world has endured a "decade of deadly heat", with 2024 capping 10 years of unprecedented temperatures. It is almost certain that it will exceed the Paris Agreement threshold of 1.5 degrees above the preindustrial levels of temperature for the first time. The World Meteorological Organisation has warned that the new year is likely to be worse, with the greenhouse gas levels growing to record highs. India also recorded its warmest year in 2024. It witnessed extreme weather on 255 of the 274 days of the year's first nine months, according to the Centre for Science and Environment. The detrimental climatic factors for human health include an increase in the frequency and intensity of heatwaves, precipitation, floods and droughts. The floods in Spain, hurricanes in the US, drought in the Amazon and floods across Africa are just a few examples. In West Asia, 1,300 Haj pilgrims died due to extreme heat in 2024.

High temperature is known to increase the 'ground level ozone' and 'climate altering pollutants' other than carbon dioxide. They exacerbate cardio-respiratory and allergic diseases and certain cancers. Between 2000-2004 and 2017-2021, heat-related deaths increased by 55 per cent in India. Due to heat exposure, it lost 167.2 billion potential labour hours in 2021, with income losses equivalent to 5.4 per cent of the GDP. An increase in the transmission and spread of infectious diseases and changes in the distribution of water-, food- and vector-borne diseases have also been seen. A 2022 study published in the 'Nature Climate Change' found that nearly 60 per cent of the infectious diseases are aggravated by climate hazards.

warmer climate causes water-borne diseases, including cholera, and diarrhoeal diseases like giardiasis, salmonellosis (including typhoid) and cryptosporidiosis. It is estimated that one-quarter of children's deaths in South Asia are due to diarrhoeal diseases. As temperatures increase, bacterial survival time and proliferation increase. Further, contamination of water during floods makes things worse. A relationship has been observed between an increase in the sea-surface temperature and cholera epidemics. Malaria, dengue, chikungunya and leptospirosis have become more common in India with a longer duration of infectivity in the last two

and changes in temperature and rainfall. It has populations with low immunity to malaria. The warming atmosphere has been melting glaciers and ice sheets. Experts fear that micro-organisms of yet unknown significance may get activated after staying dormant for thousands of years.

The increase in zoonotic diseases (diseases spread from animals to humans) is also threatening mankind. With changes in the forest cover due to human activity, there has been a migration of certain bird and mammal species which are hosts to an array of pathogenic organisms that can cause diseases in humans. They include tick-borne encephalitis, haemorrhagic fever brucellosis and leptospirosis.

Although low- and middle-income countries are responsible for only a small percentage of global greenhouse gas emissions, the adverse health effects fall disproportionately on them because of poor health infrastructure, lack of funds and overpopulation. This is the reason that at the COP-29 (29th Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC), held in November 2024, India and other developing countries objected to the \$300-billion per year funding agreed upon to prevent climate change. It fell way short of the demand of \$1.3 trillion to meet the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting the global temperature rise. While the India has formulated the National Programme on Climate Change



and Human Health and the National Action Plan on Climate Change, how can individuals help? One of the most impactful ways to do so is to eat less meat. Meat animals release methane and nitrous oxide, which have a much stronger effect on global warming than carbon dioxide. Air travel is responsible for one-sixth of all emissions globally. Using other modes of transport can, thus, be helpful. Clothes also account for sizeable emissions. Recycling clothes and having a smaller wardrobe is a good idea. Using heating devices not based on fossil fuels is easy. Reducing the use of plastics is another way to contribute to sustainable living. It is important to increase awareness about climate change since everyone is affected by it and every small measure counts. We owe it to the coming generations to save the planet.

decades. Chikungunya and dengue are influenced by climate change as both are transmitted by the same vector: *Aedes aegypti*. In 2023, some six million cases of dengue were reported worldwide — more than ever before. Alarming, in 2024, this number exceeded 12 million. Mosquitoes are exothermic or cold-blooded. So, when the temperature rises, everything that their body does speeds up. They grow faster and replicate the dengue virus in their guts more effectively. Between 1951-1960 and 2012-2021, the number of months suitable for dengue transmission has risen by 1.7 per cent. Changes in temperature, humidity and rainfall are altering the global malaria map. In Africa, on either side of the Equator, there has been an increase by several miles of areas that are suitable for breeding mosquitoes each year due to deforestation

## HMPV in India

A call for vigilance, not panic

The detection of three Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) cases — two in Bengaluru and one in Gujarat — has raised awareness about this respiratory virus, which was first identified in 2001. Though not new, HMPV poses significant health challenges, particularly for infants, the elderly and those with compromised immunity. All three Indian cases involve infants and no travel history. This underscores the fact that the virus is already in local circulation. Globally, HMPV is recognised as a key cause of acute respiratory illnesses, especially during winter and early spring. Symptoms often mimic the common cold but can escalate to severe conditions like pneumonia. Despite its prevalence, HMPV lacks vaccines or antiviral treatments, making supportive care and preventive measures essential. India has ramped up surveillance through the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP). Laboratories are now better equipped to test for HMPV. As seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, these measures are crucial for



monitoring trends and ensuring timely responses. However, challenges remain. Inexpensive, accessible diagnostic tests are still unavailable, limiting early detection in vulnerable populations. Lessons from the pandemic highlight the importance of proactive

healthcare strategies. Strengthening isolation protocols, ensuring the availability of medicines and enhancing public awareness about hygiene can mitigate the spread. Addressing sanitation and clean air are equally vital in reducing respiratory infections.

India's cautious response to HMPV reflects a commitment to preventing escalation, without spreading panic. Still, broader measures are required. They include investment in healthcare infrastructure and the establishment of a regulatory framework for rapid diagnostic approvals. Citizens can also play a role: by adhering to hygiene practices, seeking timely medical attention and staying informed. HMPV serves as a reminder of the ongoing battle against respiratory illnesses. It's not a pandemic, but vigilance, preparedness and public cooperation are imperative to curb its impact.

## India must rethink export-led manufacturing

Trade war may even have a silver lining if it compels developing countries to search harder for alternative paths, paved with high-skilled services exports

As apprehension grows in China, Europe and Japan about a possible trade war triggered by the incoming Trump administration, one should also spare a thought for developing countries. Their tried-and-tested method of expanding beyond agriculture to achieve middle-income status has been to embrace low-skilled, export-oriented manufacturing. How will these countries fare now?

Their prospects may be better than expected, especially if they choose alternative development paths. In the past, poor countries developed through manufacturing exports because foreign demand allowed their producers to achieve scale and because abysmal agricultural productivity meant that low-skilled workers could be attracted to factory jobs even with low wages. This combination of scale and low labour costs made these countries' output globally competitive, despite their workers' lower relative productivity. As firms profited from exports, they invested in better equipment to make workers more productive. As wages rose, workers could afford better schooling and healthcare for themselves and their children. Firms also paid more taxes, allowing the government to invest in improved infrastructure and services. Firms could now make more sophisticated, higher-value-added products and a virtuous cycle ensued. This explains how China moved from assembling components to producing world-leading electric vehicles (EVs) in just four decades. Visit a cell-phone assembly plant in a developing country today, however, and it is easy to see why this path has become more difficult. Rows of workers no longer solder parts onto motherboards because the micro-circuitry has become too fine for human hands. Instead, there are rows of machines

with skilled workers tending to them, while unskilled workers primarily move parts between machines or keep the factory clean. These tasks, too, will soon be automated. Factories with rows of workers stitching dresses or shoes also are becoming rarer.

Automation in developing countries has a variety of implications. For starters, manufacturing now employs fewer people, especially unskilled workers, per unit of output. In the past, developing countries moved steadily to more sophisticated manufacturing, leaving less-skilled manufacturing to poorer countries that were just embarking on the export-led-manufacturing path. But now, a country like China has enough surplus workers to undertake all manner of manufacturing. Low-skilled Chinese workers are competing with Bangladeshi counterparts in textiles, while Chinese PhDs compete with German counterparts in EVs. Moreover, given the declining importance of labour in manufacturing, industrialised countries have come to believe they can restore their own competitiveness in the sector. They already have the skilled workers who can tend the machines, so they are raising protectionist barriers to re-shore production. (Of course, the primary political motive is to create more well-paying jobs for left-behind high school-educated workers, but automation makes this unlikely).

Taken together, these trends — automation, continued competition from established players like China and renewed protectionism — have already made it harder for poor countries in South Asia, Africa and Latin America to pursue export-led manufacturing

growth. Thus, while a trade war would be damaging to their commodity exports, it would not be as concerning as in the past. It may even have a silver lining if it compels developing countries to search harder for alternative paths. That path could be paved with high-skilled services exports. In 2023, global trade in services expanded by 5 per cent in real (inflation-adjusted) terms, while merchandise trade shrank by 1.2 per cent. Improvements in technology



during the Covid-19 pandemic enabled more remote work. Also, changes in business practices and etiquette have minimised the need for physical presence. As a result, multinationals can and do serve clients from anywhere. In India, multinational firms are hiring talented graduates to staff global capability centres, where engineers, architects, consultants and lawyers create designs, contracts,

content and software that are embedded in manufactured goods and services sold globally.

