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Manipur CM lauds Assam CM Himanta's strong action against poppy farming, drugs

Sanjay Kumar New Delhi, Feb 02: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Sunday hailed his Assam counterpart Himanta Biswa Sarma for tak-



ing tough measures against illegal poppy cultivation and drugs in the state. He said both the states remain resolute in building a future where youth are protected from the shadow of drugs. Big Tax Relief in Budget 2025: No Tax for Incomes Up to ₹12 Lakh! ?? Explore the Impact! Replying to media queries on Sarma's post on X, Singh said at the sideline of a programme in

Imphal West district, "I appreciate the chief minister of Assam. He is taking up counter drugs activities very actively. We have to be united and save the future generations from drugs." Later in a post on X, Singh appreciated his Assam counterpart in taking measures against illicit poppy cultivation. "My deep appreciation for the decisive measures taken in Assam, under the leadership of Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Himantabiswa ji, in addressing the challenges posed by the cultivation of poppy," he said. "We stand together and remain resolute in our shared goal of building a future where every youth of the NE is protected, nurtured, and given the opportunity to thrive free from the shadow of drugs," the Manipur CM posted on X. The Assam CM on Sunday said around 170 bighas (over 56 acres) of poppy farming worth more than ₹27 crore were destroyed in Goalpara district of the state in January this year.

Arvind Kejriwal writes to EC over 'assault on AAP volunteers'

Simmi Kaur Babbar New Delhi, Feb 02: Kejriwal has also demanded that the poll-body appoint independent observers in his New Delhi constituency.

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday wrote to the Election Commission of India, alleging attack on his party workers ahead of the February 5 Delhi assembly election. Arvind Kejriwal has demanded that the poll-body appoint independent observers in his New Delhi constituency. Additionally, he insisted that BJP workers be arrested for their alleged involvement in such incidents and concerned police officers be suspended as well. Big Tax Relief in Budget 2025: No Tax for Incomes Up to ₹12 Lakh! ?? Explore the Impact! "I am writing to express my grave concern over the intimidation and harassment being meted out to our grass-root volunteers in the New Delhi Assembly Constituency at the hands of BJP workers and Delhi Police in the run-up to election day," Kejriwal's letter read. He alleged that a senior volunteer of his party was unlawfully detained and booked under section 126 of BNSS, 2023 at Tilak

Marg Police Station, saying that it was "on the baseless and fictitious grounds that he has previous cases registered against him, while there are



none". Kejriwal alleged that his party volunteer was "brazenly charged" with actions that he did not commit, adding that he was subjected to physical abuse by police officials to the point of fainting. The former Delhi chief minister also cited some other alleged incidents of attack on AAP workers in his

New Delhi constituency. On Saturday, AAP MLA Mohinder Goyal was allegedly assaulted during a public rally in Rohini. The Rithala candidate was interacting with local residents at the time of the incident. The AAP supremo, in his letter to EC, accused the BJP workers of having "gone to the extent of threatening the families of our (AAP) volunteers and even threatening to destroying their homes and shops". He alleged that one "Raju Matiala" a supposed BJP member issued threats to AAP volunteers in the Kali Bari Marg. "We are witnessing a systematic effort to suppress our party's grassroot level workers through unlawful detentions and threats, allegedly at the behest of BJP, to discourage them from participating in election-related activities," Kejriwal wrote. Later in the day, in a press conference, Kejriwal said that the saffron party is "rattled" as their seats are going down and the AAP is heading towards a "historic victory" in the Delhi polls. Additionally, AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh also wrote a letter to the EC on Saturday, alleging that BJP workers assaulted his party's workers and tried to stop them from campaigning in Kejriwal's constituency.

Promised special package but gave 'jhunjhuna'

New Delhi, Feb 02: Congress' Pramod Tiwari expressed concerns over reduced funding for crucial sectors such as education, rural development, and MGNREGA in the budget. After Bihar took centre stage in the Union Budget, Congress Rajya Sabha MP Pramod Tiwari came down hard on the Central government and said that the state was promised a special package but received only a "Jhunjhuna". Speaking to ANI, Tiwari expressed concerns over reduced funding for crucial sectors such as education, rural development, and MGNREGA in the budget and questioned the government's commitment to its "Viksit Bharat" vision. Big Tax Relief in Budget 2025: No Tax for Incomes Up to ₹12 Lakh! ?? Explore the Impact! "The government made income up to ₹12 lakhs tax-free but the same person will have to pay GST. The amount that they have waived off - twice that amount people need to pay one way or another. They have reduced the education budget and then will talk about Viksit Bharat," he said. "They have cut short the budget for rural development and MGNREGA. People are talking about Bihar - a special package was promised but the government gave a 'jhunjhuna,' the Congress leader added.

PM Modi fully supported tax cut idea, took time to convince bureaucrats: FM Nirmala Sitharaman

Navdeep Singh Sahni New Delhi, Feb 02: In her budget

speech on Saturday, Nirmala Sitharaman announced that no income tax would be payable up to an income of ₹12 lakh annually under the new regime. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was fully behind the idea of cutting taxes, but it took time to convince the bureaucrats, reported. "...The PM was very clear that he wants to do something. It is for ministry to have had the comfort level and then go with the proposal. So, the more work that was needed, was needed for convincing the board that efficiency in collection and honest taxpayers' voice... all this was work here in the ministry, not so much for the PM..." Nirmala Sitharaman told news agency

PTI in an interview. Big Tax Relief in Budget 2025: No Tax for Incomes Up to ₹12 Lakh! ?? Explore the Impact! She



said that, like Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his government has always listened to the voices of people from different sectors. "...He (PM Modi) meets them, interacts with them, gets their inputs... just as he would also talk with

the most deprived sections or let's say the tribals, particularly the vulnerable tribal groups... just as Rashtrapati ji was very keen on addressing their problems, PM also listens to all sections... So, I am very happy to be part of this government, which literally hears the voice and responds." In the Union Budget 2025-26 presented on Saturday, Nirmala Sitharaman announced that no income tax would be payable up to income of ₹12 lakh annually. "To taxpayers up to ₹12 lakh of normal income (other than special rate income such as capital gains) tax rebate is being provided in addition to the benefit due to slab rate reduction in such a manner that there is no tax payable by them," Sitharaman said in the Parliament. Her announcement, a big relief to the middle class, was met by a loud thumping of the desks by the treasury benches led by PM Narendra Modi.

Faizabad MP breaks into tears over Dalit woman's 'murder' in Ayodhya

ST Correspondent Lucknow, Feb 02: Ayodhya (Faizabad) MP Awadhesh Prasad was seen weeping in front of reporters after a naked body of a 22-year-old Dalit woman was found in a desolate canal near her village in the Uttar Pradesh city. The deceased's family has alleged that their daughter, who had been missing, was murdered, a news agency PTI report said. They also claimed that their eyes were missing and that her body had deep wounds and fractures. Big Tax Relief in Budget 2025: No Tax for Incomes Up to ₹12 Lakh! ?? Explore the Impact! Ayodhya MP Awadhesh Prasad, who came to know of this incident, broke down in front of reporters and expressed his grief. In the video which surfaced online,



fellow colleagues are seen consoling Prasad saying, "You will fight for her, get her justice". Meaningful, an emotional and outraged Prasad says, "Let me to go Delhi, to Lok Sabha. I will keep the matter in front of (PM) Modi and if we don't get justice, then I will resign." He weeps that he couldn't save the life of the girl. "What will history say? How did this happen to the girl child?" he asks. Again, the people sitting next to him console him saying that Prasad has to get justice for the deceased. "This is a very serious issue, this has become the biggest matter," they are heard saying in the video. The Ayodhya MP is seen calling out the name of God, "Where are you Lord Ram, where are you mother Sita?" He once again reiterates that he will go to Delhi and resign from his post, to which, his colleagues respond that you have been made MP to fight for the people. So you will fight and get justice, they say and give Prasad a tissue to wipe off his tears. The deceased's family said that the woman had been missing since Thursday night. Following which, they launched a search operation and her brother-in-law found her body in a small canal, just about 500 metres away from their village on Saturday morning. Her hands and legs were tied with ropes and her body had several deep cuts, the family claimed. Villagers who draped and shifted the body noticed that one of her legs was fractured, whole her elder sister and two other women fainted at the sight of the horrific state of the corpse.

No mention of Maharashtra in Union budget is 'outright insult': Aaditya Thackeray

Tejinder Kaur Babbar Mumbai, Feb. 02: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray there was no mention of Maharashtra which contributes the highest tax revenue in the budget speech, which was an insult to the state.

In a post on X, Thackeray also expressed disappointment about the budget being silent on the demand of a new airport for Pune, and claimed that the BJP government has always neglected Maharashtra since 2014. While the Bharatiya Janata Party speaks of infrastructure growth, it is actually creating a contractor-based economy where favourite contractors get contracts and construct "horrible" roads like Mumbai-Goa, Mumbai-Nashik and Mumbai-Ahmedabad highways, Thackeray said. The BJP spoke of abolition of income tax between 2012 to 2014, and now its government is becoming more liberal and "negotiating" with tax payers on slabs and rebates but with a lot of conditions and

hidden clauses, he said. This was due to the power of citizens that brought the saffron party's Lok Sabha tally down to 240 after it had taken the country for granted, Thackeray said, referring to the income tax cuts in the budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. But it did not deal with the issue of unemployment which is at its peak, the Sena (UBT) leader said. "Not a single mention of Maharashtra is an outright insult to the state of Maharashtra, the state that contributes the highest taxes, including one of the highest GST consistently," Thackeray said in his reaction. The state doesn't get its due share of Goods and Services Tax in time, nor does it get funds for development, he said, accusing the BJP of "consistently neglecting" Maharashtra in all the budgets since 2014. "Are we getting punished for electing the BJP's 100-plus MLAs in all three state elections (from 2014 to

2024)? What is our sin that we are treated so badly by the BJP and its Union government?" the former state minister asked. He was very happy for Bihar, Thackeray



quipped. "I am hoping the state (Bihar) has already got the Rs 1.25 lakh crore package promised by BJP in 2015, and then the big package the BJP promised in 2024. "I wonder if the current announcements truly fulfil the needs of the people of Bihar, and if this is not a deviation from

the ideology of the need for one nation, one poll, by the party that proposed it," he added. While the finance minister spoke about investment in 120 new airports and mentioned Patna airport, the budget was silent about the long-pending demand of a new airport for Pune even though Pune MP Murlidhar Mohol is the Minister of State for Civil Aviation, Thackeray noted. He also sought to know about the airports which were 'started and shut down' in the last ten years. The capital expenditure of Rs 11.1 lakh crore was proposed in the last year's budget but Rs 10.1 lakh crore were actually spent, and now the Narendra Modi government has proposed a capex of Rs 11.21 lakh crore, the Sena (UBT) leader said. The people still face inflation when they buy staples like onion, tomato and potato, and what solution the government was proposing to make these items affordable without reducing farmers' incomes, he asked.

'UP government has become synonymous with atrocities on Dalits': Priyanka Gandhi

Naresh Malhotra New Delhi, Feb 02: Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra slammed BJP's 'Jungle Raj,' saying Dalits, tribals, backward, and poor are unheard, after a Dalit girl's murder in Ayodhya.

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi on Sunday slammed the BJP-led Uttar Pradesh government after the body of a Dalit girl was found murdered in a field in Ayodhya. She stated that in the "BJP's Jungle Raj," no one listens to the "cries of Dalits, tribals, backward and poor." "The kind of barbarism that was meted out to a Dalit girl who had gone to listen to the Bhagwat Katha in Ayodhya would send shivers down the spine of any human being. Such cruel incidents shame the entire humanity," Priyanka Gandhi said in a post on X (formerly Twitter). Big Tax Relief in Budget 2025: No Tax for Incomes Up to ₹12 Lakh! ?? Explore the Impact! "The girl was missing for three days but the police did nothing. In the BJP's Jungle Raj, no one is there to listen to the cries of Dalits, tribals, backward and poor. The UP government has become synonymous with atrocities on Dalits. I demand that strict action be taken against those

guilty of atrocities as well as the responsible policemen and officers," she added. Two men, enraged over mother's affair, kill her lover, fling his intestines in air: Report Meanwhile,



Samajwadi Party MP Awadhesh Prasad on Sunday broke down and wept at a press conference after the unclothed body of a Dalit girl was found in a village in Uttar Pradesh. He lashed out at the state government terming it an "extremely sad and inhuman" crime. Addressing a press

conference, Prasad broke down and said that if justice is not served, he would resign from the Lok Sabha. He was seen being consoled by fellow panellists at the press conference. Furthermore, Uttar Pradesh Police said that the body of the girl was found in a field this morning. "On 31st January 2025, information was received at Darshan Nagar Chowki that a girl was asleep with her sister on the night of 30th January but the girl went missing when the sister woke up next morning. She informed the Police about the same. Police registered a case and formed two teams to look for the girl," Ayodhya SSP Raj Karan Nayyar told. "The body of the girl was found in a field this morning. Senior officials and the Forensics team reached the spot and collected scientific evidence. Prima facie, it seems that the murder did not happen on the spot, the girl was murdered somewhere else and her body was disposed of there," he added. Meanwhile, Ayodhya SSP Rajkaran Nayyar further informed that police have detained a suspect for questioning and formed special teams to probe the case. "Three teams have been formed as of now, one suspect has been taken into custody and is being questioned.

Union Budget is biased, completely ignored TN, claims CM Stalin

New Delhi, Feb.02: The Union Budget for 2025-2026 was 'biased' in completely ignoring Tamil Nadu and betrayed the expectation of the people, Chief Minister



M K Stalin said on Saturday. Despite putting forth several demands to it, the Centre did not seem to have the heart to confirm atleast one demand and announce it in the Budget, he said. "The demands are numerous ... highways and railway projects, Coimbatore and Madurai Metro Rail projects. Why nothing has been given? What is stopping you?" Stalin asked in a post on the

social media platform X. Terming the Union Budget as 'prejudiced' in so far as Tamil Nadu was concerned, the Chief Minister said even the name Tamil Nadu was not mentioned. Tamil Nadu occupied a prominent place in all the reports of the Union Government including the Economic Survey, Ranking of Higher Education Institutions, and the NITI Aayog report, and they all praised the state's activities. "But why is Tamil Nadu completely ignored this year in the Budget?" Stalin, who is president of DMK, asked. "Should not the financial allocation reflect at least a small part of the interest shown by the Centre in imposing its language policy on Tamil Nadu much against the state's wishes?" the Chief Minister asked in the post. He argued that a reduction in central funding increased the financial burden on the state government. The Centre has already imposed various restrictions on Tamil Nadu alone. "The BJP's charade of deceiving the people of India, as usual, through empty rhetoric and deceptive overtones, continues.

## NEWS BOX

### Vengaivayal water contamination case: Special court adjourns plea against CB-CID chargesheet to February 3

**PUDUKKOTTAI.** The special court for trial of cases under the SC/ST (PoA) Act on Saturday adjourned the hearing on a petition challenging the CB-CID's chargesheet in the Vengaivayal water contamination case until February 3.

The chargesheet submitted last month by the CB-CID to the special court in the December 2022 case held three residents responsible for mixing faecal matter in the village overhead tank supplying potable water to the locality. Kanagaraj, based on whose complaint the case was registered, recently filed a petition seeking the court not to accept the chargesheet as he argued that the CB-CID had submitted it without informing him and without recording his statement. He also said that he was not informed of the removal of charges under the SC/ST (PoA) Act against the accused in the case. During the hearing on Saturday afternoon, senior advocate PP Mohan, representing Kanagaraj, argued before court that the CB-CID was obligated to provide a free copy of the chargesheet to the complainant. To this, public prosecutor KN Kumar appearing for the CB-CID replied that the complainant failed to appear before the investigating agency for questioning despite multiple summons having been issued to him. Meanwhile, the protest by a section of residents of Vengaivayal against the CB-CID charge sheet, which was suspended for two days over the death of an elderly woman villager, resumed on Saturday.

### Sugarcane farmers urge TN government for subsidy scheme amid rising labour costs

**DHARMAPURI.** Sugarcane farmers in the district are distressed by increasing labour costs and have urged the state government to implement a special subsidy scheme that would provide them assistance during harvest season. Dharmapuri was once a major producer of sugarcane, but over the years, erratic climatic patterns, water shortage and rising labour costs have resulted in a decline of cultivation area. In 2024, sugarcane was planned to be cultivated in 2,800 hectares, but only 878 hectares saw actual produce. Farmers attribute this decline to a lack of profits which arises out of limited labour and increasing costs. The Tamil Nadu Vivasayil Sangam state president told, "Nearly two decades ago, the state government set up two mills here, owing to the high production. But now, the produce is barely enough to run one mill. A tonne of sugarcane gives us about Rs 3,750, but we lose over Rs 2,000 to labour charges. Therefore, farmers are choosing alternative crops," he said. Another farmer, R Tamilselvan from Palacode said, "It is difficult to find labourers. As the harvesting period is seasonal, labourers seek other employment in off seasons. Labourers who are willing to work will require high wages. We cannot afford this without losing out on profits. Either the prices of sugarcane must be increased to at least Rs 5,000 per tonne or the mills must pay some assistance for tackling labour charges." When TNIE spoke to the agriculture department, they said, "The farmer's demand has been forwarded to the state government. Now it is up to them."

### Fishlings released in Gundlakamma Reservoir to mark Meenotsavam

**GUNTUR.** Meenotsavam (fishermen festival) was held at Gundlakamma Reservoir in Bapatla district on Saturday. Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar and Social Welfare Minister Dola Bala Veeranjanya Swamy participated in the event and released 20 lakh fishlings into the reservoir, marking the occasion. The local fishing community also attended, emphasising the project's significance to their livelihoods.

During the event, the ministers criticised the handling of the Gundlakamma project by the previous YSR Congress Party (YSRC) government, claiming that it suffered severe damage over the past five years due to breaches in the project gates and illegal sand mining. They stated that these issues led to substantial financial losses. Both the



ministers also assured the displaced individuals from the project that they would receive land for housing soon. They highlighted the Coalition government's commitment to the welfare of farmers, referencing past actions during the Tungabhadra floods in Kurnoor.

## 'Stringent' protocol for exams leaves principals puzzled

**Mumbai.** A workshop held by the officials in suburban Mumbai to instruct schools and junior colleges about the conduct of SSC and HSC board exams has puzzled a few principals. Not allowing trustees and management officials in the exam centre premises and barring phones at the entrance of the exam centres were some of the instructions. Some of them, such as sealing the xerox machines inside the institute premises during examinations and allowing cellphones only to the chief and deputy conductors, though already existed, are being strictly imposed now.

While smartwatches were never permitted in the exam premises, this year colleges have been asked to be extra cautious about them and other gadgets. Some of the principals, who are vigilant about the examination process, are miffed with a few directives.

While copy-mukt abhiyaan was implemented even last year, the inclusion of the drive in the chief minister's 100-day plan for the school education department has kept officials and schools and colleges on their toes alike. A department official said that there are centres where the trustees and management representatives walk into the exam block. "It also distracts the students writing the exams. We do not want to create any inconvenience to the students. We have also informed the sitting squads to not enter the exam blocks," said the official, adding that if they want to ensure zero



copying cases, then strict measures will have to be implemented. A principal, however, said that many junior colleges are attached to degree colleges, and though degree lectures are suspended during board exams to avoid overcrowding, the college office functions as usual. "Some of the instructions are very stringent. We cannot tell our trustees to not enter the premises. Xerox machines in the vicinity were always shut down by the police, but this year the board is also emphasising sealing all the xerox machines on the college premises," said the principal. Mumbai: A workshop held by the officials in suburban Mumbai to instruct schools and junior colleges about the conduct of SSC and HSC board exams has puzzled a few principals. Not allowing trustees and management officials in the exam centre premises and barring phones at the entrance of the exam centres were some of

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## Three killed, one critical after ambulance carrying dead body hits tipper

**BHADRAK/BALASORE.** In a tragic incident, three persons including two members of a family were killed and another sustained critical injuries after the ambulance in which they were taking the body of a deceased kin home from Cuttack, hit a dumper near Maitapur Chowk on NH-16 in Bhadrak, on Saturday. The victims have been identified as 33-year-old Himansu Jena and his brother-in-law Sudhanshu Dhal of Palasia village in Bhograi, and the ambulance driver Dilip Singh. Jena's mother Sabitri, who sustained critical injuries in the mishap, was initially taken to Bhadrak district headquarters hospital and later shifted to SCB MCH after her condition deteriorated. As per sources, Jena's father Dibakar, a TB patient,



was undergoing treatment at SCB medical college and hospital in Cuttack. He reportedly lost his life while undergoing treatment on Friday night. The family was taking his body home when the incident took place during the early morning hours of the day. Owing to dense

fog, the ambulance driver was reportedly unable to see clearly and as a result, hit the dumper in front of him. Jena, Dhal and the driver were killed on the spot. On being informed, Bhadrak police reached the spot and seized the bodies for postmortem. Meanwhile, Sabitri was rushed to the hospital. Devastated after the incident, Jena's wife Mily said her husband had last called her on Friday night to inform her of Dibakar's death. "My husband said they are returning home and would reach in the morning. He was the sole breadwinner of the family. I have three children to take care of. I don't know what I am going to do now," said an inconsolable Mily. Jena is survived by three children besides his wife.

### Guntur SP launches new system to enhance safety of auto users

**GUNTUR.** In a move to enhance safety and accountability for auto rickshaws, Guntur Superintendent of Police (SP) Sathish Kumar launched a traffic police number system on Saturday. This initiative aims to maintain a database of auto rickshaws, ensuring safer travel for commuters.

Under the system, auto drivers and owners must submit vehicle details, Aadhaar cards, driving licenses, and passport-sized photographs to obtain a unique traffic police number. Each auto will display a sticker with the number and a unique QR code, allowing authorities to track vehicles efficiently. Superintendent Kumar also announced that displaying these numbers will be mandatory from February 28. The system will assist in resolving issues like lost items, auto theft, or criminal activities, as well as identifying traffic violations through CCTV monitoring.



Sathish Kumar highlighted that the unique number, similar to an Aadhaar ID, ensures traceability and accountability. Auto drivers were urged to cooperate with the police to prevent crime and improve traffic management. The SP also inspected the upgraded East Traffic Police Station, reviewed staff working conditions, and discussed the need for traffic equipment and measures to address city traffic issues. Traffic DSP Ramesh, East Traffic CI (Circle Inspector) Ashok Kumar, SIs Ravindra Babu, Srihari, Sambasivarao Naik, and other officials were present.

## New tax regime wins praise from experts

**HYDERABAD.** The new tax regime introduced in the Union Budget on Saturday has received positive reactions from professionals, business owners and financial experts alike.

Financial analysts noted that the Budget focused on growth and development, marking a step forward from previous Budgets. Experts welcomed the relief to the middle class but emphasised that the new tax codes, expected to be released next week, would offer further clarity to taxpayers.

Raghuram Kuchimanchi, financial expert and partner, assurance & advisory, Sudit K Parekh & Co. LLP, highlighted that the Budget had significantly eased the tax burden on the middle class by raising the tax rebate threshold from Rs 7 lakh to Rs 12 lakh. Speaking to , Raghuram explained, "Taxpayers with an annual income of up to Rs 12.75 lakh will not be required to pay any tax, as their liability becomes nil due to the tax rebate. This takes into account the standard deduction of Rs 75,000. Taxpayers earning more than Rs 12.75 lakh will benefit from the new tax slab adjustments. In effect, a taxpayer in the new regime with an income of Rs 12 lakh will save Rs 80,000 in taxes. Those earning Rs 16 lakh will save Rs 50,000, while individuals making over Rs 24 lakh annually will save Rs 1.1 lakh."

Dr Dinesh Chandrasekar, chief strategy



officer and country head of Centific AI, said, "The new tax regime simplifies taxation by raising the tax-free income limit to Rs 12.75 lakh. This increases disposable income while reducing compliance burdens. By eliminating complex exemptions, this structure enables people to focus on investment choices based on returns rather than tax benefits.

With more liquidity, taxpayers can explore diverse financial instruments such as mutual funds, stocks and retirement plans, ensuring long-term wealth creation. While the new regime offers flexibility, people must proactively invest in assets aligned with their financial goals, balancing immediate savings with future security. "With no I-T burden for income levels up to Rs 12.75 lakh, a major section of the middle class has reason to cheer. However, the key question is whether these changes will boost sagging consumption and

improve savings. Rising prices, high borrowing costs and stagnating incomes have already impacted India's middle class. The increased disposable income could boost consumption and investment, assuming favourable conditions like inflation, interest rates and employment. While tax relief alone does not determine economic stability, this strengthens financial resilience. Hopefully, the govt will continue in this direction. Tax harmonisation was long overdue and is now being addressed.

In a country with limited social security, the government's move to lower tax slabs is commendable. Eliminating cross-taxation simplifies filing and reduces tax liability. Given the government's revenue from indirect taxes like fuel, it was only a matter of time before good governance eased the direct tax burden on the middle class. These reductions will enhance quality of life, boost savings and drive economic benefits by increasing consumer spending and investment. The Budget promising, with a strong focus on the welfare of the poor, youth and women.

The tax relief is a major benefit for the middle class. The proposed Rs 10,000 crore 'Fund of Funds' is a boost for startups, while extended tax exemptions until 2030 encourage business

## Bengaluru: 124 NCC cadets given grand welcome at KSR Railway Station

**BENGALURU.** A total of 124 National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets from the Karnataka and Goa Directorate, who won the prestigious Prime Minister's Banner at the Republic Day Camp 2025 (RDC-2025), were given a grand welcome at KSR Railway Station on Saturday morning around 6 am. Cadets arrived at Bengaluru through train from Delhi, and were welcomed with band and Deputy Director General of NCC Directorate Karnataka and Goa, Air Commodore SB Arun Kumar, along with other officials.

Emotional parents hugged their children, some shedding tears of joy at their victory.

From KSR Railway Station to Jalahalli, the cadets participated in a victory parade in open vehicles. They will be staying in Jalahalli for next few days for the de-kitting camp. The officials said that after five years, the Karnataka and Goa Directorate have won this prestigious award.

Speaking to Lisha DS, a third-year engineering student from Mangaluru and a cadet of the 6 KAR Naval Unit, expressed her happiness, saying that reaching the RDC was an achievement. After seven training camps, she was part for the RDC in Delhi. She participated in the Best Cadet Competition, which included five events:



writing, group discussion, firing, drill, and an interview, the senior officers from the Army and other distinguished officers provided training during the camp. She expressed her gratitude to the Karnataka NCC Directorate for their support.

### Madras HC dismisses Flipkart owners' petitions over FDI violations, issues of foreign investments

**CHENNAI.** The Madras High Court has dismissed the petitions filed by the owners of the e-commerce platform Flipkart challenging the complaint and the notices issued by the Enforcement Directorate over violations of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) and the Transfer or Issue of Security by a Person Resident Outside India Regulations (TISPRO) over receiving foreign direct investments (FDI) and issuing of equity shares.

The court stated that the petitioners - Sachin Bansal and Binny Bansal - had not availed the alternative remedy available before the adjudicating authority of ED as the ground for dismissing the petitions. Under FEMA, the court said that remedy is not available just before the civil court but also before the constitutional court, namely the high court, under section 35 of the Act.

Observing that any order passed by the adjudicating authority in a proceeding initiated under section 16 is liable to be scrutinised by the high court in a second appeal filed by the aggrieved party, Justice S Sounthar, however, reasoned that the remedy before the high court by way of appeal on question of law cannot be treated as "ineffective" remedy by no stretch of imagination.

"Hence I am not inclined to exercise my discretionary jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution, especially when the petitioners failed to make out a case that they come under one of the exceptions to the general rule regarding availability of alternative remedy," the judge said in the order. The judge also did not agree with the contentions of the petitioners on the point of delay in issuing notice (in 2021) even though the alleged violations occurred in 2009-11. The judge granted liberty to the petitioners to file their explanations/objections before the adjudicating authority within 30 days. The ED had registered the complaint against Flipkart owners under sections 6 (3)(b)/r/w section.

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# Legacy waste at Bandhwari will be cleared by May

Gurgaon: Legacy waste at Bandhwari will be cleared by the end of May, chief secretary Vivek Joshi said after reviewing development projects in the city on Saturday. Construction and demolition (C&D) waste will also be removed from the Leisure Valley ground in Sector 29 and the Sector 10 auto market site in the next two months, he said, adding that MCG had issued a tender for its transportation.

Municipal commissioner Ashok Garg, also at the meeting, said work had already been assigned to two agencies to clear the site.

Joshi was speaking after a meeting over development projects with officials. Meetings were also held in Nov and Dec last year to accelerate development projects in the city, which according to Joshi, were a priority for the state and central govt. Chief minister Nayab Singh Saini was monitoring these projects, the chief secretary said, adding that Gurgaon's global identity made it a



significant pillar of the state's economic progress. Irregularities in these development works will not be tolerated. If a contractor or a private company

associated with a govt department does not meet its standards, action will be taken," Joshi said, adding that a separate meeting will be held at headquarters level

on issues related to land acquisition. GMDA principal advisor DS Dhesi, who also attended the meeting, discussed with NHA officials the progress of Hero Honda flyover's renovation project. The officials concerned were instructed to complete the work as soon as possible.

GMDA CEO Shyamal Misra said the work on the upgradation of the Southern Peripheral Road (SPR) was being undertaken, with a tender for appointing a consultant for preparation of a detailed project report for the 5.5 km signal-free elevated corridor between Vatika Chowk and NH-48 under technical evaluation.

To resolve the waterlogging issue at Narsingpur, the process of constructing a new drain from the lowest point of waterlogging to the Badshapur drain was underway, Mishra said, adding that discussions were underway with the district administration to obtain land for the same.

## News box

### With 50% UP's investments, Noida is top pick of realtors

Ghaziabad. State's real estate sector saw significant growth last year with 259 projects registered with UP-Rera promising a total investment of Rs 45,000 crore. While NCR cities accounted for 34% of the total projects registered, Noida emerged as the primary investment destination — cornering 46% of the total investment.

The Noida International Airport, set to see flight operations from April, is seen as a major real estate driver in the region. An extensive network of roads, railways, and new metro and rapid rail corridors planned around the airport are likely to improve connectivity and stimulate economic growth. This has propelled property demand in the area. Rera data shows the 51 projects registered in the city last year have brought in an investment of Rs 20,929 crore. In 2023, nearly 100 projects were registered in the city. At 61, the highest number of properties were registered in Lucknow last year. Together, the projects offer 53,655 units and an investment of Rs 6,150 crore. "Previously, we have seen that almost 50% of the real estate projects were being launched in Noida. The data for 2024 seems to change that. Lucknow now leads in the state in terms of the number of new launches. But Noida continues to lead in terms of the number of units, project area, and overall investment," an official from UP Rera said. "The higher number of units (1.1 lakh units) with larger project area (1,35,500 sqm) and investment in Noida is attributable to the explosion of high-rise buildings in the city, driven by demand from the higher middle class," he said. Ghaziabad occupies the third position after Lucknow and GB Nagar in terms of area and units. UP Rera chairman Sanjay Bhosreddy told TOI this was the highest number of projects to be registered in one year since the Authority's inception. A total of 197 projects were registered in 2023 and 215 in 2022. "Real estate is gaining pace because of the forward-looking policies of the govt. We are now witnessing the preference of the people for apartments in small and medium cities also, with the development of educational, health, employment and infrastructure facilities outside the metropolitan cities," Bhosreddy said.

### Truck with LPG cylinders on fire, houses & cars damaged



Ghaziabad: A massive fire broke out in a truck loaded with around 100 gas cylinders in the Bhopura area on Delhi-Wazirabad Road early Saturday morning, leading to a series of powerful explosions that damaged at least two houses and three cars in the vicinity.

Firemen and eight engines took nearly 1.5 hours to control the blaze. One personnel was injured during the firefighting operations. Chief fire officer (CFO) Rahul Pal stated that the Sahibabad fire station was alerted about the incident around 4.30 am, prompting the deployment of eight fire tenders. "We had to evacuate the area and cordon it off as cylinder splinters were flying everywhere. Despite the risk, our personnel doused the fire in 1.5 hours," he said. The fire spread to two houses, three cars, and a motorcycle. While no casualties were reported, Pal confirmed that one firefighter was injured. Officials are yet to determine the exact cause of the fire. A senior official said that the truck was heading to Rampur and had over 100 cooking gas cylinders on board. The driver had refilled them before stopping in Bhopura to visit his family.

Many residents said that the explosions were so powerful they could be heard several kilometres away, causing panic in the area. As a precaution, police evacuated nearby homes while fire crews battled the blaze.

A resident described the chaos, stating that the blasts shattered car windows, terrace grills, and shop shutters. "We woke up to the deafening noise and rushed out of our house," he said.

### 3 lure man via dating app, hold him hostage and extort 1.4 lakh



Ghaziabad. Three men were arrested today for allegedly extorting Rs 1.4 lakh from a man they lured through a dating app. The suspects reportedly invited the man for a meetup, then held him hostage and forced him to undress while they recorded him. When the victim protested, he was physically assaulted. They also threatened to kill him. The perpetrators coerced him into making six online transactions amounting to Rs 1.4 lakh and threatened to release the video. Later, the victim was able to reverse two transactions totalling Rs 80,000. A case was reported at Madhuban Bapudhan police station. Rinku (37), Ajay (21) and Shubham (25) were arrested near Bunker Mart. Their mobile phones were seized and Rs 9,042 was recovered from them, said Swatantra Kumar, Kavinagar ACP. During investigation, the suspects said they would lure people on Grindr and called them to meet in person. They would then attack the targets, take obscene videos of them, and threaten to kill them. They would then extort money from them. Based on a complaint, police took action and used local intelligence to trace the suspects. "On investigation, it was found that Rinku, the gang's leader, was previously implicated in a similar case in Nandgram," Kumar said.

### Firm reinstates housekeeping & security after residents protest

Noida. Residents at Jaypee Greens Kosmos staged a massive protest after the society's maintenance agency, a subsidiary of the builder Jaiprakash Associates Limited, briefly withdrew its security and housekeeping personnel on Wednesday morning. In a letter dated Nov 22, Jaiprakash Associates Limited-Facility Management Group (JAL-FMG), which has managed the society's maintenance

#### NAME CHANGE

It is for general information that I, SHIV BHAGWAN S/O HET RAM R/O House No. 843, Gali No. 53, Lekhu Nagar Tri Nagar, Onkar Nagar S/O, North West Delhi, Delhi-110035, declare that name of mine and my wife have been wrongly written as SHIV BHAGWAN SHARMA and POOJA SHARMA in my minor daughter namely DISHIKA SHARMA aged 14 years in her School Record and her Birth Certificate Registration No. MCDOLIR-0110-004543621. The actual name of mine and my wife are SHIV BHAGWAN and POOJA JAL respectively.

#### NAME CHANGE

I, ANVIT KUMAR S/O: OMBIR R/O Rori, P.O: Govindpur, DIST: Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh - 201201. Have changed the name of my minor son Yash Kumar aged 12 years and he shall hereafter be known as Shiva Tanwar.

#### NAME CHANGE

I, AJEEZ MALIK S/O R/O B-54 MAIN SHAJANAR GARDEN SAHIBABAD GHAZIABAD UTTAR PRADESH-201005 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO AZIZ MALIK

#### NAME CHANGE

I, Praveen S/O Raj Kumar Gupta R/O House No. -19594 West Frigate pura Rohasth Nagar Shahdara Delhi-110032. Have changed my name to Praveen Kumar Gupta for all future purposes.

#### NAME CHANGE

I, Mukesh Chaudhary W/o Ajmer Singh Lohan R/O B-533-34, Sector -17, Rohini Delhi -110089 have changed my name from Mukesh Chaudhary to Mukesh Lohan for all future purposes.

#### NAME CHANGE

I, Ajmer Singh S/O Ajeet Singh R/O B-533-34, Sector -17, Rohini Delhi -110089 have changed my name from Ajmer Singh to Ajmer Singh Lohan for all future purposes.

#### PUBLIC NOTICE

It is for general information that I Mahendra Kumar Bhaskar S/O Sukhdeva Ram Bhaskar, R/O Permanent Address Rulyana Mali, Rulyana Mali, Sikar, Rajasthan-332041, Present address- Police Gater no 85/1 Ground floor, Block -CA, Tagore Garden, West Delhi, Delhi-110027, declare that name of my wife has been wrongly written as Chandri Devi in my minor son namely Chirag Bhaskar aged 8 years in his birth certificate no 0811100708000 540006/2017. The actual name of my wife is Chandri, which may be amended accordingly.

#### PUBLIC NOTICE

It is for general information that I Anita Rani W/O Anil Kumar, R/O 305, E-Block, Tagore Garden Extension, Tagore Garden, West Delhi, Delhi-110027, declare that name of mine has been wrongly written as Bhumika in my minor daughter namely Komal aged 14 years in her birth certificate no MCDOLIR-2210-004093778. The actual name of mine is Anita Rani, which may be amended accordingly.

#### NAME CHANGE

I, hitherto known as INDU KUMARI D/o Sh. GURDEV SHARMA, House No H-48, Seelampur Delhi 110053 have changed my name, and shall hereafter be known as INDU SHARMA. I also declare that INDU KUMARI and INDU SHARMA both are one and the same person. It is certified that I have complied with the other legal requirement in this connection INDU KUMARI

#### PUBLIC NOTICE

It is for general information that I Narbada Devi Negi W/O Late Rai Singh Negi R/O H.No.6, Gali -1, Ultranchal Enclave, Kamal Pur, Majra Burari, Delhi-110064, declare that name of mine has been wrongly written as Narba Devi alias Narbada Singh in my husband Service Record. The actual name of mine is Narbada Devi Negi, which may be amended accordingly.