Every developing country has a small but highly skilled elite who can profitably export skilled services, given the high wage differentials vis-à-vis developed countries. Workers who know English (or French or Spanish) may be particularly advantaged. Even if only a few have these capabilities, such jobs add much more domestic value than low-skilled manufacturing assembly, thus contributing enormously to a country's foreign-exchange earnings. Moreover, each well-paid service worker can create local employment through his or her own consumption. As more moderately skilled service workers — taxi drivers, plumbers, waiters, etc — find steady employment, they will cater not just to elite demand but also to each other. High-skilled services exports only need to be the leading edge of broader job growth and urbanisation.

ll job growth, however, requires improvements in the quality of a country's labour pool. Some 'last-mile' training and upgrading can be done quickly; as long as engineering graduates have basic knowledge of their field, they can be trained in state-of-the-art design software that a potential multinational employer needs. But over the medium term, most countries will need to invest substantial amounts in nutrition, health and education to augment their peoples' human capital.

# What's your Snooze style for 2025?



sleep binge."

### The snooze trackers

Fast-paced modern lives have made people not only count the number of hours that they stay awake and work, but also the number of hours they spend sleeping. Pragya Suhas Kaul, a 32-year-old advertising professional, who is undergoing therapy for sleep correction says, "Working in a highly stressful job made it difficult for me to fall asleep at night. Even if I did, my body would get these 'shock waves' during the night that would wake me up and keep me awake for two to three hours. When I started undergoing treatment, my doctor explained that my body was naturally on trackers."

### Made-to-measure sleep

While you may think it is similar to snooze tracking, it is quite different from the previous one. Dr Narayanan explains, "Whenever you hear someone talk about getting adequate rest and sleep, they will usually be referring to getting about seven to eight hours of sleep. However, one must know that each body type is different and thus, in turn, the sleeping patterns."

### Energy boosting naps

The concept of power naps has taken the world by storm and how. Not only are sleep experts advising people on taking them, it is being considered as one of the biggest sleep trends for this year. Shehnaz Gandhi, a medical student specialising in sleep apnea, says, "My students have been visiting several corporate firms in the city and spreading the importance of power naps. Research has shown that energy boosting naps double an individual's performance at work, and he/she is also able to strike the right chord between his/her professional and personal life."

### Losing the race to bed

Similar to sleep bingeing, sleep professionals are emphasising on the need to losing the race to bed. Dr Gokhale explains, "A lot of times when people come back from work, they either sit in front of the television, read a book or try and watch videos online, waiting for dinner time. This is also the moment when someone feels sleepy, but tries to stay awake, so they don't disrupt their sleeping pattern. However, this year, we suggest that in case one feels this way, they should not bother about staying awake and just lose their race to bed."



Last year marked the start of 'clean sleeping' and 'smart sleeping' as popular trends. This had many people recording their snooze meticulously and also logging the number of hours they spent between the sheets daily. However, sleep professionals suggest that sleep not only keeps you healthy mentally, but also physically and that's why it's imperative to incorporate trends, which your body can follow, to keep you going. Telling us how sleep trends are identified each year, sleep professional Dr D

Narayanan says, "At the beginning of every year, sleep experts across the country analyse the sleeping patterns people should follow that particular year. This study is done based on the report that professionals collect over the previous year. Through the next course of the year, these trends are then further broken down to understand the patterns of snooze." If you are wondering what your sleeping style should be for this year, take a cue from these...

### Sleep bingeing

While we know that a night's sleep is the ultimate form of rest, for most people, it's a far-fetched dream. Sleep professional Dr Anand Gokhale, opines, "There are many people who grab on some sleep in-between the day, and that's perfectly fine. For example, if you have woken up at 7 am and have an hour to spend travelling to work, utilise that one hour of travelling for sleep. However, make sure that you remind your body that it's only an hour of rest that it will be getting. This way your body will know how to

## Exercises to reduce PMS pain

Women hate forward to that time of the month. Though referred to as chums, they hardly 'friendly', thanks to the stomachache, cramps, and a bloated body that it brings along. However, senior fitness consultant Swapneel Hazare says that there are some exercises that can help to deal with this. There are women who feel appalled at the idea of exercising during those days. Swapneel explains, "Just like studying regularly prepares you for an exam, similarly exercising regularly before your periods helps relieve menstrual cramping and aches by increasing your blood circulation and getting your body ready for the aches and pain." Doctors say that exercising releases endorphins in your body which not only help to elevate your mood but also help to overcome stress. Clinical dietician Nupur Krishnan says that food cravings are often present during periods. She says, "Foods that are sugary and salty food cravings are unwelcome accompaniment of your chums. To tackle that try eating bananas as they are naturally sweet and high in potassium which will help curb your salt and sugar cravings. Swapneel suggests some exercises that you can do during your periods..."

### Pelvic tilts

Performing pelvic tilt exercise is important to maintain the mobility in the low back, hips and pelvis. It also helps to maintain and develop abdominal muscle strength and tone. It also

provides a mild low back stretch, which can help alleviate the low back pain and discomfort that often accompanies periods. Lie on the floor in a supine position (on your back) with your knees bent. Activate your Abdominal muscles by drawing your belly button towards your spine. You should feel like the hollow of your back (lumbar) is pressing to the floor and your hips and pelvis are rolled upwards towards the ceiling. Hold the position for couple of seconds before returning to the original position. Repeat it about 10 times.

### Seated Torso Stretch

Sit on the floor with both feet straight in front. Bend your right knee and place the right foot next to your left inner thigh. Now rotate from your lumbar area (lower back) and place your left elbow on the outside of your right knee and place your right hand on the floor behind your body. Hold the stretch for a good 15 seconds or more. Repeat the same on the other side.

### Lying Butterfly Stretch

Lie supine (on your back) on the floor with your legs straight in front. Slowly bring both your feet by joining the soles of your feet together towards your pelvis region or closer to your body. Now slowly let gravity take over and let the thighs drop to the floor. Stay in the position for a good 20 to 30 seconds.

### Supine High Plank

Sit on the floor with your feet extended in front

and hands placed by your side. Make sure your fingers are pointing in front-towards your feet. Now slowly lift your hips off the floor and hold the position making sure that the feet, knee, hips, shoulder form a straight line. Make sure you keep your chin tucked in towards your chest. The mobility and fitness level will determine how correctly you can hold the high plank position and for how long.

### Bridging

Lie Supine on a mat and bring your feet close to your butts. Slowly raise your hips up such that the shoulders hip and the knees form a straight line. Slowly come back to the starting position and raise yourself again without touching your hips down. Bridging helps to strengthen your lower back, hips, and your hamstrings. It is an excellent exercise to activate and tone the posterior chain of muscles.

### Tips to keep in mind

- One needs to carefully choose the exercises she does during her periods. It is advisable to take a break on the day you have a heavy flow.
- On the rest of the days of one's period, stick to light low impact aerobics
- exercises that help increase your blood circulation.
- Exercises that mobilise the pelvis such as pelvic tilts are beneficial to ease your back pain.
- Light yoga stretches are also a good way to relax and release stress during periods. However, intense yoga inversions should be avoided.



# 200km road built for 100km rly line

**Alternative water sources made available to people of over 20 villages dependent on Himalayan fountains.**

**NEW DELHI.** For the first time, the Indian Railways had to construct over 200 kilometres of roads to lay a 100 odd kilometres of new rail lines under the Udhampur - Srinagar - Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) project, connecting Katra to Srinagar through some of the most challenging Himalayan terrain, Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said on Wednesday. Initially built to transport materials, manpower, and machinery to the rail construction sites, the road has now become a valuable infrastructure, providing improved connectivity for residents in the terrain along the route between Jammu and Srinagar, he added. In the process, the railways also made viable alternate sources of water available to more than 20 villages who had been dependent on the water from Himalayan mountain fountains. The water sources originating from the hilltops and flowing down to residential areas had been disrupted due to tunnel construction. "But the railway made viable alternate ways over the top of the tunnels to ensure water supply to 20 villages, whose water sources from hilltops were disturbed due to the tunnel works," he said. The minister said the 111-km Katra-Banihal section was the most challenging part of the 271 km project, being regarded as the most difficult new rail line ever taken up in the country post-independence. This



section is also one of the world's unique railway routes, having 25 tunnels covering over 97 km out of the total 111 km, including the longest tunnel, named T-50, Vaishnav added. Underscoring the challenges the railways had to face, Vaishnav said, "Indian Railway has done the best for socio-economic development of hilly areas during the construction of new rail lines between Katra and Srinagar as part of the USBRL project. We have had to build 215 km of roads to transport materials, machinery, and manpower to lay down 111 km rail lines. It's a record showing how this government has created infrastructure in J&K." The minister also explained challenges of the 111 km Katra-Banihal section, which connects Jammu and Srinagar, faced, including geological and topographical concerns. This rail line also has a distinctive feature, as it is one of the few

railway sections in which 97.42 km of the total length is covered by tunnels. India's longest transportation tunnel, T-50, covering a distance of 12.77 km, is also located on this section, he said. He also acknowledged that the railways faced numerous challenges during the construction of tunnels, including methane gas leakage during drilling. "Our engineers and workers brilliantly resolved the issue of underground methane gas leakage and successfully completed tunnel construction as part of this project. The project includes 49 bridges, of which four are mega bridges," the minister said. He said a new chapter was written in Indian Railway history with the successful "rising grade" speed trial in the challenging terrain from Jammu and Kashmir's Katra to Banihal along the USBRL project. Another notable feature of this project is the 67 km of escape tunnels and the entire length being built with ballast-less tracks. The foundations of many of the bridges, including the iconic Chenab Bridge, the highest railway arch bridge in the world, and the cable-stay bridge, have been strengthened using 3,000 tonnes of steel, equivalent to 6,000 trucks of steel. A central command centre equipped with the world's most advanced technical facilities has been established for this section, the minister said.

## Supreme Court to hear pleas challenging poll officers appointment law on Feb 4

**The Supreme Court will hear challenges to the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023, on February 4.**

**NEW DELHI.** The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to hear a batch of pleas challenging the constitutionality of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023. The law, enacted earlier this year, removed the Chief Justice of India from the selection panel for appointing Election Commissioners. The hearing is scheduled to be held on February 4. The pleas were mentioned before a bench comprising Justices Surya Kant, Dipankar Datta, and Ujjal Bhuyan by advocate Prashant Bhushan. Bhushan cited urgency, noting that the current Chief Election Commissioner, Rajiv Kumar, is set to retire on February 18, and a new appointment needs to be made. Referring to a prior constitution bench judgment, Bhushan



reminded the court that it had directed, until a law was enacted by Parliament, Election Commissioners should be appointed by the President of India on the advice of a committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India. He argued that the new law excludes the Chief Justice, giving the executive full control over the appointments. Senior Advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan also addressed the bench, saying, "The constitution bench judgment made it clear that the executive cannot control the issue." Responding to the arguments, the bench observed, "The real test here is between the court's opinion and the exercise of legislative powers." The court is examining applications filed by Congress leader Jaya Thakur and the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) against the 2023 law. Both petitions challenge the removal of the Chief Justice of India from the selection process, arguing that it undermines the independence of the Election Commission.

## Chief Justice, Supreme Court judges plan private holiday in Andhra Pradesh: Sources

**NEW DELHI.** The Chief Justice of India, Sanjiv Khanna, along with 24 other Supreme Court judges, planned a holiday in Andhra Pradesh this weekend. The group, including their spouses, is set to visit Vishakhapatnam and Araku Valley from January 11 to 14, the sources told. The trip has been described as an informal gathering during the Court's vacation period. The judges will cover the costs personally, using Leave Travel Concession (LTC), a benefit available to all government employees. Sources indicated that the Chief Justice proposed the idea to allow judges and their families to relax together. They clarified that the trip was not an official visit and would not be funded by the Court. "It was decided that, since families will also be involved, the trip will be undertaken on LTC or personal expenditure. This is not an official trip that is being taken on court's expense," a source said.



## Weather Update: Delhi Sees Sharp Drop in Temperature, AQI Remains 'Poor'

**New Delhi.** Delhi experienced a sudden drop in temperature on Thursday, as cold wave conditions and cloudy weather affected the city. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) recorded the temperature at 6.4°C at 5:30 am. The IMD forecasts the minimum temperature will reach 5°C, with a maximum of 21°C. Compared to the last few days, the early morning temperature was a sharp decline, with temperatures previously ranging from 8°C to 11°C at 5:30 am. The IMD also predicted dense fog for Thursday, but contrasting visuals were reported from different areas of the city. The ongoing cold wave has driven many homeless people to seek shelter in night shelters. A shelter on Lodhi Road was fully occupied, with all its beds taken. To help the homeless, the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) set up 235 pagoda tents. Additional night shelters have been established across various parts of Delhi, including AIIMS, Lodhi Road, and the Nizamuddin flyover. Meanwhile, Delhi's air quality fell into the 'poor' category. The Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded at 299 at 7 am, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The AQI scale indicates that 0-50 is 'good,' 51-100 is 'satisfactory,' 101-200 is 'moderate,' 201-300 is 'poor,' 301-400 is 'very poor,' and 401-500 is 'severe.' On Sunday, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) lifted Stage-III measures under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) for Delhi-NCR, following a significant improvement in the AQI. However, Stage-I and Stage-II measures will continue, according to officials. The decision was made after the GRAP Sub-Committee reviewed air quality data and IMD/IITM forecasts, which showed a downward trend in AQI levels.

## Shiv temple 'locked for over 100 years' reopened in Varanasi

**NEW DELHI.** A Shiva temple in Varanasi was reopened on Monday. The Siddheshwar Mahadev temple, which has been closed for several centuries, is located in a predominantly Muslim locality. The temple was reopened with the assistance of police and administrative authorities. The temple was reopened following a request made last month by the Sanatan Rakshak Dal, which claimed ownership of the site and sought permission for its reopening and religious rituals. The temple's locks were cut open using a gas cutter. Inside, three damaged Shiva lingams were found, along with large amounts of debris and soil. The temple's restoration is planned after the conclusion of the Hindu month of Kharmanas. According to Deputy Commissioner of Police Kashi,



Gaurav Banswal, the temple had been locked for over 100 years. He stated that debris was being cleared with care to preserve any artefacts that might be found. Security arrangements, including police personnel, PAC, drone surveillance, and rooftop monitoring, were deployed to maintain order during the reopening of the temple. Additional District Magistrate Alok Verma said there was no opposition to the reopening, and residents of the area cooperated. The temple's cleaning, assisted by the municipal corporation, revealed over two feet of accumulated soil. Verma added that a decision on worship rituals would be taken soon. Ajay Sharma, state president of the Sanatan Rakshak Dal, said efforts by the residents of Kashi had led to the reopening of the temple. He mentioned that the three damaged Shiva lingams would undergo a reinstallation ceremony after Kharmanas ends, following traditional procedures.

# Protests weren't organic: Delhi Police oppose bail plea of 2020 riots accused

**New Delhi.** The Delhi Police opposed bail pleas filed by several accused in the 2020 North-East Delhi riots case, including Sharjeel Imam and Umar Khalid, during a hearing in the Delhi High Court on Wednesday. Special Public Prosecutor Amit Prasad argued that the Shaheen Bagh protest lacked local support and was orchestrated by bringing people from other areas. He claimed that the protest sites were created under a planned conspiracy and were presented as organic demonstrations. Prasad further contended that the Shaheen Bagh protest, often referred to as a "Dad-Nani protest," was artificially constructed to create public perception. The police cited chats involving Sharjeel Imam and Asif Mujtaba, alleging that the protests were masterminded by them. They claimed there was sufficient evidence to suggest the



protests were not organic. During the hearing, the court questioned whether organising a protest site could justify charges under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) against individuals. The court also asked the police to prepare a chart indicating the connection between each accused person and their involvement in specific WhatsApp groups. The hearing is set to continue on Thursday.

## Navy deployed with special equipment to rescue Assam coal miners

**New Delhi.** The Indian Navy deployed a specialised team to assist in rescuing miners trapped in Umrangso, a town in the Dima Hasao district of Assam. The team, comprising one officer and eleven sailors, included Clearance Divers trained in deep diving and rescue operations. The team carried deep diving equipment and underwater Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) to aid in the rescue mission. The operation was carried out in coordination with the Indian Army, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), and local authorities. The team, based in Visakhapatnam, arrived on January 7 through an airlift arranged by the Indian Air Force. Search and rescue operations began immediately, with regular updates shared among all agencies



involved. Meanwhile, rescue teams recovered one body from a collapsed coal mine in Umrangso, Assam, where nine miners were trapped on January 6. An official from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) confirmed the recovery, carried out by divers from the NDRF and the Indian Army, news agency PTI reported. NDRF Deputy Commandant N. Tiwari stated that the operation was ongoing with an expanded team, working round the clock. Tiwari added that support from the Navy was expected soon. HPS Kandari, Commandant of the 1st Battalion of the NDRF, described the challenges faced by the rescue teams. He noted that multiple attempts to locate the miners had been unsuccessful earlier, but a joint diving team recovered the body on 8 January. Kandari highlighted the complexities of the operation, citing hazardous conditions underground and the presence of mining equipment that could obstruct rescue efforts. He emphasised the need for diving experts to navigate the unpredictable environment inside the mine. Efforts to locate the remaining miners continued, with teams from the NDRF, the Army, and the Navy coordinating the operation.