#### PUBLIC NOTICE

The general public is hereby informed that Mrs. Om Wali is the owner of Plot No. B-54, measuring 100 sq. yards, out of a total area of 200 sq. yards, from Kharsa No. 166, situated in the Village Asalatpur Khadar, Colony known as Chanakya Place, New Delhi. The entire property's original owners were Mr. Dalip Singh, Mr. Dalpat Singh, Mr. Hari Singh, Mr. Manji Ram, Mr. Kura Mat, Mr. Sukbir Singh, Mr. Virender Singh, and Mr. Mir Singh. They executed a notarized General Power of Attorney, Agreement to Sell, and Will dated 19.12.1980 in favor of Mrs. Dalip Singh. Subsequently, Mrs. Davinder Kaur executed a notarized General Power of Attorney, Agreement to Sell, and Will dated 19.12.1980 in favor of Mr. Ramji Lal. Thereafter, Mr. Ramji Lal executed a notarized General Power of Attorney, Agreement to Sell, and Will dated 14.02.2005 in favor of Mrs. Om Wali. Mrs. Om Wali will be now executed a Sale Deed in her own name. The property is being done financed by Anand Rathi Global Finance Ltd., Branch A-254, Defence Colony, Delhi-110024. Any person found in possession of aforesaid property and any objection, then kindly contact the undersigned along with original property document, within 15 days from date of this notice on below address, failing which, the claim as per aforesaid sale deed shall be treated as null and void in respect of the subject property.

#### NAME CHANGE

I, MOHD. ISRAEL S/O MOHD. SHAFI, R/O H.No C-37 MIRZA WALI GALI NO-4 CHAUHAN BANAR, NEW SEELAMPUR, DELHI 110053, DO HEREBY DECLARE THAT I HAVE CHANGED MY NAME AND SHALL WILL BE KNOWN MOHD. HAMID IN FUTURE. I ALSO DECLARE THAT MOHD ISRAEL AND MOHD HAMID ARE THE SAME AND ONE PERSON. It is certified that I have complied with other legal requirement in this connection. MOHD. ISRAEL

#### NAME CHANGE

It is for general information that I, SHIV BHAGWAN S/O HET RAM R/O House No. 843, Gali No. 53, Lekhu Nagar Tri Nagar, Onkar Nagar S/O, North West Delhi, Delhi-110035, declare that name of mine and my wife have been wrongly written as SHIV BHAGWAN SHARMA and POOJA SHARMA in my minor daughter namely DISHIKA SHARMA aged 14 years in her School Record and her Birth Certificate Registration No. MCDOLIR-0110-004543621. The actual name of mine and my wife are SHIV BHAGWAN and POOJA JAL respectively.

#### NAME CHANGE

I, PRADEEP PAL S/O RAM VILASH PAL R/O H. No. 62, Gali No. 1, Bhagat Vihar, Karawal Nagar, North East Delhi, Delhi - 110094, have changed the name of my minor Son ABHIMANYU alias PRERIT PAL, aged 8 years and he shall hereafter be known as PRERIT PAL.

#### NAME CHANGE

I, S.K. MOSTAFA S/O SHEIKH SURABUDDIN R/O NEAR JHULE LAL MANDIR 5/1 NEHRU NAGAR (SOUTH DELHI) PO: SRINIWASPURI SOUTH DELHI-110065 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO SHEIKH MOSTAFA

#### NAME CHANGE

I, S.K. MOSTAFA S/O SHEIKH SURABUDDIN R/O NEAR JHULE LAL MANDIR 5/1 NEHRU NAGAR (SOUTH DELHI) PO: SRINIWASPURI SOUTH DELHI-110065 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO SHEIKH MOSTAFA

#### NAME CHANGE

I, SATISH SINGH S/O PHOOL SINGH R/O Chila Village, Mayur Vihar Phase-1, East Delhi 110091, I have changed my name from Satish to SATISH SINGH for all future purpose.

#### NAME CHANGE

I, MAMPI MANDAL (SARKAR) is legally wedded spouse of Army No. 15694894F Rank Naik Name ANANDA MANDAL Presently residing at VILLAGE-GURPARA, POST -NANDIGHAT, POLICE STATION -RANAGHAT, DISTT-NADIA, STATE WEST BENGAL, PIN-741255, have changed my name from MAMPI MANDAL (SARKAR) to MAMPI MANDAL for all future purposes. Vide affidavit dated 01/02/2024 before Notary Public New Delhi

#### NAME CHANGE

I, SUNITA Mother of No-15516573H Rank-NK Name-DESHRAJ Residing at VILL-PACHARWALI, PO-BHANGWA, TEHSIL-BHADRA, DIST-HANUMANGARH, RAJASTHAN-335501, have changed my name from SUNITA to SUNITA DEVI for all future purposes vide Affidavit dated 01/02/2025 before Notary Public, Delhi.

#### NAME CHANGE

I, KRISHNA KUMAR Father of No-15516573H Rank-NK Name-DESHRAJ Residing at VILL-PACHARWALI, PO-BHANGWA, TEHSIL-BHADRA, DIST-HANUMANGARH, RAJASTHAN-335501, have changed my name from KRISHNA KUMAR to KRISHAN KUMAR for all future purposes vide Affidavit dated 01/02/2025 before Notary Public, Delhi.

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#### NAME CHANGE

I, TEEJA W/o No-15516573H Rank-NK Name-DESHRAJ Residing at VILL-PACHARWALI, PO-BHANGWA, TEHSIL-BHADRA, DIST-HANUMANGARH, RAJASTHAN-335501, have changed my name from TEEJA to TEEJA DEVI for all future purposes vide Affidavit dated 01/02/2025 before Notary Public, Delhi.

#### NAME CHANGE

I, NISHA Mother of No-15249093X Rank-SEP Name-HITESH KUMAR Residing at VPO-KANOH, TEHSIL-BARAWALA, DIST-HISAR, HARYANA-125112, have changed my name from NISHA to NISHA DEVI for all future purposes vide Affidavit dated 01/02/2025 before Notary Public, Delhi.

#### NAME CHANGE

I, SHRESTH VEER CHAYANK Son of PRAMOD KUMAR residing at FLAT NO-18C, POCKET-C, SFS FLAT, MAYUR VIHAR PHASE-3, DELHI-110096 have changed my name to SRESTH VEER CHAYANK for all future purpose.

#### NAME CHANGE

I, hitherto known as INDU KUMARI D/o Sh. GURDEV SHARMA, House No H-48, Seelampur Delhi 110053 have changed my name, and shall hereafter be known as INDU SHARMA. I also declare that INDU KUMARI and INDU SHARMA both are one and the same person. It is certified that I have complied with the other legal requirement in this connection INDU KUMARI

#### PUBLIC NOTICE

It is for general information that I Mahendra Kumar Bhaskar S/O Sukhdeva Ram Bhaskar, R/O Permanent Address Rulyana Mali, Rulyana Mali, Sikar, Rajasthan-332041, Present address- Police Gater no 85/1 Ground floor, Block -CA, Tagore Garden, West Delhi, Delhi-110027, declare that name of my wife has been wrongly written as Chandri Devi in my minor son namely Chirag Bhaskar aged 8 years in his birth certificate no 0811100708000 540006/2017. The actual name of my wife is Chandri, which may be amended accordingly.

#### PUBLIC NOTICE

It is for general information that I Anita Rani W/O Anil Kumar, R/O 305, E-Block, Tagore Garden Extension, Tagore Garden, West Delhi, Delhi-110027, declare that name of mine has been wrongly written as Bhumika in my minor daughter namely Komal aged 14 years in her birth certificate no MCDOLIR-2210-004093778. The actual name of mine is Anita Rani, which may be amended accordingly.

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NEWS BOX

Trade wars have no winners: China as Trump imposes 10% tariffs

World. Hours after Donald Trump initiated a trade war with China, Beijing condemned the move and vowed to take "countermeasures to defend its legitimate rights and interests." The Chinese foreign ministry, in an official statement, said that the US tariff violates global trade rules and could disrupt cooperation on drug control efforts between the two countries. "Trade and tariff wars have no winners," China's foreign ministry said. "The US's unilateral tariff hikes severely violate World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules," it added.

This comes as Trump imposed a 10 per cent tariff on Chinese goods. Beijing warned that such measures would not resolve economic issues in the US and would harm both countries.

China also addressed concerns over fentanyl, a synthetic opioid linked to overdose deaths in the US. It said Beijing has taken strong steps to control the drug and has cooperated with Washington. "In the spirit of humanity and goodwill, China has given support to the US's response to this issue," the foreign ministry said. It noted that China classified all fentanyl-related substances as a controlled category in 2019, a step it said was taken at the request of Washington. China said it has engaged in broad cooperation with the US on drug control and called for a "rational" approach to the issue. "The US needs to view and solve its own fentanyl issue in an objective and rational way instead of threatening other countries with arbitrary tariff hikes," the statement said.

Zelenskyy Accuses Russia Of Bombing Its Own Civilians In Kursk Region

Kyiv. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has accused Russia of bombing its "own civilians" who were sheltering in a school in the Kursk region. Zelenskyy claimed that Russia dropped an aerial bomb on a boarding school while the civilians were still preparing to evacuate.

This is how Russia wages war--Sudzha, Kursk region, Russian territory, a boarding school with civilians preparing to evacuate. A Russian aerial bomb. They destroyed the building even though dozens of civilians were there." Zelenskyy wrote in a post on X on Saturday (local time). This is how Russia waged war against Chechnya decades ago. They killed Syrians the same way. Russian bombs destroy Ukrainian homes the same way. And even against their own civilians, the Russian army uses similar tactics," he added.

According to CNN, Ukraine has made advancements in Kursk, as stated by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), a DC-based think tank, on January 26. On the other hand, the Russian Military said that it had recaptured the region.

On Saturday, Russia launched a barrage of drones and missiles on Ukraine killing at least 12 people, Al Jazeera reported.

Ukraine's air force claimed that it shot down 56 drones and redirected 61.

Ukraine's Emergency Services said a missile struck a residential building in the central city of Poltava killed eight people, including a child, and injured 17.

On Friday, a Ukrainian Military official informed that North Korean forces have "probably" withdrawn from the frontlines in Russia's Kursk region after suffering heavy losses, CNN reported.

Budget 2025: India Hikes Foreign Aid To Maldives, This Country Tops List; Where's Bangladesh?

World. The Ministry of External Affairs has allocated Rs 5,483 crore for foreign aid in the Union Budget 2025-26, up from Rs 4,883 crore last year. This financial year, 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Look East' policies seem to drive India's aid priorities. A whopping 64% of the total scheme portfolio (Rs 4,320 crore) has been allocated to its immediate neighbors for various initiatives, including major infrastructure projects like hydroelectric plants, power transmission lines, housing, roads, bridges, and integrated check-posts. Bhutan remains India's top recipient of foreign aid, with an allocation of ₹2,150 crore for 2025-26, up from ₹2,068 crore last year. India continues to be Bhutan's key development partner, providing financial support for infrastructure, hydropower projects, and economic collaboration.

Maldives Aid Surge Amid Diplomatic Thaw

New Delhi has increased its financial assistance to the Maldives by Rs 130 crore, raising the total aid to Rs 600 crore from Rs 470 crore in the 2024-25 budget. This makes the Maldives one of the largest beneficiaries of India's foreign aid, second only to Bhutan in priority among neighboring countries.

This increase comes at a time when Malé is actively working to rebuild its relationship with New Delhi, following a period of diplomatic tensions that arose after the election of President Mohamed Muizzu, who dominantly puts forward a pro-China stance.

Aid To Bangladesh Unchanged

India has retained its financial aid to Bangladesh at Rs 120 crore for 2025-26, with no increase from the previous year. The decision comes amid diplomatic tensions following the exit of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who has been granted asylum in India. The new government, led by Muhammad Yunus, has formally requested her return, adding to the ongoing political strain between the two nations.

India's Cautious Approach With Afghanistan

India has significantly reduced its financial aid to Afghanistan, cutting the allocation from Rs 200 crore last year to Rs 100 crore in the 2025-26 budget—a steep drop from Rs 207 crore granted two years ago. The move reflects Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cautious approach toward the Taliban regime, with its engagement largely restricted to humanitarian aid and economic cooperation.

Pak Army Chief In Balochistan After Deadly Clashes Kill 41 In 24 Hours

Islamabad. Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff Gen Syed Asim Munir visited Balochistan on Saturday amid clashes in the restive province in which 18 security personnel and 23 terrorists have been killed in the last 24 hours, according to a media report. The army chief was given a comprehensive brief on the prevailing security situation in the province which was also attended by senior security and intelligence officials, the Associated Press of Pakistan reported. The army chief along with Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti and Governor Sheikh Jaffar Khan Mandokhail offered prayers at the funeral of the soldiers and also visited the injured soldiers in the Combined Military Hospital Quetta, according to the Pakistan military's media wing Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR). "No matter what these so-called 'frenemies' may do, you will surely be defeated by the resilience of our proud

nation and its armed forces," Gen Munir said.

The COAS also appreciated the efforts of the valiant officers and soldiers of the army, Frontier Corps and law enforcement agencies for their courage and determination towards fighting terrorism.

He reassured the army's resolve to ensuring the security and well-being of the people of Balochistan. At least 18 security personnel and 23 terrorists were killed during clashes between the two sides in Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province.

The military said the terrorists were killed in different areas of troubled Balochistan in the last 24 hours. In one such operation in Harnai district on Saturday, national troops effectively engaged the terrorists, killing 11 militants and destroying multiple terrorist hideouts.

Earlier on Friday night, 12 terrorists were killed while security forces successfully



thwarted militants' attempt to establish roadblocks in the Mangocher area of Kalat. "Thus far a total of 23 terrorists have been sent to hell in different operations in Balochistan in the last 24 hours," the army said, adding the sanitisation operations will

continue until perpetrators and facilitators of the heinous and cowardly act are brought to justice. However, no one immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Balochistan is witnessing violence perpetrated by the Baloch extremists who regularly attack the security forces and people belonging to other provinces.

Balochistan is Pakistan's largest province but, although it has more resources than other provinces, it is the least developed. Terror attacks have increased since the banned militant Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan group broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government.

With at least 685 members of security forces losing their lives amid a total of 444 terror attacks, 2024 turned out to be the deadliest year for the civil and military security forces of Pakistan in a decade.

US Democrats elect Ken Martin as new leader to rebuild party, challenge Trump

World. US Democrats picked a 51-year-old progressive activist on Saturday as their new leader, who must rebuild a party still reeling from last year's crushing presidential defeat -- and figure out how best to oppose Republican Donald Trump. "The Democratic Party is the party of working people, and it's time to roll up our sleeves and outcompete everywhere, in every election, and at every level of government," Ken Martin, the new chairman of the Democratic National Committee (DNC), said in a statement. The DNC, the party's governing body, raises millions of dollars each year to support and build infrastructure for candidates across the country, culminating every four years in the presidential election.

Martin, a relative unknown outside of the party, stressed the need for Democrats

to reconnect with blue-collar voters, and to take the electoral fight to all 50 states -- even bastions of conservative politics.

"Donald Trump and his billionaire allies



are put on notice -- we will hold them accountable for ripping off working families, and we will beat them at the ballot box," Martin said. Party grandees were meeting near Washington as the

DNC carries out a postmortem of their November loss. They elevated Martin, formerly the chair of the party's Minnesota branch, to devise their national battle plan. "This is not a game of chess where everyone is moving their pieces back and forth in a respectful, timed manner. This is guerilla warfare in political form," said Katherine Jeanes, deputy digital director of the North Carolina Democratic Party, ahead of the vote.

Maryland Governor Wes Moore, a rising Democratic star, warned that the party must "not go into hiding until the next general election." The moment calls for boldness, added Shasti Conrad, chair of the party's Washington state branch, saying that many Americans have lost the faith.

"They don't trust us to be able to make things better. They don't trust that when we are given power, that we know how to use it," Conrad said.

Canada, China, And Mexico Announce Bold Countermeasures In Payback For Trump's Tariffs

World. Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum swiftly hit back at US President Donald Trump's tariffs with their own actions. Meanwhile, China has vowed to challenge Trump's tariff move at the World Trade Organization as it 'seriously violates' international trade rules.

China To Move To WTO

China's government condemned the Trump administration's decision to impose a 10% tariff on Chinese imports. A statement released on Sunday read, "We will challenge this tariff at the World Trade Organization and take corresponding countermeasures," reported Reuters. While criticizing the move, Beijing also expressed a willingness to engage in talks with the U.S. to prevent further escalation. The tariff, which takes effect on Tuesday, is seen as a major step in the ongoing trade dispute.

"Fentanyl is an issue for the United States," China's foreign ministry stated. "China has conducted extensive anti-narcotics cooperation with the US and has seen significant success."

Canada Imposes Countertariff Trudeau announced that Canada would impose 25% tariffs on US imports worth CS155 billion. He said CS30 billion of these tariffs would take effect on Tuesday, with the rest to follow in 21



days. Mexico Launches Plan B Sheinbaum, on the other hand, stated that she had instructed her economy minister to carry out "Plan B," which includes both tariff and non-tariff measures to protect Mexico's interests.

In a post on her 'X' account, she also hit back at the US President for suggesting that her government has alliance with criminal organisations. "If such an alliance exists anywhere, it is in the United States armories that sell high-powered weapons to these criminal groups, as demonstrated by the United States Department of Justice itself in January of this year," she said in a post on 'X'.

Trump's Tariff Move

US President Donald Trump announced on his Truth Social platform that he had imposed a 25% tariff on imports from Canada and Mexico, along with a 10% tariff on goods from China. The move is in response to concerns over illegal immigration and drug smuggling, including fentanyl. Trump took action under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), stressing the need to protect American citizens and deliver on a campaign promise. He stated that the tariffs were aimed at safeguarding the US from the threats posed by illegal immigration and drug trafficking.

Elon Musk's DOGE gets access to US government payment system after standoff

Elon Musk, who has been tasked by President Donald Trump to identify fraud and waste in the government, had sought access to the system Treasury uses to dole out federal funds.

World. Billionaire Elon Musk and his government efficiency team have been given access to the US Treasury Department's payment system, resolving a days-long standoff, the New York Times reported on Saturday. Musk, who chairs the newly-created Department of Government Efficiency, has been tasked by President Donald Trump to identify fraud and waste in the government and had sought access to the system Treasury uses to dole out federal funds.

His efforts were resisted by a career Treasury official, David Lebrky, who was placed on leave this week and then retired. On Friday, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent gave Musk's team access, the Times reported.

The system sends out more than \$6 trillion per year in payments on behalf of federal agencies and contains the personal information of millions of Americans who receive Social Security payments, tax refunds and other monies from the government. US Senator Ron Wyden, a Democrat, appeared to confirm that Musk's



team has access in a post on the social network Bluesky.

"Sources tell my office that Treasury Secretary Bessent has granted DOGE full access to this system. Social Security and Medicare benefits, grants, payments to government contractors, including those that compete directly with Musk's own companies. All of it," Wyden, the top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, posted on Saturday.