# Behind Tirupati Stampede: Gate Opened For Woman Who Was Unwell Led To Chaos

**New Delhi.** Two days before the Vaikuntha Ekadasi festival was set to begin at Lord Venkateswara Swamy temple on Andhra Pradesh's Tirumala Hills, large crowds descended at over 90 ticket counters set up for the festival. Arrangements were in place for the distribution of 1,20,000 tokens to devotees for the "sarva darshan" (free darshan) of Lord Venkateswara Swamy for the first three days of the annual darshan on January 10 to 12. Darshan tokens for the 10-day festival were to be handed from 5 am on Thursday, but thousands of people gathered a night before at counters set up by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), which oversees temple operations. The distribution arrangements were made at 94 counters at three pilgrim lodges - Vishnu Nivasam, Srinivasam and Bhudevi complexes, besides other places like Satyanarayanapuram, Bairagipatteda and Ramanaidu school in Tirupati, officials



said. Tirupati Municipal Commissioner N Moruya said the situation went out of control at the counter set up at MGM High School in Bairagipatteda, near the Vishnu Nivasam temple. Around 4,000-5,000 people thronged the counter from Wednesday morning. By the evening, the crowd became unruly, leading to pushing

and jostling. According to BR Naidu, chairman of TTD, when a gate was opened to assist a woman feeling unwell, the crowd surged forward all at once, leading to chaos. Lack of adequate arrangements to manage the crowds resulted in a stampede late Wednesday evening, in which at least six devotees

died and over 40 were injured. Tirupati Collector S Venkateswar told NDTV that it took around 15 minutes to control evacuate the crowd. The festival allows devotees to pray to the deity Lord Venkateswara from the northern entrance of the temple. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said his thoughts were with those who lost their "near and dear ones". Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi urged Congress workers to provide all possible assistance in this difficult time. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu condoled the incident, saying it "deeply disturbed" him. "The death of several devotees in a stampede near Vishnu Nivasam in Tirupati for tokens to visit Tirumala Srivari Vaikuntha Dwara has shocked me. This tragic incident, which took place at a time when devotees had gathered in large numbers for tokens, deeply disturbed me," Chandrababu Naidu wrote in a post in Telugu on X.





Build your immunity for

# Winter



**Which foods are the best and why?**

**Cabbage: It helps the skin gain immunity against dryness and acne.**

**Cauliflower: It has anti-inflammatory properties and is rich in antioxidants.**

**Nuts: Nuts keep your internal body temperature warm and regulated and provide immunity against fever.**

Even as you are enjoying the pleasant change in weather, the winter chill will soon bring along with it ailments like cold, flu and fever. The best way to prevent falling ill during this season is to boost your immunity. As it is, one tends to feel hungrier than usual in winter, so it is important to indulge in the right kind of food. You also need to follow a proper exercise regime, so make lifestyle changes to ensure you get maximum benefits.

**Eat a balanced diet**  
During winter, the market gets a bounty of fresh fruits and vegetables. So, your focus should be on getting as many nutrients through proper food. A balance of Vitamins A, C, D and E, minerals like selenium and zinc, antioxidants and Omega 3 is required to support your immune system and they can be found in meat, legumes, cereals, whole grains, nuts

and seeds, apart from fresh fruits and vegetables. Keep your digestive system healthy to build up your immune system. Add good bacteria to your diet in the form of fermented foods. Yogurt, kefir and kimchi are some such foods which should be included in your diet.

**Opt for homemade meals**  
Foods that stimulate immunity are typically fresh, home-cooked foods, which include milk, yogurt, green leafy vegetables, whole grains and clarified ghee (in moderation) and are strongly recommended by Ayurveda. It also encourages the consumption of foods with sweet, salty and sour tastes during the cold months of winter for the required boost. At the same time, remember to avoid cold drinks and cold foods since these dampen the gastrointestinal digestive juices. Avoid

eating stale, left-over items, deep fried foods, soft drinks, processed meats, baked products, and artificial sweeteners or refined sugars, since they excessively load the system with extra and unnecessary calories. They also dampen the increased gastrointestinal digestive fire thus having a negative impact on immunity.

**Add herbs and spices to your food**  
Herbs and spices contain all the required components that help boost the immune system. Use ginger, garlic, black pepper, turmeric, thyme, basil and cinnamon.

**Avoid getting dehydrated**  
**Most of us don't feel very thirsty** in the cold weather, thus leading to dehydration. It is important to drink lots of water, so that it can spread to various parts of the body and increase blood circulation. Infuse your water with citrus fruits and sip on it throughout the day to get an extra dose of Vitamin C as well.

**Get adequate rest**  
Getting proper sleep for around seven to eight hours every night will rejuvenate you. It also takes care of putting your body to proper rest before it starts work again the next day. It increases the body's ability to fight infections and keeps the viruses at bay.

**De-stress yourself**  
Stress can increase your chances of falling ill so manage your anxiety levels. The cold weather can make you prone to depression so it is important to take steps to relax. Try meditation and yoga for the

body, watch comedy shows on TV, keep the company of witty friends, visit your neighbours or do a good deed! All these will affect you positively and help strengthen your immune system.

**Get some sun**  
This is the best weather to go for sunshine walks, since, in winter, the sun is not too harsh. A morning walk will ensure you get natural Vitamin D, which is needed for better bone health. You can also indulge in simple exercises in the open like walking, jogging or stretching exercises. (with inputs from weight management expert Dr Amrapali Patil and nutritionist Dr Monica Jacob.)

## Seven hacks to good Health for mothers

Eat well, stay hydrated and snack smart for good health while balancing pregnancy with busy schedules, says an expert.

Poornima Shankar, Senior Research Scientist at The Himalaya Drug Company, gives some tips on how mothers and mothers-to-be can recharge their energy:

**Striking the energy balance:** Eating healthy food is important but ensuring that the energy intake is just as much as the energy you release, is more important. If your food intake is greater than the energy spent, you will experience a positive energy balance and gain weight. Likewise, when the energy spent is higher than the energy intake, there is a negative energy balance and results in weight loss and exhaustion.

**Tip:** During pregnancy, eat healthy and stay active. Do not try to lose weight. Post-pregnancy, continue to eat healthy and begin an exercise routine that will help you lose weight and keep it off.

**Rainbow on your plate:** A balanced diet is all about macronutrients and micronutrients. The former provide energy in the form of carbohydrates, proteins and fat. The latter includes vitamins and minerals that help the body function well. An expectant mom's diet should contain a balance of both micronutrients and macronutrients for baby's healthy development.

**Tip:** Ensure your diet is rich in proteins, good fats, sprouts, fish, fruits and vegetables.

**Relax and rejuvenate:** It is important for every mother to break out from the daily routine and rejuvenate in order to stay both mentally and physically strong. Something as simple as a long and deep breath can double up as a break at times. A lot of mothers tend to worry about post-pregnancy weight gain and other skin-related concerns. Such concerns do have an impact on their overall health.

**Tip:** Regular deep breathing exercises and mild yoga as per physician's advice will help mothers relax.



**Not all fats are bad:** Healthy fats found mainly in plant-based natural liquid forms, like olive oil, are good for health as they reduce bad cholesterol and increase good cholesterol. Intake of saturated fats like butter or ghee, should be limited as they can raise

bad cholesterol and reduce good cholesterol which, in turn, increase health risks. Consuming omega 3 fats is important for good skin health and overall heart health.

**Tip:** Include fatty fish and vegetarian sources like flaxseeds and walnuts in your diet to make it rich in good fat.

**Snack smart:** Pick nutrient and fibre-rich, low-to-medium calorie munchies that keep you full for longer. Choose lighter snacks instead of heavy,

greasy snacks to avoid heartburn and gastric issues during and post-pregnancy. Nuts are rich in protein, fibre, vitamin E and essential fatty acids or good fats. Dairy products contain protein, calcium, Vitamins A and D, and essential fats. Eggs are a source of protein, Vitamins A and D, and essential fats. Vegetables and fruit contain fibre, vitamins, minerals, and nutrients from plants.

**Tip:** Eating often and having smaller portions should be the mantra.

**Cut on salt:** Reduce salt intake as extra salt can raise blood pressure. In pregnant women, excessive salt intake can increase the risk of hypertension which can lead to further complications. Limit the addition of excessive table salt to food.

**Tip:** Avoid pickles, papad, and salted snacks.

**Stay hydrated:** Last but not the least, it is very important to keep yourself well hydrated all the time. Pregnant women and lactating mothers should drink plenty of fluids including water, milk, buttermilk, juices, ice and tender coconut water.

### Is your shoe right for you?

Marilyn Monroe has famously said, "Give a girl the right shoes, and she can conquer the world." She may not be talking about workout shoes here but one can easily co-opt it for those. Because what you choose to wear on your feet for your next workout can make or break your body, say fitness experts. And it's not just a 'good' shoe you are looking at but the 'right' shoe. "Shoes are the most important part of your workout gear. It's what your entire body rests on and forms the base for all your workouts," says Mumbai-based celebrity fitness trainer, Mustafa Ahmed.

There's a reason why sports goods companies spend so much time and money on research on shoes. "Each sport or workout has a different movement and shoes are designed to adhere to that," says sports medicine expert Dr Pushpinder Bajaj.