In a letter to Bessent on Friday, Wyden raised concerns that any "politically-motivated meddling" in the payment system "risks severe damage to our country and the economy." The Department of Government Efficiency is not a federal department but a unit assembled at Trump's order working out of the White House.

In a post on X on Saturday, Musk claimed without providing evidence that officials at the Treasury Department had been instructed to approve payments to "known fraudulent or terrorist groups."

Emeralds, Rubies, Gold: Taliban Bets On Afghan Mines Worth Trillion Dollars

Goshta, Afghanistan. A miner in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan poured water over a block of jade, exposing the green stone that is part of the Taliban authorities' push to capitalise on the country's rich mineral resources. Touting the return of security, the Taliban government is rushing to court local and foreign investors to exploit the country's underground wealth and secure a crucial revenue stream -- though experts warn of the risks of cutting corners. Emeralds, rubies, marble, gold and lithium: the resources buried across Afghanistan's rocky landscape are estimated to be worth a trillion dollars, according to US and UN assessments from 2010 and 2013. Though decades of war spared these reserves from large-scale exploitation, roughly 200 contracts -- the majority with local companies -- worth billions of dollars in total have been signed since the Taliban's 2021 return to power, official figures show. "We want Afghanistan to be self-sufficient

but there are obstacles," Humayoun Afghan, the spokesman for the Ministry of Mines, told AFP. "We have no experts, no infrastructure, no knowledge." The Taliban authorities will "welcome anyone who wants to invest, especially those with mining experience", he added. Many of these contracts focus on mining exploration, a process that can take years and yield little results, while loosely regulated extraction can leave behind environmental scars, experts caution.

The US Geological Survey (USGS) has noted the production of coal, talc and chromite, "sharply increased" in 2021 and 2022. The authorities are prioritising resources that could lose value before tackling others, such as lithium, the prices of which may still rise on global markets. The mines ministry regularly publishes tenders for exploration and extraction projects, sending their embassies lists of available mining projects to invite foreign companies to apply, according to



documents reviewed by AFP. The World Bank says the results are already visible: a 6.9 percent expansion of mining and quarrying drove an industrial sector increase of 2.6 percent in 2023-2024. But while the government "has auctioned several small mining contracts to meet its cash requirements, many of these contracts have yet to commence operations", it said in a December report. For mining sector expert Javed Noorani, authorities are tendering "maybe 10 times more than its own capacity to do things".

Country is stabilised'

The Taliban fought a two decade insurgency against the US and NATO-backed Afghan government in Kabul, seizing power in a rapid military campaign in 2021 after foreign forces withdrew.

Foreign investors had largely abandoned the country, but security has drastically improved and the country's road network has opened up. Most now fear being associated with the "Islamic Emirate", which remains unrecognised internationally and under Western sanctions.

However, some countries that maintain diplomatic and economic ties with Kabul, such as Iran, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Qatar, have seized the opportunity, with China leading the way. "The first thing investors say when they meet with us is that the country has been stabilised so now they want to invest," said Afghan, who estimates that 150,000 jobs have been created by the sector since 2021.

NEWS BOX

**Madras HC directs Pudukkottai administration to consider PIL on illegal quarrying**

**MADURAI.** The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court directed the Pudukkottai district administration to consider a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petition filed by a man seeking action against illegal quarrying in a village in the district. A division bench of Justices MS Ramesh and AD Maria Cleto was hearing a petition filed by one C Ezhilarasu seeking direction to take action against the illegal quarrying operations carried out by one Subbu in Kunnathupatty village of Thirumayam taluk in Pudukkottai district, based on his representation in June 2023.

Observing that there has been a considerable lapse of time since the filing of the earlier representation, the court granted the petitioner the liberty to file a fresh representation to the concerned respondent, ventilating his grievances, as expeditiously as possible. On receipt of such a representation, the concerned respondent is directed to consider the same, on its own merits and pass appropriate orders in accordance with law, after giving due opportunity to the petitioner and the private respondents, as well as to any other person, who may be interested in the subject matter, within a period of three months, the court added.

**TN to face power crunch amid summer as North Chennai plant works yet to be completed**

**CHENNAI.** With Tamil Nadu's peak power demand projected to cross 22,000 MW, about 10% increase from last year, the state will require all of its thermal power plants to operate close to full capacity to bridge the demand without power cuts. However, the state's first 800MW North Chennai Super Critical Thermal Power Station (NCTPS-Stage III), which was inaugurated last March, is unlikely to be of any use since many infrastructure related works are yet to be completed. According to top official sources in the Tamil Nadu Power Generation Corporation Limited (TNPGL), the power plant will not be ready to supply power during the upcoming summer.

The Southern Regional Power Committee has predicted the state's peak power demand to be 22,150 MW this year. "Despite the plant being inaugurated, few technical works remain unfinished. Hence, we are unable to run the plant commercially. We have generated less than 1,000 million units using imported coal or oil as fuel since the plant was inaugurated," a senior TNPGL official told.

Another official added that wagon-loading facilities and fly ash ponds at the new power plant are essential for it to run at full capacity. "For these, the utility had submitted a detailed project report seeking Rs 50 crore. But, the funds are yet to be allotted. In addition, BHEL is yet to hand over the power plant to the power utility as it has not reached its full generation capacity. Sources said technical issues have resulted in failed attempts by BHEL to run the plant at full capacity (800 MW).

**Fishing for benefits: Kerala can enhance catch from high seas**

**KOCHI.** The Union budget gives stress to the fishing sector to tap the potential of the marine sector by enabling a framework for harnessing fisheries from India's Exclusive Economic Zone and the high seas which can be beneficial for Kerala's fisheries sector. Aiming to enhance India's competitiveness in the global seafood market, the budget proposes to reduce the basic customs duty on frozen fish paste from 30% to 5% for the manufacture and export of its analogue products.

The basic customs duty on fish hydrolysate for manufacture of fish and shrimp feed has been reduced from 15% to 5%. Besides, the government will provide financial support for setting up a network of Nucleus breeding centres for shrimp broodstocks.

Financing for shrimp farming, processing and export will be facilitated through NABARD. "The budget proposal will help end the stagnation in marine fisheries sector and increase production. Facilitating deep-sea and high-sea fishing will help tap high-value tuna species like yellowfin tuna,



skipjack tuna and other 10 species. The lack of infrastructure facilities in Lakshadweep and Andaman and Nicobar seas has led to under-exploitation of the resources in these areas.

Expanding fishing activities to the high seas can lead to a steep increase in production," said KUFOS founder vice-chancellor B Madhusoodana Kurup. However, mechanised fishing operators are apprehensive of the initiative to promote high-seas fishing.

**Kerala government indecision delays process to finalise metro rail alignment**

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM.** The process to finalise the alignment for the long-pending metro rail project in the state capital drags on owing to indecision of the state government. It's been several months since the Kochi Metro Rail Ltd (KMRL) - the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) roped in by the government to implement metro projects in the state - submitted the proposal with six different alignments for the upcoming conventional metro rail project in Thiruvananthapuram. However, the state government is yet to take a decision and choose an alignment that will cater to the maximum number of riders.

According to official sources, the proposal is pending with the Finance Department for getting clearance. "If the alignment is passing via Secretariat the main arterial road will be blocked and we need to take a decision on constructing the metro underground. If the plan is for an overhead metro then the Bakery Junction - Thampanoor alignment would be ideal. These are policy matters and a decision on whether to take the metro underground or overhead needs to be taken. Only after making these decisions will we be able to finalise the alignment," said an official source.

Widespread demand to reroute the metro via Kazhakoottam has turned into a headache for the authorities. With the NH66 work ongoing near Pallipuram, it's becoming impossible to plan a metro in the route. "Even the service road is feasible and we need to look for another alignment. These are policy decisions and once the finance department approves the project,



the chief minister level meeting will be held to finalise the alignment," said the official. KMRL MD Loknath Behera told TNIE that a decision on the alignment will be taken soon by the state government. "We have submitted the proposal and are waiting for the decision on the final alignment so that we can kickstart the process," said Behera.

The metro project for the state capital was conceptualised over a decade ago. However, the changing governments have failed to make the project into a reality. Initially, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation Ltd (DMRC) proposed a monorail for the capital city. Later, it was decided to implement a light metro project for

the capital. During the previous term, the LDF government sanctioned administrative sanction for the proposed metro projects in Thiruvananthapuram and Kozhikode. In February 2021, the Kerala Rapid Transit Corporation Ltd (KRTL) submitted a revised DPR for the light metro.

Later, the state government roped in KMRL as the SPV for the project which came up with the proposal of a conventional metro for the state capital. The Trivandrum Chamber of Commerce and Industries (TCCI) has come out with stiff criticism against the government and the KMRL for keeping the proposed alignments discrete.

**Elderly couple charred to death as son sets house on fire near Chennithala in Kerala**

**ALAPPUZHA.** The charred bodies of an elderly couple were found in the remains of a house in Kottamuri, near Chennithala, which was allegedly set ablaze by their son in the early hours of Saturday. The deceased were identified as Raghavan, 96, and his wife Bharathi, 86. Mannar police arrested their son Vijayan. According to officers, an autorickshaw driver first noticed the fire around 3.30 am. Locals immediately alerted authorities. Fire and rescue service personnel extinguished the blaze and recovered the bodies. The house, with walls made of tin sheet walls and its roof interspersed with tarpaulin and asbestos sheets, was gutted in the blaze. According to reports, the couple and their third son, Vijayan, had differences over property. Vijayan, who used to live with his wife and



children, moved out of their house six months ago following an altercation. He then moved in with his parents again. He turned into a drunkard and quarrelled regularly with his parents over property. This may have been the motive for killing them, said officers. "We suspect that he killed his parents before setting the house on fire," officers said. The bodies were shifted to Alappuzha Medical College

Hospital for postmortem. "The autopsy report will help us ascertain the exact cause of death," they added. Vijayan will be produced before a magistrate on Sunday. Police registered a case under various sections including murder and arson. As per the police statement, Vijayan was planning to kill himself along with his parents, but he panicked as the fire engulfed the house. He then ran away from the scene. The parents denied his demand for property and had rejected his reasoning for the same. This enraged Vijayan. This led him to the decision to kill parents and end his own life, it said.

Officers collected CCTV visuals from a fuel station where Vijayan had reportedly purchased the petrol used to set off the fire.

**KLEF top brass arrested in NAAC bribery case**

**VIJAYAWADA.** Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officials on Saturday arrested the top brass of Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation (KLEF) and members of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) inspection team in connection with a bribery case. In an official statement, the CBI confirmed that a case had been registered against the office bearers of the educational institution as well as the NAAC inspection team members.

The allegations involve offering undue advantages to public servants in exchange for favourable NAAC ratings, specifically for A++ accreditation. The investigation agency also conducted searches at 20 locations across various cities, including Vijayawada, Chennai, Bengaluru, Palamu, Sambalpur, Bhopal, Bilaspur, Gautam Buddh Nagar, and New Delhi.

During these searches, the CBI sleuths seized Rs 37 lakh cash, six laptops, one mobile phone, and other incriminating documents. KLEF Vice-Chancellor GP Saradhi Varma, Vice-President Koneru Raja Hareem, Director of KL University (Hyderabad Campus) A Ramakrishna, NAAC Inspection Committee Chairman and Vice-Chancellor of Ramchandra Chandravani University Samarendra Nath Saha, Member Coordinator and Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University Rajeev Sijariya, NAAC Inspection Committee Member and Dean at Bharath Institute of Law Dr D Gopal were arrested by CBI on Saturday.

Other NAAC inspection members including Rajesh Singh Pawar, Manas Kumar Mishra, Gayathri Devaraj, and Dr Bulu Maharana were also arrested. The agency stated that a total of 14 individuals are involved in the case, and confirmed that an investigation is underway to uncover the full extent of the crime and identify others involved.

**Scope for Andhra Pradesh, Telangana to spur rural growth**

**Andhra Pradesh.** Andhra Pradesh seeks to become a \$2.5 trillion (Rs 216.48 lakh crore) economy by 2047, meaning that it would have to grow over the next 22 years at a CAGR of 13.53% from its current (2024-25) GSDP of \$190 billion (Rs 16.41 lakh crore). That is, the economy has to expand by 13 times in 22 years.

Theoretically, it may be possible, but practically, an unenviable target. Post bifurcation, AP's growth rate has been flat, relative to Telangana. Further, fiscal prudence, (or the lack of it) is also a matter of concern for both Telugu States. While revenue from own tax sources and Central transfers amount to Rs 1.77 lakh crore, AP's debt is Rs 4.91 lakh crore (2023-24). In other words, AP has a current debt liability three times that of its annual income. Some of this accumulated debt is certainly attributable to profligacy, or mismanagement.

So, achieving such an ambitious growth target while balancing its liabilities will definitely be a tough call. Assuming that governance improves, own revenue sources diversify and expand, identification and prioritisation of growth sectors is properly done, strong Central budgetary support is likely, and



favourable global investment climate prevails over the next two decades, near 13% growth is feasible. But then, these are too many ifs. Good to have an ambition, but it is better to be realistic. Now that the context has been set, let us examine the Finance Minister's Budget speech. To my mind, the FM perfectly identified the key growth engines for the country - (1) Agriculture (2) MSME (3) Investment and (4) Exports. Funds should flow within the above framework over the next few years.

I steer clear of the persistent demands like Polavaram, Railway Zones, new capital, etc. because they are somewhat politico-economic in nature. Special dispensations can always be found for them if political cards are played well. So, let us limit the discussion to what the

**SCTIMST unveils two innovative drug-eluting bone graft products**

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM.** Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology (SCTIMST) has launched two innovative drug-eluting bone graft products. The products were unveiled by President of SCTIMST, S Kris Gopalakrishnan under the brand names CASPRO and BONYX. They were developed by the research team at the Biomedical Technology Wing of SCTIMST and commercialised by M/s Onyx Medicals Pvt Ltd, Meerut, UP. 'BONYX' contains bioceramic beads for local drug delivery in bone, mainly to handle bone infections.

In this product, the bone mineral composition is designed as ceramic beads with multi-modal porosity, through a patented process. The beads allow the vacuum loading of antibiotics or drugs in liquid form, and then release the same in the implanted region in a controlled manner, sustainable for more than 30 days. Being composed of osteoconductive minerals, they integrate with native bone issues ensuring the dead-space management and local bone regeneration. 'CASPRO' is a bioactive, mouldable and self-setting bone cement designed for drug delivery in bone. The product is composed of synthetic medical grade basanite (or calcium sulfate hemihydrate mineral), fortified with phosphate ions, prepared through a proprietary 'drowning out' precipitation process.

On wetting with aqueous solution, the powder forms a putty or paste, which could be used for the repair of bone defects. In addition, the cement gives provision to add antibiotics or drugs to it, in either powder or liquid form, and facilitate the controlled release for a period of over 21 days. Both products are the results of years of scientific research and development and validation for regulatory approval as per International Standards. The making of the products CASPRO and BONYX, which spanned over a decade, demonstrates a viable model in the country to develop biomedical products.

**TN exporters hail budget for boosting cotton output, knitwear exports**

**TIRUPPUR.** The Export Promotion Mission and a five-year plan to boost cotton production, announced in the union budget, would together drive up exports of knitwear firms and cut down manufacturing costs, said Tiruppur Exporters' Association president K M Subramanian on Saturday.

Subramanian said the budget included positive announcements, for instance, the announcement of Export Promotion Mission, with sectoral and ministerial targets, driven jointly by the Ministries of Commerce, MSME, and Finance. He said, "The government said it will streamline credit access for exporters, support for cross-border factoring and assistance for MSMEs to tackle non-tariff measures in overseas

markets." On the mission for cotton productivity, Subramanian said the initiative would ensure a reduction in cotton prices and the availability of quality cotton. "Nearly 80% of the total production of the Tiruppur knitwear sector is cotton garments," he said. The turnover limits of MSMEs have been raised, which is one of their long-pending demands, he said.

"MSMEs with investments up to Rs 125 crore will be recognised as medium enterprises, an increase from the previous limit of Rs 50 crore," he said. Responding to TNIE on whether the announcements were adequate to address the challenges faced by the ready-



made garment export sector, he said, "We will seek other requirements from the centre."

Similarly, Tiruppur Exporters and Manufacturers Association (TEAMA) president M P Muthurathnam said the budget is "very favourable" for

MSMEs. Apparel Made-ups and Home Textiles Sector Skill Council chairman A Sakthivel said the raising of investment and turnover limits of MSMEs will help enterprises achieve higher efficiencies of scale, technological upgradation and better access to capital. The revision in classification criteria will bring in more firms under the MSMEs coverage. The provision to voluntarily declare material facts and pay duty with interest but without penalty will incentivise voluntary compliance. But, it will not apply in cases where the department has already initiated audit or investigation proceedings, he said.

### What Ambedkar's vandalised statues imply

During a recent seminar to mark 75 years of the Constitution, my colleague in the Joint Action Committee on Telangana, Prof M Kodandaram, summed up the state of affairs in two lines. He said there were two groups of people in this country — those who wanted to throw the Constitution into the Bay of Bengal and those who wanted to protect it with their lives. We have been witnessing the vandalism of statues of the 'Father of the Constitution', BR Ambedkar, all over the country. One such incident took place on Heritage Street in Amritsar — and, that too, on Republic Day.

The culprit climbed atop the statue using a steel ladder and hit it with a hammer before he was nabbed. In his statement to the police, he said that he did not believe in the Constitution. The fact that he belongs to a reserved category makes it all the more deplorable. The development prompted a visit to the holy city by Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale, who issued directions for strict action to ensure that such incidents were not repeated.

Ambedkar's statues are found in virtually every city and town, besides many villages. They mostly stand unprotected. Last year, the Andhra Pradesh Government unveiled the world's tallest statue of Ambedkar in Vijayawada. Standing 206 feet from the ground, the 'Statue of Social Justice' figures among the 50 tallest statues worldwide (Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's 'Statue of Unity' tops the list). The second-tallest Ambedkar statue (175 feet) is situated in the neighbouring Telangana.

The trend of idolising national icons started with the installation of Mahatma Gandhi's statues in various towns and cities. Some roads were also named after him. As the Dalit movement in India grew stronger, the community went all out to make its presence felt across the country. In several states, Dalit leaders and activists raised the demand for the installation of a bust or a statue of Ambedkar at a central location in cities as well as towns. In some cases, they collected money and put up the statue at a place provided by the municipality concerned. Those who benefited from reservation displayed a photograph or portrait of Ambedkar in their offices. The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has done it in Punjab offices, where portraits of Ambedkar are showcased beside those of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, particularly in the Chief Minister's Office.