If the shoe fits

Dr Bajaj says that every fitness need requires a different shoe. Runners need something with more cushioning and bounce, tennis players' shoes should be able to handle the side-to-side movement and walkers need shoes with a stronger base. "The reason for wearing the correct shoe is to minimise the impact on your foot and knees," he says. For problem feet (like flat foot), you should follow expert advice.

Ahmed has seen people's attitude towards their workout shoe change. Earlier, people would do double duty with their shoes – making it a case of one shoe fits all, they have now realised wrong shoes can cause injury. "Serious gym-goers won't go in for 'buzzwords' like zigzag soles or butt-toning shoes now," he says.

The life of a shoe

When looking for a shoe, Dr Bajaj says the safest bet is to pick an "upper-end brand". His rationale: big brands do solid research before putting a shoe out. Start with a budget of at least Rs 3,000 for a good shoe. But even the best brands are not going to last you more than a year. "If you are a runner and run five times a week, change your shoe every 6-9 months or 500 miles, whichever comes first," he advises. For walkers, the life of a shoe is a year, not more.

But follow some shoe-tiquette and don't treat your workout shoe as outdoor shoes. "Always carry your shoes in a gym bag and change while at the gym," Ahmed advises. The point: treat your shoe well, and it will return the favour.

#### 6 COMMON SHOE MISTAKES TO AVOID

Starting new workout with old shoes

Don't grab the old trainers and start a new workout. They may not have the same support as before and may not be suited to the activity. Wearing them everywhere

Keep your workout shoes as workout shoes. Don't wear them around town. You will break down a good pair of shoes by running errands and not exercising.

Pick a cross-trainer for everything

Shoes are activity specific. A good cross-trainer can't be a go-to shoe for all activities – they are best kept for gym workouts. Anything more intense requires a specialised shoe.

Not changing them often

The life of a workout shoe is not more than a year (and that's stretching it). Experts recommend that runners replace their shoes every 500 miles. If you exercise five days a week, a year is the most your shoe will serve you.

Sticking to the same size

Get your shoe size checked every year. It can change. It's said that our feet tend to grow bigger as we age.

Buying at a department store

Don't go to buy a shoe in a multi-brand department store looking for a bargain. Shop for a shoe at a speciality athletic shoe store and ask their in-house expert. Get a foot evaluation and discuss your specific need.

## Bearish sentiments strong, crucial for Nifty to break resistance at 23,800

**NEW DELHI.** Domestic equity market is having a tough start to 2025. After gains in the first two sessions of the year, the benchmarks – NSE Nifty and BSE Sensex – have predominantly closed in the red. Over the past four sessions, both indices have declined by over 2% each, erasing nearly Rs 12 lakh crore from the market capitalisation of all BSE-listed companies. On Wednesday, the benchmarks once again slipped nearly 1% during intraday trade, mainly due to weaker GDP estimates for FY26.

However, late-session buying in select blue-chip stocks helped the indices recover most of the losses. The Sensex rebounded 650 points from the day's low to close at 78,141.06, down 58 points, the Nifty50 ended marginally lower at 23,688.95, losing 19 points.

As per experts, the bearish sentiments are strong at the moment and only a move above the hurdle of 23,800 levels (Nifty) could confirm upside bounce in the market. Dhupesh Dhameja, Derivatives Analyst, SAMCO Securities, said Nifty's price action suggests a sideways to mildly bearish inclination as it grapples with the 23,800–23,900 resistance zone, which coincides with the 10-day and 20-day EMAs.

## Cybersecurity firm Rubrik to open new office in Bengaluru

**BENGALURU.** India is a critical growth market for us. It is in the midst of a massive digital transformation, and we believe there's a huge opportunity for Rubrik to help secure its digital future, said Bipul Sinha, CEO, chairman, and co-founder of US-based cybersecurity company Rubrik. On Wednesday, it announced plans to set up a new office in Bengaluru in mid-2025. Rubrik began its India operations in 2017 with the opening of its first office in Bengaluru. In 2019, it launched



a new R&D centre in the city and the centre now serves as a hub for data security and ransomware recovery innovation. The company also has sales and presales teams in Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru.

"By investing in top engineering talent, we believe we will continue to create innovative solutions that enhance Rubrik's portfolio and support our global growth. Our new facility will help meet these future plans," Sinha said. The new facility will combine product development, product management, customer support, and global recovery operations. The company said it will be hiring talent from top universities in the country as part of the expansion.

## Swiggy, Zomato launch 15-minute delivery service

**BENGALURU.** The quick food delivery space continues to heat up as major players like Zomato and Swiggy have rolled out new services. Zomato has launched its 15-minute food delivery service. Similarly, Swiggy's new app Snacc will deliver food in 15 minutes. Though both the players didn't officially announce the new app and the service, both are now available for users.

Swiggy's new service Snacc has been introduced in Bengaluru and it promises to deliver food in 15 minutes including breakfast, snacks and meals. Snacc app is available on both Google Play and App Store. Though Swiggy has Bolt, which provides restaurant food delivery in 10 minutes, this app will deliver from a centralised location and focuses on



delivering quick meals, snacks and beverages within 15 minutes. Recently, Swiggy said Bolt service is available in over 400 cities and has grown to 5% of its food delivery orders within eight weeks. Zomato has introduced a 15-minute food delivery service that helps users get food delivery from nearby restaurants.

Another player Zepto recently launched Zepto Cafe, a 10-minute food delivery app. From samosas to chai, it offers beverages and dishes in just 10 minutes. Zomato-backed Blinkit too recently launched Bistrot that delivers food in 10 minutes. In 2024, the space saw a significant jump in terms of funding as the sector raised \$1.37 billion in equity funding from 7 rounds, driven largely by Zepto, which secured \$1.355 billion across three \$300 million rounds.

### Services available to users in select cities

Zomato has launched its 15-minute food delivery service. Similarly, Swiggy's new app Snacc will deliver food in 15 minutes. Though both players didn't officially announce the new app and the service, both are now available for users. Swiggy's Snacc has been introduced in Bengaluru.

# High-interest FDs for super senior citizens: Check SBI, PNB, RBL and more

**Banks like SBI, PNB, RBL, Indian Bank, and Union Bank are offering enhanced returns to help them secure a financially stable future.**

**NEW DELHI.** As super-senior citizens (80 years and above) often face challenges managing their finances, many banks are offering attractive interest rates on fixed deposits (FDs) to cater to their needs. Not all banks provide higher rates for super-senior citizens, but several leading institutions

have stepped forward to offer competitive returns. Let's have a look at some of the best options available for those aged 80 and above.

### STATE BANK OF INDIA (SBI)

SBI's 'Patrons' scheme offers an additional 10 basis points (bps) above the senior citizen rates, making it an attractive option for super senior citizens.

The bank provides a top rate of 7.60% for FDs with a tenure of 2 to less than 3 years. This scheme ensures that super senior citizens enjoy enhanced returns on their investments.

### PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK (PNB)

PNB offers the highest rate of 8.10% for super senior citizens on a 400-day FD. Super senior citizens get an additional 30 bps over senior citizen FD rates, with



the bank offering higher rates for deposits with tenures above five years.

### RBL BANK

RBL Bank leads with a remarkable 8.75% interest rate for super senior citizen FDs with a tenure of 500 days. Super senior citizens enjoy an extra 0.75% interest rate over the standard senior citizen FD rates. This makes RBL a top choice for

those seeking higher returns.

### INDIAN BANK

Indian Bank's special FD scheme for super senior citizens offers 8.05% interest on a 400-day tenure. The bank offers an additional 25 bps on top of senior citizen rates, ensuring that older investors benefit from higher returns.

### UNION BANK OF INDIA

Union Bank of India offers super senior citizens an extra 0.75% on FDs, pushing the interest rate to 8.05% for a 456-day tenure. The bank's additional rate is higher than that for senior citizens, reflecting its focus on providing superior benefits to the elderly. With a variety of attractive options available, super senior citizens can now maximise their returns and secure their savings with the right fixed deposit choice, ensuring a financially stable future.

## Centre to launch new credit guarantee scheme for MSME sector up to Rs 100 cr

**NEW DELHI.** Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju on Thursday said the government would soon launch a new credit guarantee scheme for the MSME sector covering loans up to Rs 100 crore.

"We are likely to come up with a scheme, which was announced by Finance Minister in her last Budget, that could provide loans up to Rs 100 crore without guarantee, if they are already having the enterprise," he said at the concluding day of Grameen Bharat Mahotsav. The scheme is expected to be placed before the Union Cabinet soon for its approval.

"For facilitating term loans to MSMEs for purchase of machinery and equipment without collateral or third-party guarantee, a credit guarantee scheme will be introduced. The scheme will operate on pooling of credit risks of such MSMEs. A separately



constituted self-financing guarantee fund will provide, to each applicant, guarantee cover up to Rs 100 crore, while the loan amount may be larger," the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced in Budget 2024-25. The borrower will have to provide an upfront guarantee fee and an annual guarantee fee on the reducing loan balance, she had said.

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector employs 50 million people, he said.

MSMEs exports have witnessed a

remarkable rise, increasing from Rs 3.95 lakh crore in 2020-21 to Rs 12.39 lakh crore in 2024-25, underscoring their critical role in boosting India's economy and strengthening global trade. The MSME sector in India has consistently demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, significantly contributing to the nation's GDP over the years.

The Gross Value Added (GVA) by MSMEs in India's GDP was 29.7 percent in 2017-18, rising to 30.1 percent in both 2022-23.

To promote entrepreneurship in rural India, Nagaraju said, the government is very keen to lend more to rural areas through its various schemes. As the country surges ahead, he said, there is need to focus on four things, quality, linkages for exports, capacity building, and support to achieve the vision of Vikshit Bharat.

## India must prioritise frontier AI research to drive innovation: Nadella

**NEW DELHI.** India must prioritise frontier research in artificial intelligence (AI) and develop foundational models to drive innovation, Microsoft Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella said on Wednesday. However, he noted that major investment is required to overcome the entry barrier and a single groundbreaking mathematical discovery can revolutionise the entire AI landscape. "There is no reason why India can't do frontier work, but you can even define frontier pretty unique. For example, I don't think the last known big breakthrough in AI frontier has happened. I always say we are one mathematical breakthrough away from that entire edifice being thrown out and being going after something else," said Nadella during his visit to India. Nadella announced strategic partnerships with the Government of



India and industry leaders to advance cloud and AI transformation. This comes on the heels of its plan to invest \$3 billion in cloud and AI infrastructure in India over next two years, including establishment of new data centres.

Microsoft has partnered with RailTel to advance digital, cloud, and AI transformation in the Indian Railways and public sector space. As part of this five-year partnership, Microsoft will

support RailTel in establishing an AI center of excellence (CoE). The company has also joined forces with the Mahindra Group to transform automotive, farm and financial services with AI. Additionally, it has partnered with Apollo Hospitals to co-innovate, jointly develop products and drive digital transformation in the healthcare sector. The partnership will also focus on research in areas such as disease progression and genomics.

Furthermore, Microsoft has entered a strategic partnership with Bajaj Finance to enhance digital transformation and deliver seamless experiences for Bajaj Finance's customers. The company has signed a MoU with India AI, a division of Digital India Corporation, to collaborate on advancing AI and emerging technologies in India.

# Government revises November gold import figures from 14.8 billion to 9.9 billion

**Downward revision by 5 billion may result in lower trade deficit for the reported month**

**NEW DELHI.** The sharp jump in November merchandise trade deficit was because of a clerical error. The Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCI&S) on Wednesday revised India's gold import figure for November 2024 from \$14.8 billion to \$9.9 billion—a decline of 33%. The November goods trade deficit rose to an all-time high of \$37.8 billion due to a massive year-on-year surge in gold imports. Data from the Ministry of Commerce had shown gold imports rose 4.3 times YoY to \$14.8 billion during the month. However, soon after the release of the trade data, it was being speculated that the increase in the trade deficit was largely due to an error in

recording gold imports. The ministry never came up with a clarification on the issue. However, on Wednesday DGCI&S, an organisation under the Ministry of Commerce, for collection, compilation and dissemination of trade statistics – revised the November gold import data without any explanation.

The downward revision in gold import should cut India's goods trade deficit in November to \$32.7 billion from the earlier \$37.8 billion, if everything else remains the same. While this is a positive development, analysts raise questions on 'unexplained' revision of gold imports figure. "In the interest of transparency, the government must clearly explain the rationale behind this revision. Was there an error in the initial data compilation, or



did DGCI&S uncover discrepancies after further verification? Without a clear explanation, such revisions erode trust in official statistics, especially when no changes were made to the data compilation rules in November," says Ajay Srivastava, founder, Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI).

A query sent to the ministry remained unanswered at the time of filing of this

report. Despite the revision, the year-on-year growth in gold imports remains high at 186% (in November 2023, India imported \$3.4 billion worth of gold).

The unprecedented jump in gold imports in November had left many analysts clueless as they feel festive demand alone cannot explain the jump in gold imports. According to Nomura, the rise in gold imports this November cannot be explained by festive demand alone, and "it represents a meaningful step up in gold purchases for reasons unclear to us".

**Total gold imports stood at \$44 bn till Nov** In FY25 till Nov 2024, total gold imports stood at \$44 bn, 34% higher than a year-ago period. Analysts have partially attributed this to import duty cut from 15-6% in July budget. The free trade pact with the UAE, effective since May 1 2022, has also contributed to the surge.

## NEWS BOX

## Bangladesh wait on Shakib Al Hasan's test results for Champions Trophy selection

New Delhi .The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is waiting for the test results on Shakib Al Hasan's bowling action before naming their squad for the Champions Trophy 2025. The participating teams need to announce their squads by January 12. Last year, in September, Shakib was reported for suspect action during a county match for Surrey, after which the ECB suspended him from bowling.

As per clause 11.3 of the ICC's regulations for illegal bowling actions, the ICC banned Shakib from bowling in international cricket and by domestic teams in competitions around the world. The all-rounder went through a bowling test at Loughborough University, but the results were negative. Subsequently, Shakib underwent a second bowling test in Chennai, the results of which are still awaited. BCB's chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain called the entire incident 'shocking' and said that BCB is



patiently waiting for the results.

"It was very shocking to hear that Shakib couldn't pass the bowling action test (at Loughborough). I will have to find out whether he has tested himself again," Hossain was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo. "We have to wait for this information. The board hasn't instructed us fully on Shakib. I think every minute counts. I am sure we can clarify this in a day or two," Hossain added.

Najmul Hossain Shanto, the Bangladesh captain, and Faruque Ahmed, the BCB chief, decided in favour of Shakib's inclusion if the veteran passes his bowling test.

Shakib hasn't played any form of international cricket since the Test series against India, which Bangladesh lost 0-2. He also missed out on playing his 'farewell' Test against South Africa at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. Shakib last played any form of cricket in November, representing Bangla Tiger in the T10 League. He is also not a part of the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League.

## Barcelona's Dani Olmo, Pau Víctor granted temporary registration

New Delhi. Barcelona have received provisional clearance to register Dani Olmo and Pau Víctor after Spain's top sports court, the Consejo Superior de Deportes (CSD), upheld the club's appeal against LaLiga and the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF). The decision allows both players to be available for selection while the CSD continues to analyse the case. The CSD's ruling comes after Barcelona's earlier attempts to register the players for the second half of the season were denied by LaLiga and the RFEF. Both Olmo and Víctor were initially signed during the summer transfer window but could only be registered for the first half of the season due to Barcelona's struggle to comply with LaLiga's stringent wage cap regulations. Their initial registration expired on December 31, 2024. Both the RFEF and LaLiga rejected Barcelona's request to register Olmo and Víctor for the remainder of the season on Saturday. The CSD intervened, stating that professional athletes have the right to pursue their careers under conditions of fairness and stability. The court emphasized that failing to grant provisional clearance would result in significant economic and sporting damages to both the players and Barcelona. Additionally, the CSD pointed out the potential harm to Spain's national football interests and domestic competitions, including LaLiga.

LaLiga has opposed the CSD's decision and hinted at potential legal action. In a statement, the league announced plans to carefully study the resolution and present appropriate appeals. It emphasized its disagreement with the ruling but did not elaborate on its next steps. "The content of the resolution will be studied carefully in order to present the appropriate appeals, without prejudice to expressing its absolute disagreement with it," it said.

Dani Olmo, who joined Barcelona from RB Leipzig in August on a six-year deal worth €55 million, became a key figure for the Catalan side during the first half of the season. The Spanish international had also starred at Euro 2024, finishing as the joint top scorer. Víctor, another summer signing, has been regarded as a promising talent for the club.

After the Super Cup win, manager Hansi Flick said it was a huge relief to his side ahead of the game. "I am really happy for these two guys, but I am also happy for the whole team," Flick said. "After the information, you can see what happens in the bus, it was good. I think the whole club is very happy for this decision, for this right decision."

## Australian Open draw explained: Djokovic, Alcaraz on quarterfinal collision course

## Australian Open 2025:

**Novak Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz are set to meet in the quarter-final while defending champion Jannik Sinner is in the other half of the draw. World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka has been handed a tough draw in women's singles.**



Melbourne. Novak Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz have been grouped in the same quarter of the men's singles draw of the Australian Open, the season's first Grand Slam tournament, starting January 14. Alcaraz, who is yet to win the Australian Open crown, will start his campaign against Alexander Shevchenko while Djokovic, bidding to reclaim his dominance in Melbourne, will take on 19-year-old American wildcard Nishesh Basavareddy. Defending champion Jannik Sinner, the top seed, is in the opposite half of the draw,

potentially setting up a semifinal encounter with No. 2 seed Alexander Zverev. Sinner's path includes a challenging quarterfinal seeded eighth against Australia's No. 1, Alex de Minaur, who is the eighth seed in the men's singles draw. De Minaur, who has never defeated Sinner in their previous nine meetings, opens against Botić van de Zandschulp.