As a result of these endeavours, the movement spread to villages. In parts of coastal Andhra Pradesh, you can even find two Ambedkar statues within a distance of one kilometre. The political statement made by the Dalits was that no other leader (except Gandhi) could be seen as a pan-India phenomenon. One of the best features of the Ambedkar statues for Dalits is that the location gives them a great opportunity to use it as a protest site in cases of atrocity against members of the community. They invariably protest by holding candles in front of the statue. This gesture is also common among Dalits who are part of the diaspora. Ambedkar statues adorn places like Columbia University, the London School of Economics and Brandeis University in Massachusetts, US. An Ambedkar statue was unveiled in October 2023 in Maryland, US, reinforcing the commitment of the Dalits to their icon. A possible trigger for the vandalism of the Ambedkar statue in Punjab, which has a significant Dalit population, could be antipathy towards the community, whose members have been seeking constitutional rights over the years and demanding punishment for the culprits who commit atrocities against them.

Or, it could be due to disillusionment and discontent within the community. The Amritsar incident might also have a political angle, considering that the AAP is not only in power in Punjab but also in Delhi, where the Assembly elections are scheduled for February 5. The iconography of the Ambedkar statue is clearly recognisable: he is shown holding the Constitution in one hand, while the other hand is raised, indicating that he is showing the right path and direction to his followers and admirers. As the Constitution is an inseparable part of his iconography, the recent incident could be a symbolic assault on constitutional values and mandate.

### Kotkhai and the unchecked horror of custodial torture

The culture of impunity created as a result of not fixing accountability in custodial torture cases must be pierced.

On July 4, 2017, a 16-year-old girl went missing in Himachal Pradesh's Kotkhai. Two days later, her body was recovered from a forest near the town. The sensational rape and murder of Gudiya (the name given to the minor victim by locals) made newspaper headlines across the country and triggered political mudslinging and massive public protests.

In order to assuage public sentiments, the government swiftly formed a special investigation team under the then IG, Zahoor Haider Zaidi. In such high-profile cases, a combination of mounting political pressure, an aggressive media and rising public outrage often forces the police to resort to an old script — of quickly picking up scapegoats and inflicting torture on them to extort confessions and douse the anger. Unfortunately, this case was no different. Twelve days later, Suraj Singh, one of the suspects in the case, was brutally tortured and killed by the police. An investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation later revealed that a nexus of eight officials — Zaidi, DSP Manoj Joshi, Sub-Inspector Rajinder Singh, ASI Deep Chand Sharma, head constables Mohan Lal, Surat Singh and Rafee Mohammad and constable Ranjeet Steta — was involved in the conspiracy and cover-up.

The brazen conspiracy was only the latest example that spotlighted the grim reality of custodial torture and deaths. The malaise has not been eradicated despite the Supreme Court, the National Human Rights Commission and civil society groups repeatedly lamenting that allowing this criminality to continue by not fixing accountability on perpetrators had created a culture of impunity.

The conviction pronounced by a CBI court last week for illegal detention, torture to extort confessions, murder, fabricating and destroying evidence, and other crimes in the case, is an important blow to this culture of impunity.

It offers a glimmer of hope for holding the police accountable for their actions, especially in a milieu where convictions in custodial death cases are rare.

Three takeaways from the case are crucial. First, the focus on the role of the whistleblower, Dinesh Kumar, who was the sentry on duty outside the lockup of the Kotkhai police station at the time of

the incident. His testimony provided a crucial account of the night when police officers brutally beat Suraj Singh and others on the first floor of the station, with their screams echoing down to the ground floor. The extraordinary nature of this testimony is evident when one turns to the 1995 State of MP vs Shyamsunder Trivedi case, where the Supreme Court noted that police officers, bound by "ties of brotherhood", often choose to stay silent rather than assist the court. Initially, this case was no different. All personnel involved — except Dinesh Kumar and Mukesh Sharma (the night munshi on duty) — worked together to fabricate and destroy evidence. Kumar, however, resisted joining the conspiracy to falsify the death. Despite frequent threats from Rajinder Singh, the then SHO of



Kotkhai Police Station, Kumar stood firm. Not only that, he recorded these threat calls, which became a key piece of evidence in holding the perpetrators accountable. His bravery in speaking the truth and exposing the crimes committed by his superiors was the single biggest contributor to the landmark conviction. Second, the critical role of the CBI cannot be overstated. Its investigation to unearth the fabrication of the general diary and other documents at the police station and interference with the CCTNS (Crime and Criminal Tracking Networks and Systems) as well as ensuring that the autopsy report was not manipulated and safeguarding the family from the fear of reprisal so that they could testify in court, all collectively ensured that Suraj

Singh's killers were brought to justice. Third, the brazenness displayed by the police even in a high-profile case with nationwide scrutiny is instructive. The IG confidently proclaimed in a press conference that the police had 'cracked' the Gudiya case and arrested the culprits based on scientific evidence, whereas the arrests were made six hours after this press conference. Further, the IG tried to intimidate and force the then SP, Shimla, to hand over Suraj Singh's body to the family for cremation even as the re-examination of the body was yet to be conducted — all this, at a time when the police had not even informed the family of Suraj's death.

Clearly, even intense media scrutiny and political pressure were not deterrents enough for the officials to stick to the law. The conviction is heartening, especially in a system where guilty officers often escape any accountability. But it is far from a watershed moment. The 400-odd-page judgment makes for sombre reading and is a ringing indictment of the criminal justice system.

It showed that despite a flurry of apex court orders, torture of suspects is rampant and easily excused. Medical reports and testimonies of the co-accused revealed that they were stripped naked, hung upside down, beaten with lathis and given electric shocks. Suraj Singh's autopsy report showed that he was beaten with a blunt hard cylindrical object/weapon, such as lathi, rod or baton, from about two days to two hours prior to death.

It showed that the fabrication of evidence can be done with little fear of consequences. And, it showed that whistleblowers continue to battle mounting challenges if they choose to expose the rot in the system. The Kotkhai verdict was achieved against odds because of the grit of investigating officials to uncover and deal with procedural violations, the courage of the eyewitnesses to stand up and testify against their superiors, even threats hanging over their heads, and the availability of the recordings to corroborate these testimonies. Now, the hard work must begin to pierce the culture of impunity. While a complete overhaul of police selection, training and orientation is essential, some immediate steps need to be taken. Certain legislative changes will significantly help in preventing law enforcers from becoming lawbreakers.

### A strategic leap

Critical minerals mission takes off

The Union Cabinet's approval of the National Critical Minerals Mission (NCMM), with an outlay of Rs 34,300 crore over seven years, is a decisive step toward securing India's access to essential raw materials. These critical minerals — lithium, nickel, cobalt, and rare earth elements — are indispensable for clean energy, electronics and defence industries. Currently, India is highly dependent on imports, particularly from China, which dominates global processing and refining capabilities. The NCMM has the ambitious aim of decreasing this dependence through intensified domestic exploration, acquisition of overseas mineral assets and value-chain development. The government plans to fund 1,200 mineral exploration projects and auction over 100 mineral blocks by 2030-31.



should not come at the cost of ecological degradation. As much as 5.9 million tonnes of lithium reserves have

been discovered in Reasi, Jammu and Kashmir. While this find holds the potential to transform India's battery industry, concerns persist over deforestation, groundwater depletion and displacement of local communities. Notably, insufficient exploration data has deterred industry players from bidding for the Reasi reserves. The more modest lithium block in Chhattisgarh is the only one to have been successfully auctioned.

Additionally, strengthening local manufacturing of batteries, electric vehicles and renewable energy infrastructure will be critical to reducing reliance on global supply chains. India must also expand its strategic partnerships with mineral-rich nations to ensure supply stability. It has partnered with Argentina for lithium exploration. Discussions with Australia, Chile and Bolivia are also on. Expanding such collaborations and securing long-term agreements will be crucial for building a resilient and self-sufficient critical minerals ecosystem.

### Ram bharse at the Kumbh

THE GREAT GAME: The life-and-death battle in Prayagraj holds a lesson for the Opposition

ASHES to ashes, dust to dust. Equal parts devotion, despair, desperation, anger and even, fulfilment. Above all, the ability to swallow insults over millennia. And so the Ganga gobbled up another 31 bodies on the night of the sacred Mauni Amavasya earlier this week at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj and seven more in the neighbouring village of Jhusi — a much smaller stampede, the day after. What's 38 lives when several crore people took a sacred dip in the Sangam at exactly the same time, cleansing both body and soul. Yogi Adityanath has still not confirmed the numbers his police have put out. PM Modi has reassured the families. VHP global chief Alok Kumar has said that this is the "will of god."

The problem is that the VHP leader is right. There is probably deep sorrow in the ashrams and akharas on the banks of the Ganga these last few days at the deaths of the pilgrims, but the overwhelming sentiment remains, "Chalo, ho gaya. It was terrible, but this is the Kumbh. Not just an ordinary Kumbh, a Maha Kumbh. How can any government be blamed when millions of devotees want to pray together at the same time in such a small space?" People like me will point to the unshakable fatalism of the Hindu devotee and say, perhaps this is part of the problem. Some of you upstanding folk may metaphorically stomp your feet and add, Sack this CM, transfer that DGP. Instead, I would entreat all of you to get out of your heated homes and go to the nearest railway station from where the Kumbh Specials for Prayagraj are leaving. People carrying bundles of provisions on their heads, the poorest of the poor, with nothing to hold on to except their faith in the Almighty — perhaps, someday, she May improve their lot. The coaches of the trains are packed to the gills with

human beings, dark, expectant eyes set in bronzed faces, men with gamchas tied over their heads, women wearing brightly coloured saris — red, orange, pink, the colours of fertility, of celebration. Of course this is also a pilgrimage of joy.

Jai Ma Gange!" echoes as you walk and walk and walk over the pontoon bridges on the Ganga and then to and from the Sangam, over the sand in which bodies were buried during those awful Covid years barely five years ago. You remember the pictures of dogs poking their noses in those sands. Families have spread themselves on it now, on plastic sheets made from used KitKat wrappers. Home Minister Amit Shah and his wife, accompanied by Yogi, also came for a dip in the Sangam on Monday, so the police shut 17 bridges back into the city, in the name of security. Scenes of mothers with babies as well as older people exhausted beyond belief plead with UP policemen to let them pass, but they remain unmoved. You must trudge to the 18th and the 19th bridge to return, another 4 km upstream, they say. Upar se aadesh aaya hai. A minor political row has broken out since the Mauni Amavasya stampede, with Akhilesh Yadav crying foul, saying he doesn't believe the low numbers of deaths being cited, while Rahul Gandhi has complained about the "VIP culture" that discriminates against ordinary folk. Certainly there are still many missing people.

A judicial enquiry will attempt to figure out the truth, but the fact remains that nothing these Opposition leaders say is likely to amount to even a drop in the churning ocean of UP politics, because they are not seen as serious alternatives to the political regime at hand. Any anger against Yogi, it is now clear, will only come from the faceless devotees themselves,

who feel that the chief minister, elected on a majority Hindu mandate, hasn't done enough to take care of them. Moreover, the cynic will point out, anger cannot be transformed into a political challenge unless it is channelised by someone. Look high and low in UP — there's no one with either the credibility, the political heft or the staying power that can oppose



the BJP today. Opposition leaders love to blame the ruling party for their autocratic behaviour — and god knows, many of them have a point. But look at what Rahul Gandhi did when the water in Delhi's Yamuna between Arvind Kejriwal and the BJP began to get hot last week? He got an activist from the SANDRP NGO to take him for a boat-ride on the river that is really a nullah and explain to him what's going on.

Against the light, Rahul looked so good in that photo-shoot. But let's cut to the chase and ask, how many votes is the Congress going to get in Delhi? And if Rahul is so keen on a joint INDIA bloc against Modi's BJP, why didn't he overrule his own party workers who turned down his idea of an alliance with AAP in the Haryana polls last year? And why didn't he float the idea this time in Delhi? To reiterate, the vote-share difference between the winning BJP (39.94%) and the losing Congress (39.09%) in Haryana was 0.85 percentage point, while AAP won 1.79 per cent of the votes. Guess who would have won if Congress and AAP had fought together. Still, the Congress refuses to learn. Nearly four months after the elections, a sense of chaos and ad hocism prevails — a leader of the legislature party in the state has still not been appointed. A stunning win in Haryana gave the BJP the impetus to win Maharashtra. And now the all-important battle for Delhi, with voting day on February 5, looms large.

It is hardly a coincidence that the PM has picked that day to take his dubki in the Sangam — it follows that all the TV channels will devote much air-time to Pilgrim Modi's journey to the Kumbh, which also means that the life-and-death battle for Delhi is in danger of being pushed to the second spot.

As for the life-and-death battle in Prayagraj, there's a lesson for the Opposition here too. Back in 2022, the BJP won back UP again (255 seats to the Samajwadi Party's 111) despite the fact that Yogi's administration had failed to cope with Covid and people ended up falling like flies.

# The winter Food Saga



During winters, your body requires energy as much as warmth. So, despite the drop in the mercury, Bhopalites can be spotted at the street-side shops selling winter delicacies. These dishes, though exclusively gorged on during the cold season, are light on the pocket. We bring you some of these, that you ought to give a try.

## Garadu

(Price - Rs 25-30 per plate)

One thing that every Bhopali can have throughout the winter is garadu. Bhopalites not only rush to street shops but also keep a stock of raw garadu at home as remedy to hunger pangs. The dish is garnished with a blend of spices and lemon.

## Bhutte Ka Kees

(Price - Rs 20-30 per plate)

Bhutta is in demand across the year but during the cold days, the bhutta vendors make phenomenal business. Bhutte ka kees is grated corn blended with spices and garnished with coriander leaves, coconut powder, and

jeeravan; served hot to make your winters more enjoyable. Harshita Mangal, a student, says, "Despite having a busy schedule, I run to the nearest shop selling bhutte ka kees, every time I have an urge to have it. During winters, this is my routine every alternate day."

## Rabdi Malpua with Malai

(Price - Rs 300 per kg)

Want to make someone an offer they can't deny? Ask them to try the delectable combo of rabdi malpua and malai. This sweet dish is drenched in warm sugar syrup and if hot kesar-doodh is had with it, one needn't ask for anything more. Gajar ka halwa Gajar ka halwa is one of the most nutritious delicacies offered by street vendors. Grated carrot with sugar and dry fruits is makes it the perfect dessert for cold evenings. Although many homemakers prepare this delicacy at home, the fun of having it at roadside eateries is something different altogether. Plus, there is a sugar-free variant available as well.

## Gulab jamun

(Price - Rs 250 per kg)

Another regular delicacy that sells like hot cakes during winters is gulab jamun. This sweet is readily available at all the sweet shops of the city and is a great option to be had along with your group of friends or family

## Kesariya doodh

(Price - Rs 20-30 per glass)

The thickened milk is the Bhopali night-owl's preferred delicacy. Saffron, sugar and cardamom powder is added to the thickened milk and it is topped with crushed almonds and pistachios to give a healthy and warm treat. Arif Hussain, a management student, says, "After dinner, your body needs a hot drink. So, instead of opting for tea, I walk to a nearby shop to have kesariya doodh. I feel rejuvenated after sipping the milk."

## Gajak, til, peanuts and more

(Price - Rs 160 per kg onwards)

Gud gajak or gud patti are just a couple of the varieties that are specially on offer during winters. The other delectable items you could spot at shops are gajak roll with mawa stuffing, dry fruits laddoo, til cake etc. Ashok Pandey, a shopkeeper, says, "We are in the gajak making business from past eight years and every year during winter, we are so busy that we don't even have the time to talk with our families. Every year, we experiment with delicacies made from til, gud, peanuts and dry fruits that are good for the health."



## Simple steps to make great scrambled eggs

Eggs are god's best gift to us. Not only making simple, quick recipes from eggs are no less than a savior on days when you are low, hungover, woke up late on lazy Sundays or simply love eating eggs on given day, they are equally healthy.

However, there are many who always strive to make that scrambled eggs with utmost precision and perfection, but somehow never get that. Here's a simple and easy recipe to help you make that ever succulent and tempting scrambled egg.

### Ingredients

- 4 eggs
- 1 tsp of milk/water for each no of egg
- Salt to taste
- Black pepper as per taste
- Grated cheese
- A pinch of mixed herbs
- Olive oil/butter
- A frying pan

### Method

-In a big bowl, crack open the eggs and add water or milk. While the water will make the scrambled eggs fluffy and light, adding milk will make it creamier and thicker.

-Once you have added the water or milk, add a bit of



cheese, salt, black pepper and herbs and beat it lightly.

-Beat it lightly with a fork, but don't beat it thoroughly.

-In a pan add a little butter or a teaspoon of olive oil. Once it gets melted on the pan pour in the beaten eggs.

-Once the outside of the eggs is settled, start gently pulling the edges of the eggs to the center of the pan.

-Just gently keeping moving it on a slow flame. In a minute or two turn off the flame and remove the eggs in a plate and serve it with crispy buttery toasts.

## Types of foodies you'll find on campus

there is one thing that everybody has in common it has to be the love for food. While choices may differ when it comes to cuisine and the palate, it is still a binding factor. And if you are a foodie just the aroma is enough before the nom noms arrive. To some people, food must mean value for money and for yet others, the charm lies in the presentation of the dish, so they can photograph it. We list a few such foodies whom you are bound to come across on campus.

### The photo foodie

This member of this clan believes in 'capturing before savouring' and this is a tradition for him/her. Nobody can stop these people from whipping out the camera and clicking; they are satisfied only when their phone pings to notify them that their picture has been liked. While all this happens, you know of their exploits once you get a notification for the same. And mind you, all this happens at same. And mind you, all this happen bolt speed. Food photography is a genre by itself and this well-established group of foodies cannot stop themselves from adding memories to their gastronomic trips. The fussy foodie

Their list of 'I don't like' reads longer than most restaurant menus. These are normally referred to as the choosy lot. They referred to as the choosy lot. They have a list of things they want to indulge in and the rest they dismiss as items they don't intend having at all. Though they appreciate the food they like, they may not be open to having everything on offer. On seeing an array of dishes will not have these foodies break into any kind of celebration. The downside



: with so many restrictions, they can never be spoiled for choice.

### The diet conscious foodie

"Please keep oil content to minimum,"...this is something you get to hear every time this foodie places an order. Sure, it's good to be health-conscious, but they can go a little overboard. Even a drizzle of olive oil in something gets a strong reaction that one reserves for a dish drowning in fat.

Most of the orders are altered, so having authentic cuisine is close to impossible. You can never have butter chicken and greasy naan or even a rich, creamy jalebi with rabdi at a dhaba with this friend, for sure.

### The vfm foodie

Budgeted food, but really tasty food is what you will get to indulge in with this friend. He or she knows how to spend sensibly. Value for money (VFM) food is their mantra and they may even treat friends on birth days, accordingly. Planning on saving your pocket money this month? Take recommendations from this friend and you're sure to have tasty food without burning a hole in your wallet.

### The know-it-all foodie

This friend knows about all the new outlets and what should or should not be eaten. If you are in a mood to try out food from a new place, you know who to ping. This pal is sure to be updated about all the restaurants from small shops to big restaurants across the city. Phone apps are in place, they constantly keep abreast of food reviews and best part is, they share their knowledge too. This foodie also doesn't mind travelling to distant locations just to eat something that has been highly rated.

## How to reuse Cooking oil?

Are you wary of using your cooking oil after frying a batch of nachos, because of the health implications? Here are some tips to reuse them.

### Choose the oil

If your frying technique is off, your oil won't be reusable. Every oil has a specific smoking point, - the temperature where the oil starts breaking down. Use oils like canola, peanut or vegetable oils with a high smoking point that won't break down easily. Avoid reusing olive oil as it has a low smoking point and a dominant flavour, which makes it a bad choice for deep-frying in the first place.

### Filter the oil

After the first (and each subsequent) fry, drain the oil and filter it. Any impurities and unwanted extras like loose crumbs or bits of batter are going to spoil the oil's integrity, making it burn the next time you heat it. Put a few layers of cheesecloth in a metal strainer to filter out the crumbs.

### Refrigerate it

Let the oil cool down till it's at room temperature, and then refrigerate it in an air-tight container.

### Use separate oils according to flavour

The oil is going to take on the flavour of the food you cooked in it, which makes fried fish oil ideal for shrimp, but not good for onion rings. Separate the oils to prevent bad flavour overlaps.



## Recipe: Honey Garlic Chicken

Delicious cooked chicken in a honey-garlic sauce. Best served with hot, steamed rice.

### Ingredients

- Chicken Breasts - 2, boneless, skinless
- Garlic - 1 tblsp finely minced
- Garlic Powder - a pinch
- Butter - 4 to 5 tsp

Chicken Stock - 1/4 cup

Honey - 3 tsp

Soy Sauce - 1/2 tsp

Salt as per taste

Black Pepper Powder as per taste

Method

- Place the chicken breasts in a bowl.



- Sprinkle salt, garlic powder and pepper.

- Toss well to combine.

- Heat butter in a pressure pan.

- Add the chicken and cook until browned and slightly crisp.

- Pour the chicken stock and stir.

- Combine the garlic, honey and soy

sauce.

- Add this to the pan and stir until the chicken is evenly coated.

- Cover with a lid and pressure cook for 10 minutes.

- Switch off the flame and allow the pressure to reduce.

- Serve with rice.

# Top Bhutanese Army commander's India visit begins, high-level meets on cards

**>The Chief Operations Officer of the Royal Bhutan Army, Lieutenant General Batoo Tshering, will be in Delhi from February 2 to 5 and is scheduled to hold talks with Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval among others.**

**New Delhi.** Chief Operations Officer of the Royal Bhutan Army, Lieutenant General Batoo Tshering, began a six-day visit to India on Saturday to further enhance the already close defence ties between the two countries. Lt Gen. Tshering is scheduled to hold talks with Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi, National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh.

The visit is focused on fostering closer bilateral military cooperation and exploring new avenues for defence collaboration, an Indian readout said.

The top Bhutanese military commander's trip comes around two months after Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck visited India.

The overall situation in the Doklam plateau may figure in Lt Gen. Tshering's talks with Indian officials. The Indian and Chinese armies were locked in a 73-day standoff at the Doklam tri-

junction in 2017, after China tried to extend a road in the area that Bhutan claimed belonged

expeditious resolution of their festering boundary row.



to it. The India-China standoff in the Doklam plateau even triggered fears of a larger conflict between the two neighbours. Bhutan had said the area belonged to it and India supported the Bhutanese claim. In the last couple of years, Bhutan and China were looking at an

Lt Gen. Tshering will spend the first day of his trip in Gaya, where he is scheduled to visit the Officers Training Academy and a number of significant Buddhist cultural sites. From February 2 to February 5, he will be in Delhi. Lt Gen. Tshering will also visit several key military institutes, including the National Security Guard (NSG) in Manesar and the Defence Image Processing and Analysis Centre (DIPAC).

Before concluding his visit, he will travel to Kolkata, where he will visit the headquarters of the Eastern Command of the Indian Army. "This visit by Lieutenant General Batoo Tshering paves the way for continued collaboration between the two militaries," the readout said. "The visit will further deepen the strategic relationship between the two friendly nations and enhance their cooperation on matters of mutual interest," it said.

## Defence Ministry to return Rs 12,500 crore unused funds amid procurement delays

**New Delhi.** The Defence Ministry is expected to return Rs 12,500 crore from its 2024-25 budget due to not fully using the funds allocated for capital acquisition. This comes as the ministry's budget for 2025-26 rises to Rs 6.81 lakh crore, marking a 9.53 per cent increase from the previous year. The main reason for the underutilisation of funds is the slow and complex defence procurement process, which causes delays. Out of the Rs 6.81 lakh crore allocated for 2025-26, Rs 1.8 lakh crore is set aside for capital expenditure, including Rs 1.48 lakh crore for modernising and acquiring essential defence equipment. However, the modest 4.65 per cent increase in capital allocation has raised concerns due to inflation and currency fluctuations.

The remaining Rs 31,277 crore is allocated for Research & Development and infrastructure development, with Rs 1.12 lakh crore earmarked for procurement from domestic industries under the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. Two major deals worth over \$10 billion are likely to be concluded by the end of the fiscal year, which includes the procurement of 26 Rafale-M fighter jets and three additional Scorpene-class submarines from France. These deals are expected to coincide with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to Paris in February 2025.

The Rafale-M jets are critical for bolstering India's naval capabilities. Additionally, the Army is set to finalise the procurement of 307 Advanced Towed Artillery Gun Systems (ATAGS) valued at Rs 8,000 crore. While the armed forces grapple with procurement delays, the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has received a significant boost in its allocation. The ICG's budget has increased by 26.5 per cent, with a sharp 43 per cent rise in its capital outlay, which now stands at Rs 5,000 crore.

The additional funds will be used to acquire Advanced Light Helicopters, Dornier aircraft, fast patrol vessels, training ships, and interceptor boats, enabling the ICG to enhance coastal security and respond more effectively to emergencies, according to officials.

To streamline procurement, the government has started consolidating capital expenditures for the three armed services under a single framework. This unified approach aims to cut down on redundancies and boost efficiency in acquiring critical assets like land, aircraft, aero-engines, and heavy vehicles.

## Dense fog envelops Delhi, as cold conditions prevail

**NEW DELHI.** Dense fog covered the national capital on Sunday morning affecting visibility. The fog was accompanied by cold winds. According to India Meteorological Department (IMD), the lowest temperature in Delhi today is 10 degree Celsius. The weather department has forecast dense fog in isolated places over Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. The Met Department has predicted rain for Delhi on February 3.

Meanwhile, Delhi's air quality was recorded in the "very poor" category. According to the Central Pollution Control Board, Air Quality Index was



logged at 340 at 8 am this morning. An AQI rating is categorized as follows: 0-50 (good), 51-100 (satisfactory), 101-200 (moderate), 201-300 (poor), 301-400 (very poor), and 401-500 (severe). Cold weather conditions continue to grip the national capital, with residents seeking refuge in night shelters to escape the biting cold. On Saturday night, many were seen huddled in shelters across areas like Nizamuddin and Lodhi Road, looking for warmth amid the harsh conditions. The dip in morning and night temperatures is attributed to northwesterly winds coming from the Himalayas.

## Bus plunges into gorge in Gujarat; 5 pilgrims killed, several injured

**NEW DELHI.** At least five pilgrims, including two women, died and 12 others were seriously injured after a private bus carrying pilgrims plunged into a gorge in Gujarat on Sunday morning, officials said. The accident occurred at 4:30 am when a bus carrying pilgrims fell off the Malegaon Ghat road into a 35-foot deep gorge in Dang district after the driver lost control, resulting in the death of two men and three women, according to



officials. Four buses with pilgrims on board had departed from Madhya Pradesh's Guna district. One of these buses, carrying 50 tourists, met with an accident near the Gujarat-Maharashtra border, close to Saputara Hill Station.

While five people lost their lives on the spot, 40 others sustained injuries, with 12 grievously injured. The injured were rushed to nearby government hospitals in Samgahan and Ahwa. According to officials, all the injured are out of danger and are being treated at the hospitals. Upon receiving information about the incident, the senior district and police officials reached the spot immediately to assess and mitigate the damage.

## UP Man Loses Rs 1.4 Lakh In Grindr Date After He Is Filmed During Sexual Act

**New Delhi.** Three people have been arrested in Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad for allegedly using a gay dating app to lure people into sexual activity, filming the act and then blackmailing them for money. Rinku, Ajay and Shubham have been arrested and two accused are on the run. According to police, they received a complaint in which a man said he connected with someone on Grindr, a gay dating app, and went to meet him at a flat.

During their meeting, the two started getting intimate. Some other people, who were present in the flat, filmed them in the act. They then blackmailed the complainant and forced him to transfer Rs 1.40 lakh into an account. The victim later approached the police and registered a complaint.

Swatantra Kumar Singh, Assistant Police Commissioner, said they filed a case based on the complaint and started tracking the accused. "We received information that the accused would be near NDRF road today. We set up a checkpoint and arrested the accused. Rinku is the mastermind of the gang. The other accused are Shubham and Ajay. Ajay had connected with the complainant and lured him to the flat. Two people are on the run and they will be arrested soon."

The senior police officer said they had seized three identity cards from Rinku describing him as an advocate. "We are investigating if they are fake," he said. Police have also seized three mobile phones and Rs 10,000 in cash.

Asked if the gang had targeted other people in the past, the officer said, "The owner of the rented flat told us that the accused moved in on January 2. They have admitted that they blackmailed some others too. We are investigating this." Amid a surge in blackmail cases using dating platforms, the officer had a word of caution for the public. "If you are not careful in the virtual world, someone can hide their identity and target you like this. If you are talking to someone and becoming friends online, you must be cautious before trusting them," he said.

## 36 life-saving medicines fully exempted from custom duty: Finance Minister

**NEW DELHI.** Investigators probing the January 29 stampede at the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj have shifted their focus to a conspiracy angle that might have played a part in the tragic incident that left 30 pilgrims dead, sources said. According to the sources, investigators are conducting data analysis of more than 16,000 mobile numbers which were said to be active in the Sangam Nose area -- ground zero of stampede -- on the day of the incident.

The sources further said that suspects were being identified via a facial recognition app from CCTV footage collected in the control room.

Meanwhile, additional reinforcements

have also been deployed to the premises with police on high alert ahead of the third Amrit Snan, scheduled to take place on Monday morning on the occasion of Vasant



Panchami. While the fourth Maha Snan will be on Magh Purnima on February 12, the last will take place on Maha Shivratri on February 26.

Besides the 30 victims, most of them

from Bihar, more than 60 devotees were also injured in the stampede that occurred as a massive crowd of people gathered for a holy dip at the auspicious bathing festival of Mauni Amavasya. According to the police, the disaster broke out as the crowd jumped barricades, crushing those waiting for their turn on the other side.

On Friday, a three-member judicial commission set up by the Uttar Pradesh government to investigate the stampede visited the incident spot.

The panel has a month to wrap up its investigation and submit a report. Being held after 12 years, the Maha Kumbh kicked off on January 13 and will continue till February 26. The Uttar Pradesh government, hosting the fair, expects a total footfall of around 40 crore pilgrims at the largest spiritual gathering on the planet.

## 'Jealous of Bihar,' Union Minister Piyush Goyal slams opposition over budget sops

**NEW DELHI.** Union Industry and Supply Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday hit out at opposition parties over their remarks regarding announcements made for Bihar in the 2025 Union Budget, accusing them of being "jealous" of the development the state is receiving. He demanded that the opposition clarify whether they want Bihar to develop or not. "The people in the opposition want injustice to happen to Bihar. They are jealous because the people of Bihar have received many gifts for the state's development. The opposition must clarify their objections. Are they unhappy with development in Bihar?" Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in 2014 that the government policy would

be 'look east, act east'. Till the time eastern states and northeastern states aren't developed, the country will not



be developed," Goyal told reporters outside the Parliament.

Reiterating the words of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said that the development of eastern and

northeastern states has been the policy of the Modi government since 2014.

Speaking on the budget presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Goyal said that the budget was sensible and pushed for development. Highlighting the relief for the middle class, the minister said that encouragement to the manufacturing sector will increase employment opportunities.

"(The budget) is very sensible and pushes for development. There is relief to the middle class. Encouragement to the manufacturing sector in order to increase employment opportunities. Many facilities for farmers. In a way, this budget encourages jobs, manufacturing (sector), farmers, middle class and everyone else to contribute to Viksit Bharat (mission)," Goyal said.

# Waqf bill report in Lok Sabha today, Congress MP claims dissent note redacted

**New Delhi.** The report of the Joint Committee on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, is scheduled to be presented in the Lok Sabha on Monday, February 3. Meanwhile, the opposition member of the panel alleged that parts of his dissent note were removed without his consent.

According to the List of Business, Jagdambika Pal, Chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, along with BJP MP Sanjay Jaiswal, will present the report in both Hindi and English. They will also place on record the evidence given before the committee. The report was submitted to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on January 30. On the same day,

Jagdambika Pal met the Speaker at Parliament to hand over the final report. The JPC adopted the draft report and the amended bill on Wednesday, January 29. Opposition leaders submitted dissent



notes on the report. Meanwhile, opposition member and Congress MP Syed Naseer Hussain has claimed that

sections of his dissent note on the bill were redacted without his knowledge.

Disapproving what he described as an attempt to suppress opposition voices, Hussain on his X handle writes, "As a

Member of the Joint Committee on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, I had submitted a detailed dissent note opposing the Bill. Shockingly, parts of my dissent note have been redacted without my knowledge!"

"The Joint Committee on Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024 was already reduced to a farce, but now they've stooped even lower—censoring dissenting voices of Opposition MPs! What are they so scared of? Why this attempt to silence us?" he asked. The committee had earlier cleared the Waqf Bill, 1995, with 25 amendments across 14 clauses and sections.

Speaking with news agency ANI, Jagdambika Pal said, "We have adopted the report and the amended revised bill. For the first time, we have included a section stating that the benefits of Waqf should go to the marginalised, poor, women, and orphans. Tomorrow, we will present this report to the Speaker."

"We had 44 clauses before us, out of which amendments were proposed by members in 14 clauses. We conducted a majority vote, and these amendments were then adopted," he said.

The Waqf Act of 1995 regulates Waqf properties and has been criticised for issues such as mismanagement and encroachments. The Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, seeks to introduce reforms, including digitisation, enhanced audits, and legal mechanisms to reclaim occupied properties. The Budget session of Parliament, which began on January 31, will continue until April 4.



# Top food Trends of Year



## Indian street food going global

It's the turn of paranthas, tikkas, gol gappas and chaats to be the main course globally. Teppanyakis and stir fries, popular street food the world over, will make way for tawas and kadhais. Expect variety of dosas, cheelas, burgers with spicy Indian patties and fries in place of quesadillas and pizzas too while Indian sherbets will be the flavour of the season! In India, chefs won't shy away from presenting fusion mithais to local and international travellers. Expect anything from gulukand cupcakes and mithai jars to a famous French dessert giant selling mishti

doi and mango lassi.

## Spiralising

Spiralising — cutting vegetables into strings — is going to reach new levels of popularity this year, owing to the 'eat healthy' wave. Spiraliser is the hottest kitchen gadget in the market right now. It won't be just confined to zucchini pasta (the most popular spiralised dish currently); seasonal vegetables like beets, turnips and sweet potatoes in spiralised form is becoming quite popular. Restaurants will use spiralised vegetables and fruits as appetisers and main course.

## Super Bowls

Meals that pack a punch, conveniently tucked into portable bowls, are becoming the new 'it' food in both restaurants and grocery stores. They are nutritious and can incorporate protein, whole grains, vegetables, and delicious sauces into one dish. Super bowls are versatile, and easy to cook too.

## Sriracha will get hotter

Sri racha (A hot sauce from Thailand made from a paste of chili peppers, distilled vinegar, garlic, sugar, and salt) will be increasingly used by chefs

## Pop-up Party

Pop up was food stalls gained popularity last year, but will be a mainstay in 2019. Expect

cooks specialising in select recipes of forgotten cuisines to set a small stalls in large restaurants, and treat diners to lesser-known delights. Be prepared to tickle to your taste buds to the Kayastha, Bund, Bundelkhand, Assamese and Rampur meals being dished out from small stalls at leading restaurants.

## Cream of Mushroom Soup

For 1-2 persons

### Ingredients:

100 g sliced mushrooms, 1 onion, 2 glasses of water, 2 cloves coarsely-out, 2-inch piece cinnamon coarsely occurred, Kornflor 4 T spoon, 1 cup milk, 4 T spoon of butter, salt and pepper to taste

### Method:

1. Put the butter in a pan and heat. Add onion fry.
2. Mushrooms, water and spices wrapped in a cloth insert. Cook until the mushrooms does not melt.
3. Put mixture in blender and blend to remove the bundle of spices. (Save some mushrooms for decorating.)
4. Donate now to flame Blend milk into the

mixture. Then coming to the boil 3/4 Kornflor Mix dissolved in water. Add salt and pepper powder. 5. Stir and cook the kernels were becoming frequent. Garnish with sliced mushrooms, fresh cream and serve hot.



## Chicken noodles soup

For 1-2 persons

### Ingredients:

Vejtebl 2 tbsp oil 1 medium onion, chopped 1 medium carrot 1/4 inch pieces chopped 1 celery stick, sliced long pieces, 50 g chicken breast, 250 ml. Chicken stock or low-sodium stock, 150 ml. Cold water or as needed, 4 Dndian of parsley, fresh thyme twig 3 or 1/2 tea spoon of dried thyme, 1 cassia, salt and ground black pepper to taste 2 cups steamed egg noodles, chopped parsley to decorate

### Method:

1. Put all the ingredients in a saucepan boil on high heat for about 6 minutes.
2. Garnish with parsley and serve hot, add egg noodles.

Executive Chef Bharat different



cab driver. Garnish with paprika, add garam masala over and serve hot.

## Royal Cheese Balls in Green Gravy

### Balls content:

150 g grated cheese, 20 g Kornflor, 1/2 cup chopped spinach, 1 green pepper, 1 tablespoon chopped coriander leaves, chopped 1 teaspoon ginger, salt to taste, oil for frying, roll semolina, 20 g chopped cashews, almonds, 1 large tablespoon, 1 large tablespoon raisins.

For gravy - 200 g spinach puree, grated 2 onions, 1/2 cup tomato puree, 1-inch piece ginger, garlic bud lane was 8 1/2 tea spoon turmeric powder, 1/2 tsp red chilli and coriander powder, 1 tsp garam masala, 1 tbsp cashew nut paste, 1 tablespoon cream.

### Method-

Kornflor in cheese, spinach and salt together to shake. Raisins, cashews, almonds, coriander, green chillies and ginger together, prepare the filling. Make small balls of cheese mixture filling the filling slightly. Fry the semolina golden wrapping. Wash spinach puree cooked without water make. Heat 4 tablespoons oil in pan, add. Onion, ginger, garlic, turmeric, chilli and coriander powder fry. Tomato puree and salt on low flame fry oil to escape. Cashew nut paste, garam masala, add spinach puree and run 2 minutes. Cook covered on low flame, add 2 cups water 5-6 minutes. Mix the cream off the heat. Cover and put cheese balls.