Other notable first-round matches feature Nick Kyrgios, who could meet No. 2 seed Alexander Zverev in the third round, and

Jack Draper, the 15th seed, beginning his tournament amidst concerns over a hip injury. All eyes will be on Novak Djokovic as the Serb bids to win a record-breaking 11th Australian Open crown and his 25th Grand Slam crown.

Djokovic finished 2024 without a Grand Slam title as Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz shared the four majors between them. Having roped in Andy Murray to his coaching team, Djokovic will be hoping for a quick turnaround in Melbourne. He did not

have an ideal start to the season as he was knocked out in Brisbane International, an Australian Open tune-up event, in the quarter-final.

Meanwhile, India's Sumit Nagal, who earned a direct entry to the main draw, will open his campaign against 26th seed Tomas Machac in the first round.

## POTENTIAL QUARTERFINAL LINE-UP

The women's draw sets up a potential semifinal between top seed Aryna Sabalenka and No. 3 seed Coco Gauff. Sabalenka, aiming for her third consecutive Australian Open title, faces former US Open champion Sloane Stephens in a challenging first-round match. Gauff begins her campaign against former Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin. In the bottom half, No. 2 seed Iga Swiatek could face No. 4 seed Elena Rybakina in the semifinals. Rybakina's first-round opponent is Australian wildcard Emerson Jones, making her Grand Slam debut. British No. 1 Katie Boulter, seeded 23rd, looks to advance beyond the early rounds after previous early exits in Grand Slams. She opens her tournament following a strong showing leading Great Britain to the United Cup quarterfinals.

## Why India shouldn't forget Shreyas Iyer in Champions Trophy 2025 squad

New Delhi . After the conclusion of the Border Gavaskar Trophy, all eyes will shift to India's upcoming white-ball assignments, including ODI and T20I series against England, followed by the highly anticipated ICC event—the Champions Trophy 2025. As the men in blue aim for another ICC title following their T20 World Cup 2024 triumph, there is growing speculation about India's squad for the Champions Trophy.

There is considerable anticipation surrounding India's white-ball squad for the Champions Trophy, especially since the team will be playing the 50-over format after their series loss to Sri Lanka in August 2024. According to PTI, Yashasvi Jaiswal is a strong contender for the ODI squad. His inclusion would bring a left-handed batter to the top four, with Shubman Gill, Rohit Sharma, and Virat Kohli expected to secure the first three spots. However, the question remains whether Jaiswal could replace



Shreyas Iyer in the squad. Despite Jaiswal's promising form, Iyer has been in sensational form in domestic cricket, particularly for Mumbai.

## Shreyas's blitzkrieg in Vijay Hazare Trophy

Shreyas Iyer has been a standout performer, especially in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy, where he scored an impressive 312 runs in four matches for Mumbai. One of his key performances came when he scored a match-winning 137, guiding Mumbai to a

massive 163-run victory over Puducherry. Mumbai found themselves in trouble at 82 for five, but Iyer's brilliant 133-ball 133, including 16 fours and four sixes, helped them recover and post a strong total. In reply, Puducherry were bundled out for just 127 in 27.2 overs, thanks to the efforts of Suryansh Shedge, Ayush Mhatre, and Shardul Thakur, who shared the wickets to seal a dominant victory for Mumbai. Shreyas Iyer once again showcased his power-hitting skills with an explosive 114 off 55 balls against Karnataka, including five fours and 10 sixes at the Narendra Modi Stadium B Ground in Ahmedabad. He reached his century in just 50 deliveries.

## Sensational form in domestic cricket

The 30-year-old has been in exceptional form this domestic season. In the Ranji Trophy, he has accumulated 452 runs in four matches at an average of 90.40, with a strike rate of 88.80 and a top score of 233.

## Arne Slot criticises decision not to send off Bergvall after Spurs beat Liverpool

New Delhi. Liverpool manager Arne Slot has criticised the referee's decision not to send Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Lucas Bergvall, who scored the winner in the first leg of the Carabao Cup semi-final—a rare setback in an otherwise stellar season. Liverpool expected a second yellow card for Spurs midfielder Lucas Bergvall. Bergvall had cut through Kostas Tsimikas, forcing the left-back to leave the pitch for treatment. However, referee Stuart Attwell spared Bergvall the dismissal, and with Tsimikas still sidelined, Bergvall capitalized on a Dominic Solanke pass to score the decisive goal. Earlier, Attwell made history by announcing over his microphone that VAR had disallowed a Solanke goal for offside—a first in English football. Despite this setback, Spurs rallied and secured a crucial advantage heading into the second leg at Anfield on February 6. For Liverpool, the defeat marked only the second loss since Arne Slot took charge, ending a remarkable 24-match unbeaten streak in all



competitions. Speaking after the game, Slot referenced recent controversies involving refereeing decisions: "I saw Ange [Postecoglou, the Spurs manager] sat here on Sunday, unhappy with decisions made," Slot said, with a nod towards the Spurs manager's grievances with the referee during his team's 2-1 Premier League loss against Newcastle.

"People say decisions even themselves out but I am not a believer of that. I believe you can be unlucky or lucky in decisions in a season.

Yes, a decision went against them on Sunday and went in favour of them today, which, of course, is very unlucky for us. A moment like this... if you go down to 10 men for a few seconds against a team as good as Tottenham - it is far from ideal. Slot questioned Attwell's handling of Bergvall's challenge: "I think anyone would prefer the card was given [to Bergvall] rather than have the advantage played 40 yards from their own goal. The other question is: was it reckless enough to justify playing advantage and then coming back to give the yellow? Unfortunately, he [Attwell] had to explain his decision

on the disallowed Solanke goal but didn't have to for this one. The good thing is there's a second leg, but it's far from an ideal position for us." Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk echoed his manager's frustration: "I think it was quite obvious it was going to be a second yellow [for Bergvall]. It was pretty clear. And a minute later, he scores the winner... a coincidence." With everything to play for at Anfield, Liverpool will look to overturn the deficit.

deserved. He was excluded from the squad for the 2023 World Cup and wasn't offered a farewell match, a decision that still leaves him feeling unfulfilled. "I would have loved to have played a lot more. I feel like I had a lot more to give New Zealand Cricket and the Black Caps," Guptill said, reflecting on his abrupt exit. "It's disappointing how it ended, but I've got to move forward." Widely regarded as one of New Zealand's greatest white-ball batters, Guptill's prowess extended beyond his batting. His sharp fielding skills earned him global recognition, highlighted by a decisive run-out of M.S. Dhoni during the 2019 World Cup semi-final.

Guptill's departure was part of New Zealand Cricket's broader strategy to invest in younger talents like Finn Allen. Ironically, Allen himself stepped away from international commitments in 2024 to pursue a career in T20 leagues, underscoring the changing dynamics of modern cricket. Guptill's Test career, though respectable, fell short of his white-ball exploits. In 47 matches, he scored 2,586 runs at an average of 29.38, including three centuries. His highest score, 189 against Bangladesh in 2010, came while batting at No. 5, a position where he averaged over 43. However, Guptill preferred the challenge of opening the innings, a role that often tested his technique against the new ball. "I had the opportunity to keep batting at five, but I wanted to go back to the top. I've got no regrets; I gave it a good shot," Guptill shared. While his international career may have ended earlier than he hoped, Guptill remains proud of his journey.

## Pat Cummins set for scans for ankle injury, Champions Trophy participation in doubt

Pat Cummins is scheduled to undergo scans on his ankle, raising concerns about his availability for the upcoming Champions Trophy, set to begin on February 19. The Australian skipper's fitness will be closely monitored.

following his participation in all five Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Cummins has already been ruled out of the Sri Lankan tour due to paternity leave as he awaits the birth of his second child, and now faces uncertainty regarding his availability for the Champions Trophy, which begins on February 19.

Bailey revealed that Cummins had managed an ankle issue throughout the Test summer, adding further concern about his fitness. "Pat's obviously on paternity leave for the next little bit," Bailey told reporters when asked about Cummins' potential involvement in the Sri Lanka series. "There's a little bit of work to do. He's got a little bit of a sore ankle as well, so I think in the next week or so, he's got a scan coming, and we'll get a bit more information around where that's at," Bailey added.



When pressed on Cummins' participation in the Champions Trophy, Bailey remained non-committal, stating, "Not really sure yet. We'll have to wait and see where that scan comes back and where it's tracking." Cummins isn't the only Australian pacer grappling with injury concerns.

Mitchell Starc experienced niggles during the fourth Test but managed to play in Sydney, while Josh Hazlewood was ruled out of the series after the Gabba Test due to a calf injury. Hazlewood was also omitted from the Sri Lanka tour squad, but Bailey expressed confidence in his recovery progress. "He's working really hard, and all the news on how he's responding to the calf injury is coming along really well," Bailey said.