# Girlfriend Recipe Competition

## Spinach cheese

### Content -

2 cups spinach, 2 cups shredded cheese into square pieces, 1 cup tomato puree 1 tsp ginger - garlic paste, 1/2 tea spoon cumin, 1/2 cup chopped onion, 2 tsp ghee, salt to taste, 1 T spoon garam masala, green chili paste 1 T spoon, 1/2 cup milk, 1/2 cup fresh cream. The first method grind boiled spinach. Ghee in a pan, add the cumin Ctkaan now. Please add the onion is golden. Ginger - garlic paste and fry for pouring. Add the tomato puree and cook until the oil drop. Now add the milk and spinach puree. Salt, green chili paste and garam masala and cook for 10 minutes on low flame. When the sync is done, turn

off the gas. Cover 2 minutes, add cheese. Garnish with fresh cream Serve hot.

## Spinach With Corn

### Content -

50 grams spinach, 2 paste interest, 2-3 clove garlic paste, tomato puree, 1, 50 g cheese, red and yellow bell peppers, cut into square pieces, 50 grams of corn kernels, chopped green pepper, red pepper, salt to taste, garam masala, oil.

### Method -

Wash the spinach thoroughly grind and keep aside. Oil in a pan, add the cheese and bell peppers (red, yellow) make fried mushrooms and bell pepper and keep aside. In another pan, add oil, onion, ginger and garlic paste Fry the



## No tax for up to Rs 12.75 lakh, major overhaul in slabs

**NEW DELHI.** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday gave the middle class and the common man enough reasons to smile when she announced her personal income tax proposals. Not only did she increase the income threshold up to which no taxes would be levied from Rs 7 lakh to Rs 12 lakh, she also changed the income tax slabs that will lead to a substantial reduction in tax burden for all taxpayers under the new tax regime. With these changes, and the standard deduction of Rs 75,000, an individual earning Rs 12.75 lakh a year will have to pay no taxes under the new tax regime. However, if one's taxable income crosses that threshold, all the income would be taxed as per the new slabs, which are both magnanimous and generous.

The new tax slab increases the basic exemption limit from Rs 3 lakh to Rs 4 lakh, which means the first Rs 4 lakh would attract no taxes. Income from Rs 4-8 lakh would attract a rate of 5%, Rs 8-12 lakh would attract 10%.

From Rs 12,00,001 to Rs 16 lakh, there will be 15% tax and from Rs 16,00,001 to Rs 20 lakh, the tax rate would be 20%. The government has introduced a new tax slab of 25%, which would be applicable on income from Rs 20,00,001 to Rs 24 lakh. The highest tax slab of 30% kicks in only if the income crosses Rs 24 lakh per annum. A taxpayer in the new regime with Rs 12 lakh income will save Rs 80,000 in tax (which is 100% of tax payable as per existing rates). A person earning Rs 18 lakh will get a tax benefit of Rs 70,000 (30% of tax payable as per existing rates), while a person with an income of Rs 25 lakh gets a benefit of Rs 1,10,000 (25% tax payable as per existing rates).

Meanwhile, the FM also announced that the new direct tax bill will be introduced in the Budget session of Parliament. "The new income-tax bill will carry forward the same spirit of 'Nyaya'," said the FM, adding that the new bill will be clear and direct in text with close to half of the present law, in terms of both chapters and words.

## From letters to logistics: With 1.5 Lakhs rural post offices, FM announces in Budget

**New Delhi.** Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman Saturday announced the govt's plan to transform India Post into a large logistics organisation with 1.5 lakh rural post offices.

In her Budget speech, Sitharaman said India Post's rural post offices will emerge as a catalyst for the rural economy. "India Post with 1.5 lakh rural post offices, complemented by the India Post Payment Bank and a vast network of 2.4 lakh Dak Sevaks, will be repositioned to act as a catalyst for the rural economy. India Post will also be transformed as a large public logistics organisation. This will meet the rising



needs of Viswakarmas, new entrepreneurs, women, SHGs, MSMEs, and large business organizations." India Post's range of services will now include rural community hub colocation; institutional account services; DBT, cash out and EMI pick-up; credit services to micro enterprises; insurance; and assisted digital services. The FM added services of India Post Payment Bank will be deepened and expanded in rural areas.

## Mutual funds: Flexi cap funds shine; know whom are these suitable for

**NEW DELHI.** A report of the wealth management arm of brokerage Prabhudas Lilladher has mentioned that more than 60% of the equity mutual fund outperformed their respective benchmarks in the month of December 2024. The report also found that Flexi Cap Funds led the entire pack and 79.49% of schemes outperformed the benchmarks which they follow. The study was based on as many as 291 open-ended equity diversified funds. This automatically leads to the questions what are flexi cap funds? How are they different from other equity-oriented funds? What sort of returns have they provided in December 2024 and which class of investors are they suitable for.

### What is a Flexi Cap Fund

A Flexi Cap fund is a type of equity-oriented fund. In a sense, a flexi cap fund offers a great opportunity to diversify investments through a single investment. This is possible since flexi cap mutual funds invest in large-cap, mid-cap, and small-cap equities. Flexi cap mutual fund schemes are usually open-ended funds where one can put their money whenever they want. These funds offer flexibility to their managers to select any company to invest irrespective of their market cap depending on the market conditions and across sectors. This lack of any shackles on the fund manager on the type of company he/she can invest in allows great flexibility to the fund manager and, therefore, is significantly responsible for generating returns.

### Benefits of flexi cap mutual funds

Mutual fund experts have pointed out a few key benefits for the investors of flexi cap mutual funds. The crucial among them are listed below: Diversification: Flexi Cap Funds allow your investment to be spread across all stocks that offer varying risk and return, thereby making investments suitable for different market conditions.

# Tax axe budget prods people to spend more

**NEW DELHI.** A country is not just its soil, a country is its people—a famous line of Telugu poet and playwright Gurajada Appa Rao quoted by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her speech—sums up the focus of Budget 2025-26. The middle class was the central focus of the Budget, which heralded a big income tax cut the demand for which calls came from all corners—salaried people, industrialists, and economists. All of them were unanimous in their call for a relief to the common man, the absence of which was writ large in all macro and micro indicators. The FM was cheered by all the members of Parliament when she announced the personal tax proposals, which include a major overhaul in tax slabs and an increase in the threshold up to which no tax is levied on income.

The income threshold was increased from Rs 7 lakh to Rs 12 lakh, virtually making any income up to Rs 12.75 lakh tax free. The new tax slab significantly reduces the tax burden on all with the highest tax rate of 30% applicable on income over Rs 24 lakh from Rs 18 lakh earlier.

The government will introduce a new income tax bill in Parliament next week, replacing the six-decade old Income Tax Act of 1961. According to Sitharaman, the tax reforms will result in a revenue loss of Rs 1 lakh crore. However, analysts say this could be much higher. Despite her tax largesse and the resultant revenue loss, the government maintains a strong fiscal stance. The fiscal deficit target has been kept at 4.4% in FY26, and the government plans to keep its borrowings lower than the current financial year, lower than 4.8% estimated in the current financial year. It's a fiscal magic that the government plans to achieve through higher collection of personal taxes, which are estimated to grow at 14.5%.

The government has, for a change, decided to go slow on capex as the allocations for capital expenditure have been kept at Rs 11.2 lakh crore, a 10% increase from the revised FY25 estimate of Rs 10.2 lakh crore. However, the government has defending flat capex numbers as it argues that the budgeted numbers don't include the central PSUs' capex commitment of Rs 4 lakh crore for the year. "So, there is no going back or scaling down on public capex," said finance secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey. The Budget also launched a massive rationalisation of customs duty to help both manufacturers and the middle class. That the move came in the wake of

US President Donald Trump's aggressive stance against countries with high import tax regime is notable. With the duty cut, Harley-Davidson bikes will be cheaper as its levy has been brought down from 50% to 40%. Apart from the middle class, the Budget centred around 10 broad areas focusing on the poor, youth, farmers, and women. The objectives include spurring agricultural growth and productivity, building rural prosperity and resilience; inclusive growth path, boosting manufacturing and supporting MSMEs, and enabling employment-led development. In a significant boost to the MSME sector, the FM announced that credit guarantee cover for the MSME will be doubled from Rs 5 crore to Rs 10 crore. This leads to additional credit of Rs 1.5 lakh crore in the next five years. Over 1 crore registered MSMEs currently employ 7.5 crore people and generate 36% of India's manufacturing.



7.5 crore people and generate 36% of India's manufacturing.

## Green Energy revolution on right course

**NEW DELHI.** India's 2025 Union Budget marks a transformative moment in the nation's journey toward clean energy, unveiling a comprehensive vision that blends nuclear power ambitions, manufacturing prowess, and sustainable development. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcements reveal a carefully crafted strategy to position India as a global clean energy leader while ensuring energy security and environmental sustainability.

At the heart of this transformation lies an ambitious Nuclear Energy Mission, aiming to boost India's nuclear power capacity from the current 8 GW to a remarkable 100 GW by 2047. This is backed by a substantial ₹20,000 crore commitment and thoughtful regulatory reforms to the Atomic Energy Act and

Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act. The mission places special emphasis on Small Modular Reactors. These innovative reactors, generating up to 300 megawatts per unit, represent



the future of nuclear technology. The manufacturing sector emerges as another powerhouse in clean energy strategy. Building on the July 2024 Budget's customs duty exemptions for 25 critical minerals, the new budget

expands this list to include cobalt powder, lithium-ion battery scrap, lead, zinc, and 12 other crucial minerals. This creates a robust ecosystem for manufacturing clean energy components – from solar PV cells and EV batteries to wind turbines. The electric vehicle sector receives particular attention through strategic customs exemptions for manufacturing equipment. By adding 35 new capital goods for EV battery manufacturing and 28 for mobile phone batteries to the exemption list, the government aims to make electric vehicles more affordable and accessible. This localization of critical components is expected to lower production costs, spur technological innovation, and create high-tech employment opportunities for India's youth.

## These Banks Raise FD Rates Ahead of RBI Monetary Policy Review; Check Details

**NEW DELHI.** At the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting on February 7, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is anticipated to decide on a cut in repo rates. Nonetheless, many banks, including Union Bank of India, Punjab National Bank (PNB), Axis, Shivalik Small Finance Bank, Karnataka Bank, and Federal Bank, have changed the fixed deposit rates in January before the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee meeting. In January, the following banks changed the interest rates on their fixed deposits. Please take note that only general citizens' fixed deposits are eligible for the rates listed below.

**Punjab National Bank**  
With a 7 per cent interest rate, Punjab National Bank has introduced a new FD tenure of 303 days. With a 6.7 per cent interest rate for general citizens, 506 days is the other tenure that has been added. The revised FD tenures have taken effect since January 1 this year. For general citizens with fixed deposit tenures ranging from seven days to ten years, Punjab National Bank offers interest rates ranging from 3.50 per cent to 7.25 per cent. The 400-day tenure offers the highest interest rate,

7.25 per cent.  
**Shivalik Small Finance Bank (SFB)**  
The official website of Shivalik Small Finance Bank (SFB) states that the bank has updated its fixed deposit interest rates. Interest rates on FDs offered by the bank range from 3.50 per



cent to 8.80 per cent for general citizens and from 4 per cent to 9.30 per cent for senior citizens. FD interest rates have been updated and taken effect from January 22.  
**Karnataka Bank**  
Karnataka Bank provides interest rates for general citizens ranging from 3.50 per cent to 7.50 per cent for terms of 7 days to 10 years. For 375 days, the highest interest rate of 7.50 per cent is

available. Rates have been adjusted as of January 2.

**Union Bank of India**  
The interest rate on fixed deposits under Rs 3 crore was changed by the bank, and as a result, interest rates ranging from 7 days to 10 years are now between 3.5 per cent and 7.30 per cent. For 456 days, the highest interest rate of 7.30 per cent is available to general citizens. The updated rates have taken effect since January 1.

**Axis bank**  
For funds under Rs 3 crore, Axis Bank offers FD interest rates ranging from 3 per cent to 7.25 per cent for general citizens with tenures ranging from 7 days to 10 years. The revised fixed deposit interest rates are effective from January 27.

**Federal Bank**  
Karnataka Bank provides general citizens with fixed deposit tenures ranging from seven days to ten years, with interest rates ranging from 3 per cent to 7.50 per cent. The maximum interest rate, 7.50 per cent, is available for a 444-day term. It is important to note that the rates have been revised as of January 10.

## Harley-Davidson bikes to get cheaper as Centre cuts tariff amid Trump threat

**NEW DELHI.** Imported bikes, including American brands like Harley-Davidson, are set to become cheaper in India as the Union Budget 2025 has lowered import duties on high-capacity motorcycles. The Harley-Davidson tariff has been a point of contention for several years between India and the US, and the US President Donald Trump has been battling for its reduction. The Budget announcements are anticipated to alleviate these strains.

The import duty on motorcycles with engine capacities up to 1,600 cc, which are imported as completely built-up (CBU) units, has been slashed from 50 per cent to 40 per cent. For motorcycles with engine capacities exceeding 1,600 cc, the reductions are even more substantial with a drop to 30 per cent from 50 per cent.

Additionally, the import duty on semi-knocked down (SKD) kits has been reduced from 25 per cent to 20 per cent, and completely knocked



down (CKD) units will now be taxed at 10 per cent, down from 15 per cent, according to the Union Budget presented on Saturday. This reduction in tariffs is expected to significantly lower the prices of Harley-Davidson motorcycles in India and will likely make these bikes more accessible to a broader range of customers, potentially increasing sales and market penetration for the brand. The decision to slash tariffs for imported bikes comes as Donald Trump threatened reciprocal taxes on countries that levy high tariffs on US goods.

In December last year, asserting his tit-for-tat approach to taxation, Trump said that India's taxes are excessive and stated, "If they tax us, we tax them the same amount!" The word reciprocal is important because if somebody charges us - India, we don't have to talk about our own - if India charges us 100 per cent, do we charge them nothing for the same? You know, they send in a bicycle, and we send them a bicycle. They charge us 100 and 200. India charges a lot," he said.

According to data by the Ministry of Commerce, India was the US's largest trading partner last financial year.

# Agriculture budget cuts, focus shifts to new mission and natural farming

**This year, total budgetary allocation for the department of agriculture is Rs 1,27,290 crore whereas it was Rs 1,31,195 crore (revised estimate) of 2024-25.**

**NEW DELHI.** Despite terming Agriculture as the first engine of growth, the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has allocated a lesser amount than previous year. The allocation of 2025-26 is around 3% less than previous year revised estimates. This year, total budgetary allocation for the department of agriculture is Rs 1,27,290 crore whereas it was Rs 1,31,195 crore (revised estimate) of 2024-25.

However, a major emphasis is given on natural farming and flagship scheme Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY). The funds for National Mission on Natural Farming has increased by over 500% and RKVY funds increased by 41% compared to previous year. Even Krishonnati scheme has witnessed an increase of 12% over previous year.

The government gave a major relief to 7.7 crore farmers who hold Kisan Credit Cards (KCC). The loan limit under the Modified Interest Subvention Scheme will be enhanced from Rs 3 lakh to Rs 5 lakh for loans taken through the KCC.

Besides that, Sitharaman has launched some flagship schemes to promote cotton, pulses, makhana, fruits and vegetable production. One of the major schemes announced is Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana - Developing Agri

Districts Programme (DADP) to help 1.7 crore farmers. The DADP scheme will target 100 districts which are marred with low productivity, moderate crop intensity and below-average credit parameters. The



scheme will help farmers to enhance agricultural productivity, adopt crop diversification and sustainable agriculture practices, augment post-harvest storage at the panchayat and block level, improve irrigation facilities, and facilitate availability of long-term and short-term

credit. Moreover, the government launched a 6-year "Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses" with a special focus on Tur, Urad and Masoor to achieve self-reliance in Pulses production. In view of election in Bihar and to appease its crucial partner, the government has announced to set up a Makhana Board to improve production, processing, value addition, and marketing of makhana. The Board will provide handholding and training support to makhana farmers and will also work to ensure they receive the benefits of all relevant government schemes.

In another move, the government announced to launch a comprehensive programme to promote production and processing of vegetable and fruits and setting up of cooperatives and FPOs to facilitate it. Besides, the government announced to launch a National Mission on High Yielding Seeds and Mission for Cotton Productivity.

## NEWS BOX

## IND vs ENG: Mohammed Shami, Jaiswal in focus as India aim 'clean-win' in Mumbai

India and England will meet for the final time in the T20I series on Sunday, February 2. Billed as an exciting hitting contest, the series has come to a tame end with both teams not firing in unison over the last four matches.

When the series was being planned, both boards would have hoped for a high-profile, high-scoring contest in a winner-takes-all kind of match in the 5th and final T20I at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. After all, while this is Suryakumar Yadav's homeground, this is also the venue that Jos Buttler enjoys a lot in the Indian Premier League. However, there is no chance for that drama anymore as the England batting line-up imploded in the final 5 overs of the 4th T20I in Pune, handing India an unassailable lead of 3-1 in the series. Now that both teams are playing a dead rubber before the ODIs, a lot of changes can be expected, at least for the hosts on Sunday.

But, is all lost? Is there no drama, something to look forward to in the final T20I?

Of course, there is.

India's series win in Pune was slightly flattened due to a concussion substitute controversy. After Shivam Dube got hit on the helmet in the first innings and could not take the field, India opted to replace him with Harshit Rana.

England players and supporters were left fuming and questioned if this kind of



substitution, a pacer for an all-rounder, was even possible. Rana ran through the England line-up in that game and helped India clinch a clinical victory in Pune. On Sunday, he will be put to the test once again, hopefully this time as a starter in the Indian line-up.

Sunday's match will be a battle of egos between the two sides as they try to assert their dominance, at least in moral terms. If India wins, they get the bragging rights - that concussion sub or not, they are technically a superior side to the 2022 champions.

On the other side, England will try to win this game by hook or by crook to prove a point.

Team News: India vs England, 5th T20I  
India's bowling coach Morne Morkel has more or less confirmed that Mohammed Shami will be playing in the final T20I match.

## Bangladesh Cricket appoint independent committee to probe BPL corruption allegations

**New Delhi** The Bangladesh Cricket Board appointed an independent inquiry panel to help its Anti-Corruption Unit in investigating a series of corruption claims made in recent weeks in the Bangladesh Premier League. This is the first formal corruption inquiry in the BPL since 2013, as the league deals with delayed player payments and ticketing issues.

"As part of its ongoing efforts, the BCB is in the process of establishing an Independent Inquiry Body to further support the ACU in its investigations," a BCB press release said. "The BCB remains dedicated to ensuring a fair and transparent cricketing environment, and will continue to take all necessary actions to safeguard the integrity of the sport in Bangladesh." The ongoing BPL season is under scrutiny over corruption allegations, with reports claiming that the BCB's Anti-



Corruption Unit (ACU) has identified eight matches suspected of spot-fixing and match-fixing based on anonymous tips and media reports. Ten players are also under investigation, while four franchises are being closely monitored. Among the players, six have played for the Bangladesh national team, two are uncapped Bangladeshi cricketers, and two are foreign players.

Among the franchises, Durbar Rajshahi and Dhaka Capitals have the most integrity concerns, with 12 flagged instances each, while Sylhet Strikers and Chittagong Kings have six and two, respectively. "The BCB has also come across media coverage regarding potential anti-corruption concerns about the BPL. The Board reiterates its firm commitment to upholding the integrity and spirit of the game," added the release. A day after the announcement, the BCB reaffirmed its commitment to preserving the league's integrity and revealed plans to set up an independent inquiry committee to support the ACU's investigations. "The BCB strictly adheres to the ICC Anti-Corruption Code for Participants and maintains a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption in any form. The BCB anti-corruption unit is continuously monitoring all matters relating to integrity

# IND vs ENG 5th T20I, Predicted XIs: Will concussion sub Harshit Rana get a look in

**India and England are all set to lock horns for the final time in the ongoing T20I series as the action shifts to Mumbai. Will the impressive Harshit Rana get a look in for the 5th T20I after his Pune heroics**

**NEW DELHI.** India and England are all set to finish off the series with a bang at the iconic Wankhede stadium in Mumbai with the final match of the T20I series on Sunday, February 2. India wrapped up the series with a 16-run win in Pune, but it was one man who stole the headlines on the day. Harshit Rana, who was relaxing in the changing room, was summoned to head to the field after Shivam Dube failed to recover in time from a knock to the helmet he received in the final over of the Indian innings. Everyone was stunned to see Harshit come in as he made an instant impact by taking the catch to dismiss the



dangerous Jos Buttler. He followed it up with figures of 3 for 33 in his 4 overs as he turned the game in India's favour in the end. While the jury is out on the decision to have him as the concussion sub, Harshit delivered for his side at the right time with his impressive variations. The question now on everyone's mind will be to see if the youngster does get the chance to play in the final match of the series, which is essentially a dead rubber.

India vs England, 5th T20I: Predicted Playing

Xis Harshit Rana coming into the playing XI will heavily depend on a few things. The main one will be if India is ready to abandon their current strategy of going with just one frontline pacer. Hardik Pandya has done well as the second pacer, but given that it is a dead rubber, the team management could be in a mood to experiment. If that is the case, then the Delhi pacer could come in if Dube fails to recover in time for the match. If the batting

all-rounder is out, it could also open the door for Rannadeep Singh to come in as well. India could also choose to rotate a bit and bring back Mohammed Shami instead of Arshdeep Singh to give the right-arm pacer some game time. For England, it's all about pride as they let the Pune T20I slip out of their fingers. Saqib Mahmood has impressed everyone and is sure to retain his spot in the side. England could look to rest Jofra Archer, who has played all the 4 matches so far.

Expect some rest for Archer as Gus Atkinson or Mark Wood could return to the side. We could also see Jamie Smith come into the team as Jacob Bethell continues to struggle to make an impact. Rehan Ahmed could also come in as Adil Rashid could be given some rest with the ODI series and the Champions Trophy on the horizon. India (Predicted XI): Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wk), Tilak Varma, Suryakumar Yadav (c), Rinku Singh, Axar Patel, Randeep Singh/Harshit Rana, Ravi Bishnoi, Varun Chakaravarty, Arshdeep Singh/Mohammed Shami. England (Predicted XI): Phil Salt (wk), Ben Duckett, Jos Buttler (c), Harry Brook, Liam Livingstone, Jacob Bethell/Jamie Smith, Jamie Overton, Brydon Carse, Gus Atkinson/Mark Wood, Saqib Mahmood, Adil Rashid/Rehan Ahmed.

## Steve Smith wants Usman Khawaja to open in Ashes after Australia's Sri Lanka win

**New Delhi** Australia's stand-in skipper and veteran batter Steven Smith has backed Usman Khawaja to retain his spot as an opener for the upcoming Ashes series against England, following Khawaja's outstanding performance in Australia's dominant victory over Sri Lanka.

Khawaja, who had faced a slump in form during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India, made a remarkable comeback in the first Test against Sri Lanka in Galle. His maiden Test double century was the highlight of Australia's innings, playing a crucial role in their emphatic win by an innings and 242 runs. Speaking after the match, Smith praised the 38-year-old batter for defying age with his consistency and resilience, stating that his performance solidified his case for the Ashes.

"He's still batting exceptionally well and age is only a number... He's still doing everything right, he's catching well in the slips, he's a senior figure. He's batting really well. I'm not a selector, but I'm sure as long as he wants to play then I'm happy with him there for sure," Smith said. Smith even highlighted how facing the likes of India's

Jasprit Bumrah is as tough a challenge can get for a Test batter, reasoning Khawaja's off-form in the Border Gavaskar Trophy. "Batting at the top of the order at the moment, particularly in Australia, is as hard



as I've seen in my career. The amount of seam movement, and you throw into that he's facing Jasprit Bumrah throughout the summer with a brand-new ball, fresh every time. There's probably not a much bigger threat in world cricket at the moment or almost ever," he added.

While Khawaja stole the limelight with his double hundred, Smith himself had a

significant role in Australia's triumph. Leading the side in the absence of regular skipper Pat Cummins, he played a crucial knock of 141 off 251 balls, a landmark innings that also saw him surpass the 10,000-run mark in Test cricket. His leadership and batting masterclass ensured Australia's commanding display against the hosts. Australia's dominant performance in Galle further extends their stronghold in Test cricket.

Fresh off their Border-Gavaskar Trophy triumph over India, the series against Sri Lanka is shaping up as an ideal platform to fine-tune their squad for the upcoming World Test Championship Final against South Africa. With Khawaja's resurgence, Australia's batting lineup looks formidable, and Smith's endorsement further cements his place at the top of the order. As the Ashes loom closer, the Aussies will be keen on maintaining their momentum, ensuring that their experienced players, including Khawaja and Smith, continue to lead from the front in their quest for another Test glory.

## WWE Royal Rumble 2025 Results: Jey Uso breaks John Cena's dream, Charlotte wins

**New Delhi** Jey Uso shattered John Cena's dreams of winning the Royal Rumble as he eliminated the WWE legend to secure a big win in Indianapolis and book his ticket for the WrestleMania 41 main event. Charlotte Flair made a sparkling return to in-ring action as she set a Rumble record by winning her second one. Cody Rhodes and DIY retained their titles as the Royal Rumble some great moments and surprises on the night. The men's Royal Rumble had an incredible start as we had Rey Mysterio and Pentagon as the first 2 entrants. They set the pace of the match with some incredible offence. Chad Gable, Carmelo Hayes would follow next and they all made some impact on proceedings. The biggest surprise of the night was seeing iShowSpeed make his debut. The YouTube sensation had some funny moments but was eliminated by Bron Breakker.

WWE Royal Rumble 2025 Highlights

Jacob Fatu came in at No.12 and went after everyone as he eliminated Rey Mysterio, Chad Gable and Andrade in the blink of an eye. The next surprise of the night was when TNA Champion Joe Hendry made his Royal Rumble debut as the crowd joined with the Scottish star's entrance song. The action started to pick up once Roman Reigns made his way to the ring at No.16 and eliminated 4 people in one go. Soon, we had John Cena and CM Punk enter the mix as we got a stare-off between the two former rivals and Reigns before Seth Rollins broke everything up with his entrance.

Logan Paul would enter at No.30 and eliminate AJ Styles as the field was set. Reigns and Rollins produced an incredible moment of some back and forth offence as the former SHIELD members looked to eliminate each other. But Punk used it against both men to eliminate them. However, Paul eliminated Punk as we

entered the final 3.

But soon, Rollins snapped and he took out his frustration on Reigns with 2 Stomps and he fought with Punk. Cena and Jey Uso worked together to eliminate Logan Paul.

Cena and Uso would battle it out, leaving the fans on their edge of the seats as they were exchanging blows on the apron. Cena made the mistake of trying for an AA, which Jey used to his advantage and eliminated the legend to win the Royal Rumble.

Charlotte sets Rumble record  
The night started with the Women's Royal Rumble match as Iyo Sky and Liv Morgan. They were joined next by Roxanne Perez, who made it all the way to the final two with a sensational performance. The surprises amongst the first 10 entrants was kept at a minimal with Chelsea Green being the crowd favourite. Then the surprises started to come in as WWE's new signing Jordynne Grace came in.



players and the board, as she has worked in strategic and leadership roles, helping to streamline various operations," said a source close to the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

Munawar, who joined the PCB last year, was also appointed manager of the Pakistan women's under-19 team for the Asia Cup. "She made history as the first female district officer in the Frontier Constabulary in Swat, breaking gender barriers in a traditionally male-dominated field," the source added. It is understood that PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi brought Munawar onto the board on deputation, as she remains part of the Police Service of Pakistan. The PCB aims to streamline team management and create a more organised and efficient environment, with her appointment bringing fresh perspectives to the traditionally coaching-focused and male-dominated setup.

## Salah nets brace in Liverpool's win over Bournemouth, Forest score 7 vs Brighton

**Mohamed Salah's brace powered Liverpool to a crucial win, extending their lead to nine points, while Nottingham Forest ran riot with a stunning 7-0 demolition of Brighton in a goal-packed Premier League night.**

**New Delhi** The Premier League delivered exhilarating action on February 1, with Mohamed Salah stealing the spotlight once again. The Egyptian maestro scored twice to propel Liverpool to victory against Bournemouth, extending their lead at the top of the table to nine points. Meanwhile, Nottingham Forest put on a spectacular show, hammering Brighton 7-0 in a goal-fest. Liverpool, under Arne Slot, have been in



imperial form across all competitions, and their latest triumph takes them to 56 points, firmly ahead of Arsenal (47 points). Salah's brace not only guided his team to victory but also saw him surpass Chelsea legend Frank Lampard to become the sixth-highest goalscorer in Premier League history. However, the Reds were dealt a significant

blow as star right-back Trent Alexander-Arnold limped off with a muscle injury, casting doubt over his availability for the crucial Carabao Cup semi-final second leg against Tottenham Hotspur. Nottingham Forest, on the other hand, produced one of their most dominant performances in recent memory, humiliating Brighton with a 7-0

thrashing. Chris Wood stole the show with a sensational hat-trick, while Anthony Elanga dazzled with a hat-trick of assists. The scoring began with an own goal from Brighton captain Lewis Dunk, setting the tone for a ruthless display from Forest. They added two more before half-time before running riot in the second half, netting four more. Under Nuno Espirito Santo, Forest's resurgence continues as they climb the table with renewed confidence. Elsewhere, Wolves secured a 2-0 victory over Aston Villa, with Matheus Cunha sealing the win in stoppage time after Jean Ricner-Bellegarde's opener. Meanwhile, Newcastle United suffered a damaging 2-1 defeat to Fulham, dealing a blow to their top-four aspirations. Everton, struggling at the bottom half of the table, found some much-needed respite with a resounding 4-0 win over relegation-threatened Leicester City. With Liverpool extending their dominance and Nottingham Forest making headlines, the Premier League title race and battle for survival continue to intensify.



# Keerthy Suresh

**Demands Justice For Kochi Teen Who Died By Suicide After Ragging: 'This Is Heart Wrenching'**

A 15-year-old student from Kerala died by suicide on January 15 after alleged ragging and bullying by his classmates at a private school in Kochi. Mihir Ahammed, a student of the Global Public School in the Thiruvaniyoor area of Ernakulam, jumped from the 26th floor of his building after returning home from school. His mother alleged that her son was forced to 'lick toilet seats' and had his 'head shoved into the toilet while it was flushed.' Actress Keerthy Suresh has demanded justice for Mihir, describing the situation as heart-wrenching. She criticized the shameful act of ragging, and expressed that she can't stop thinking about his grieving mother and other family members. Keerthy Suresh took to her Instagram story to re-share an Instagram post which was originally uploaded by Mihir's mother. Reacting to the incident, Keerthy wrote, "This is heart-wrenching! If ragging starts in school and a group of kids has tortured a boy to the extent that he took his own life, what a shame! Can't stop thinking of this grieving mother and her family."



The grieving mother has filed a formal complaint at the Hill Palace Police Station in Thripunithura. In her statement, she also revealed that her son was bullied for his skin colour. "I am a grieving mother fighting for justice for my son, who was a happy, active, and loving child. On that fateful day, Mihir returned home from school at 2:45 PM, and by 3:50 PM, my world came crashing down as he jumped from the 26th floor of our home in Choice Paradise, Thripunithura, Kochi, ending his life," Ahammed's mother Rajna PM said. "Mihir was beaten, verbally abused, and forced to endure unimaginable humiliation even on his last day. He was forcibly taken to the washroom, made to lick a toilet seat, and had his head pushed into the toilet while it was flushed. These acts of cruelty broke him in ways we cannot fathom. He was bullied for his skin colour," the teen's mother claimed.

Samantha Ruth Prabhu, who was shattered by the news, also demanded justice for Mihir. "It's 2025. Yet, we've lost another bright young life, snuffed out because a few individuals, filled with hate and venom pushed someone to the brink! Mihir's tragic death is a stark reminder that bullying, harassment, and ragging are not just 'harmless traditions' or 'rites of passage! They are violence-psychological, emotional, and sometimes even physical. We have stringent anti-ragging laws apparently, yet our students continue to suffer in silence, afraid to speak up, afraid of consequences, afraid that no one will listen. Where are we failing?" she wrote.

## Anushka Sharma

Has 'No Tantrums'

Deepika Padukone's

Rajeev Juneja said he is also in talks with Alia Bhatt to replace Anushka Sharma as the new face of the brand.

Fee Is 'Too Much For Us': Prega News Founder



From Kareena Kapoor to Anushka Sharma, new moms in Bollywood often sign endorsement deals with pregnancy test brands. Rajeev Juneja, the Managing Director and Co-Founder of Mankind Pharma, recently appeared on Raj Shamani's podcast and opened up about his experience with Anushka Sharma as Prega News' face. He also revealed that the brand is now eyeing either Deepika Padukone or Alia Bhatt for an endorsement. Rajeev's brand, Prega News, is currently endorsed by Anushka Sharma and he believes, "She is very good. Very straight, very disciplined. Matlab kam aisa hota hai. Koi tantrums nahi hai. Koi filmy wali baatein nahi hain. Army background se hain so maybe her ethics are different. Very professional."

Rajeev shared that he also had a great experience with Kareena Kapoor, the previous ambassador of the brand. As for his next choice, Rajeev has his eyes set on Deepika Padukone. However, the actress hasn't been signed yet. Rajeev said, "Nahi, sign nahi kiya. Maybe her asking is too much for us." He revealed he is also in talks with Alia Bhatt to represent the brand. Rajeev Juneja mentioned that for his brand marketing, only 20-25 per cent of the budget is allocated for making an ad. This includes the star's fee. The rest is spent on running the ad and making sure it reaches a wide audience. Anushka Sharma was announced as the brand's ambassador in 2020 when she was pregnant with her first child, daughter Vamika Kohli. Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli welcomed Vamika in January 2021. Anushka and Virat also welcomed their second child, son Akaay, in February last year. As for Deepika Padukone, she welcomed her first child with Ranveer Singh, daughter Dua, in September last year. Both Anushka and Deepika have refrained from sharing their kids' photos with the public. Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor welcomed their daughter, Raha Kapoor, in November 2022. While Ranbir and Alia kept Raha's face hidden from the public for the longest time, they revealed her face for the first time at the Kapoor family's Christmas Lunch in 2023.



## Janhvi Kapoor Shares Photo Of Her 'Favourite Kind Of Days' From Param Sundari Sets



Sidharth Malhotra and Janhvi Kapoor are currently shooting for their romantic comedy film Param Sundari in Kerala. The shoot is going on in full swing and actors have also been sharing BTS from the sets. Recently, Janhvi Kapoor also shared another photo from the sets and called it her favourite kind of day. The film is all set to release in July this year. Taking to her Instagram stories, Janhvi Kapoor shared a photo in which we can see camera, light all set for capturing the scene. Earlier, Sidharth also shared a photo in which we can see him enjoying coconut water with a view. The makers had released the motion poster, teasing their first looks. While fans are ecstatic about the new pair. The film is directed by Tushar Jalota and produced under the banner of Maddock Films. It revolves around a love tale between a North Indian man (Sidharth Malhotra) and a South Indian woman (Janhvi Kapoor). The film promises a heartwarming love story in which two worlds intersect and sparks fly. Set against the magnificent backwaters of Kerala, this love story is a rollercoaster of comedy, chaos, and surprising turns. The motion poster depicts Sidharth Malhotra's look as a North Indian guy and Janhvi Kapoor dressed up in a traditional South Indian attire. The caption along with the post said, "North ka swag, South ki grace - two worlds collide and sparks fly. Dinesh Vijan presents #ParamSundari, a love story directed by Tushar Jalota, coming to cinemas on 25th July 2025. Meet the suave Sidharth Malhotra as Param and the vivacious Janhvi Kapoor as Sundari." "wists that will surprise Speaking to Variety about the film, Dinesh Vijan stated, "Its like those films that Mani-sir [Mani Ratnam] used to do like Saathiya. The kind of music it has and Janhvi playing a South Indian is interesting, Sid's playing a Northern Delhi boy and the conflict is very cool. It's like maybe taking Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya forward - there's a high tech idea in there. But we are going into the Kantara world of sorts - we are going a little more than that."

## Naga Chaitanya Calls Married Life With Sobhita Dhulipala 'Great', Says 'I Am Enjoying It'



Naga Chaitanya has opened up about his married life with actress Sobhita Dhulipala. In a recent interview, Chay called his life after marriage "great" and mentioned that they both have been able to balance their personal and professional lives well. "Married life is great! I'm totally enjoying it. It's just been a couple of months. I think we both invest equally in work and away from work; so, we have that work-life balance very much intact. I think that's one of the qualities we both really connected on also," he told Hindustan Times. Asked what he and Sobhita have in common other than being successful actors, Naga Chaitanya added, "You know, we are both from Andhra. She



is from Vizag and I love Vizag. Our roots are similar though we are not from the same cities and so, culturally, there was a lot of connect. And, obviously, the love for cinema, the love for this art form. I think both of us are just so curious about life, which got us going. Many conversations sort of started around that for us. And we love travelling as well."

Chaitanya is currently gearing up for the release of his upcoming movie, Thandel. Earlier this month, the actor attended the film's trailer launch event in Vizag, Andhra Pradesh, when he also talked about his wife, actress Sobhita Dhulipala, who also hails from the city. "Vizag is so close to my heart that I fell in love with a Vizag girl and married her. Now, there's a piece of Vizag in my home too. Even in my household, the ruling party is Vizag. So, brothers, I have a small request—Thandel should rock Vizag's box office; otherwise, I'll lose my honour at home. Please!" he said. Naga Chaitanya and Sobhita Dhulipala tied the knot on December 4, 2024, at the Annapurna Studios, Hyderabad.