"It was just probably a little bit tight (for this squad) given the amount of time he would've missed. Looking at how we may structure those loads for the quicks, it just worked out that unfortunately for him, he didn't quite get there in time. But we're really confident he should be fit and raring to go for the Champions Trophy." The Australian team will be hoping their pace trio regains full fitness as they prepare for the highly anticipated tournament.

New Delhi. Australia's chairman of selectors, George Bailey, has confirmed that Pat Cummins is set to undergo scans on his ankle



# Shraddha Kapoor's

## Post-Workout Glow Will Make Your Day

Shraddha Kapoor, who was last seen in *Stree 2*, recently launched her jewellery brand. But the brand has been facing serious allegations of plagiarising designs from luxury labels. Amid the controversy, the actress was papped outside her gym in Mumbai and won hearts with her unmissable post-workout glow. In a video on Instagram, Shraddha Kapoor can be spotted coming out of her gym in Mumbai. Without posing for the shutterbugs stationed outside the gym, the 37-year-old walked towards her car. But before getting inside her vehicle, she hugged one of her gym mates and bid her adieu. The actress, who has been effortlessly acing her fitness and fashion game, won hearts with her post-gym glow.

For the day, Shraddha wore a front zipper jacket and teamed it with a pair of blue athleisure. She also carried a black arm candy, seemingly for carrying her gym essentials and teamed her look with white comfy shoes. A messy bun hairdo and absolutely no makeup completed her look. She was also seen wearing rimless round glasses and flaunting a radiant glow on her face.

Shraddha's video came amid the controversy going on related to her jewellery brand, Palmonas.

As per a report by Money Control, the jewellery brand has been allegedly plagiarising designs from luxury brands like Cartier and selling demi-fine versions of original pieces. Social media users are claiming that the jewellery available on the co-founder Shraddha's brand is made from materials like sterling silver and stainless steel and coated with 18-carat gold. This sparked widespread criticism online, putting the brand and the actress in a tough spot.

A Reddit user brought up the issue on the discussion platform by comparing pieces from Shraddha's brand with Cartier's original designs. This led to people expressing their disappointment. One user said, "Why can't celebrities use their resources to create original designs? This is just embarrassing." Another commented, "Plagiarism should be rebranded as 'making things affordable.'" However, Shraddha has still not reacted to the same issue.

On the work front, Shraddha last appeared in the sequel of her 2018-released film, *Stree*. In the 2024-released movie, the actress reprised her role as part of the Maddock Horror Comedy Universe and received immense appreciation for her performance even though she had very limited screen time in the film. As per reports, *Stree 2* emerged as the seventh highest-grossing Hindi film of all time, with a worldwide earning of over Rs 8.75 billion. Additionally, she won the 2024 Iconic Gold Award in the category of Best Actress of the Year for her film *Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar*.



## Aamir Khan Promises To Quit Smoking If Junaid Khan, Khushi Kapoor's Loveyapa Is A Hit? Know Here



Aamir Khan has reportedly vowed to quit smoking if his son Junaid Khan's upcoming film, *Loveyapa*, is a hit. As per a Pinkvilla report, the actor has taken a 'mannat' (vow) that he will stop smoking if *Loveyapa* performs well at the box office. However, the actor has not confirmed this claim. Junaid Khan made his debut with Netflix's *Maharaj*. Junaid's performance was greatly appreciated in the film. He will next be seen in *Loveyapa* with Khushi Kapoor. Junaid Khan and Khushi Kapoor are all set to bring a fresh wave of romance to the big screen with their upcoming film *Loveyapa*. Reportedly, if *Loveyapa* becomes a hit, Aamir Khan will quit smoking.

A few days ago, Aamir Khan told ANI that he has seen a rough cut of the film and is confident in the cast's talent. "I liked this film. It is very entertaining. The way our lives have turned out these days due to mobile phones, and the interesting things that happen in our lives because of technology, are shown in the film. All the actors have done a good job," he said. "When I watched the film and saw Khushi, I felt that I was watching Sridevi. Her energy was there, I could see. I am a huge fan of Sridevi," he added.

*Loveyapa* is slated to release on February 7, 2025. Directed by Advait Chandan, who previously helmed *Laal Singh Chaddha*, the romantic comedy is produced by Phantom Studios and AGS Entertainment, with global distribution by Zee Studios. Touted as a heartwarming modern love story, the film promises lively music, stunning visuals, and unforgettable performances.

Reportedly, *Loveyapa* is a remake of the 2022 Tamil hit *Love Today*, which was directed by and starred Pradeep Ranganathan. The film explores how modern relationships are shaped by the omnipresence of technology, a theme that resonates with today's audiences. The first leg of the shoot wrapped in Mumbai, followed by a schedule in Delhi, where Junaid and Khushi filmed key sequences. With their chemistry already sparking excitement, *Loveyapa* is shaping up to be one of the most anticipated releases of the year.

## Pooja Hegde Is All About Positivity And Charm In Her Latest Appearance



Pooja Hegde is all set to rule the year with an impressive lineup of films in her kitty. Despite the busy schedule, the actress keeps fans engaged on social media. Not to mention, her paparazzi appearances are equally enchanting as she never fails to enthrall fans with her natural beauty and casual looks. Having said that, Pooja was recently out and about in the city as she was clicked outside what seemed like a salon. A video emerged online showcasing her stepping out of the salon after a pampering session. Her look made a case for comfy fashion.

With a bright smile on her face, Pooja Hegde looks cheerful as she exits the salon and makes her way towards her home. Wearing a simple white T-shirt and black relaxed pants, her laid-back style proves her knack for fashion which is a blend of style and comfort. Her tan sling bag, pointed-toe flats and minimalist glam sealed the look.

In terms of work, Pooja Hegde is set to reunite with Thalpathy Vijay for the highly anticipated *Thalpathy 69*. The action-packed entertainer is in the filming stage and has been announced to be the Tamil actor's last film before venturing into politics. It is directed by H Vinoth and produced by Venkat K Narayana under the KVN Productions banner. Besides, she also headlines *Retro*, directed by Karthik Subbaraj. The gangster drama which is a blend of nostalgia and innovation features Pooja alongside Suriya in the lead role. Adding to her interesting lineup is the youthful romantic drama *Hai Jawani Toh Ishq Hona Hai*, starring Varun Dhawan. Directed by the legendary David Dhawan, known for his iconic comedy films, the romantic comedy promises to be a delightful cinematic experience, bringing back the masala entertainment that the filmmaker is famous for.

Last but not the least is *Deva*. Featuring Shahid Kapoor as the titular character, the film has Pooja in the role of a journalist. The film also features Kubbra Sait and Pavail Gulati in the key roles. Directed by acclaimed Malayalam filmmaker Rosshan Andrews and produced by Zee Studios and Roy Kapur Films, *Deva* is set to release on January 31. The teaser of the film, released recently, allowed fans a peek into the high-octane action, mesmerising dance sequences and a gripping storyline of the film.

# Raveena Tandon's

## Daughter Rasha, Busy With Azaad Promotions, Greets Paparazzi With A Namaste

Rasha Thadani, Raveena Tandon's daughter, will soon make her acting debut in Abhishek Kapoor's upcoming action adventure film *Azaad*. She will star opposite Aaman Devgan, Ajay Devgn's nephew, in the film. While the recently released trailer promises to transport viewers back to a bygone age, the new pair on screen and fresh story have made moviegoers excited. Recently, Rasha was spotted in town as she stepped out for promotions and looked stunning as usual. Rasha Thadani was spotted by the paparazzi in the city and the actress posed happily for the cameras. Rasha folded her hands and greeted the photographers. The actress was seen in a faded denim dress paired with black bracelets giving an overall rugged look. He left her hair open and went for a minimal glam look.

The film's trailer was launched recently and has sparked excitement among fans. In addition to Aaman and Rasha, the film stars Ajay Devgn and Diana Penty in significant roles. The period drama offers a compelling story set in pre-independence India. It follows the narrative of a skilful horse rider, played by Ajay Devgn, who flees the ruthless English troops. The scenario develops when his horse goes missing, compelling him to embark on a perilous quest with the assistance of a young man, played by Aaman Devgan. Rasha will play a member of a royal family, while Diana Penty will play

Ajay's romantic interest. *Azaad*, directed by Abhishek Kapoor and produced by Ronnie Screwvala and Pragna Kapoor, blends action and emotions. Ahead of the film's release, a dance number from it, *Uyi Amma*, has created a lot of buzz. The music video featuring debutants Rasha Thadani and Aaman Devgan is being loved by the audience. Amit Trivedi created the track, which features

Madhubanti Bagchi's soulful voice and Amitabh Bhattacharya's lyrics. Bosco Leslie Martis choreographed *Uyi Amma*, which beautifully integrates traditional

and contemporary aspects to create a visually spectacular experience. The film, filled with love, devotion and courage, is slated to be released on January 17, and promises to provide a cinematic experience unlike any other.

