

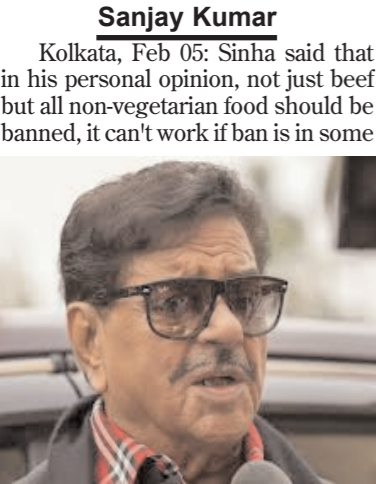
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Shatrughan Sinha calls for consistency in beef ban, warns on UCC loopholes



Sanjay Kumar Kolkata, Feb 05: Sinha said that in his personal opinion, not just beef but all non-vegetarian food should be banned, it can't work if ban is in some places while not in others Lok Sabha MP and Trinamool Congress leader Shatrughan Sinha called for the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) that takes into account the concerns of all communities. He said that the initiative should not be viewed as a political move for elections, stressing the need for a multi-party meeting to ensure broad consensus. Sinha also voiced his support for beef bans but highlighted the

importance of consistency across different regions. "What happened in Uttarakhand, I would say that as a nation, we must acknowledge it as necessary. A Uniform Civil Code (UCC) should indeed be implemented and it is something that all citizens of the country would agree upon. However, there are many fine prints and complexities in this matter. It is important to ensure that the concerns of various communities and groups are addressed. It cannot be that suddenly one day, it is imposed in a way that people feel it's just for votes or elections," Sinha told ANI. Sinha said that while in his personal opinion, not just beef but all non-vegetarian food should be banned, it can't work if it is banned in some places while not in others "In some places, beef is banned, and I agree with this. Personally, I think non-veg should be banned, but that's just my opinion. In some regions, beef is banned, while in others it is not. Now, take the Northeast, for example.

Delhi records 57.70% voter turnout

Simmi Kaur Babbar New Delhi, Feb. 05: A voter turnout of 57.70 per cent was recorded till 5 pm in the Delhi assembly polls, according to officials figures. The polling in all the 70 constituencies began at 7 am and will continue till 6 pm. According to Election Commission (EC) data, 57.70 per cent of the electorate exercised their franchise till 5 pm. There are around 1.56 crore eligible voters in Delhi. The highest turnout was recorded in the Northeast district at 63.83 per cent, while the New Delhi district recorded the lowest at 54.37 per cent. Among other constituencies, Mustafabad had the highest turnout at 66.68 per cent while Karol Bagh recorded the lowest at 47.40 per cent. Shadara recorded a turnout of 61.35 per cent, Southwest Delhi 58.86 per cent, Northwest Delhi 58.05 per cent, North Delhi 57.24 per cent, Central Delhi district 55.24 per cent, Southeast Delhi 53.77 per cent, according to the EC data. Polling is underway at 13,766 stations across Delhi's 70 constituencies to decide the electoral fate of 699 candidates. In the 2020 polls, Delhi had recorded a turnout of 62.59 per cent while only 56 per cent participated in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. President Droupadi Murmu, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Chief Justice of India Sanjiv



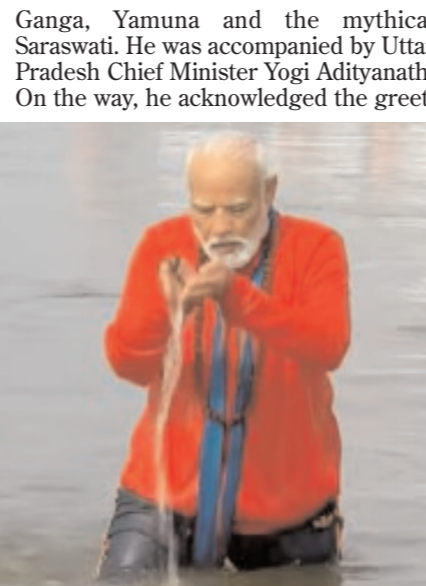
Khanna, Union ministers S Jaishankar and Hardeep Singh Puri, Congress leaders Sonia Vadera, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal were among the early voters.

Arunachal Christian body to protest implementation of Freedom of Religion Act

ITANAGAR, Feb 05: The Arunachal Christian Forum (ACF), a state-based religious organisation, has announced a series of statewide protests from February 10 to 17 against the state government's decision to implement the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1978, terming it "unconstitutional" and an "infringement" on religious rights. The legislation, enacted 46 years ago during the tenure of former chief minister P K Thungon, seeks to prohibit forced conversions through inducement or fraudulent means. It prescribes penalties of up to two years' imprisonment and fines up to 210,000 for violations. Delhi votes today! Stay updated with key updates, LIVE blogs, on-ground coverage & more. Read Now Addressing a press conference at the Arunachal press club on Wednesday, ACF president Tarh Miri said the forum has been opposing the Act since its enactment and strongly disapproves the government's move to enforce it. As part of the protest, the ACF has declared a statewide week of prayer and fasting from February 10 to 17, urging the Christian community to observe it. Miri said that no celebrations, including birthdays or picnics, should be held during this period.

'Blessed to be at Maha Kumbh': PM Modi

Navdeep Singh Sahni Prayagraj, Feb. 05: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday took a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam and said he felt "blessed to be at the Maha Kumbh" where he was "filled with a spirit of devotion". The prime minister held 'rudraksh' beads in his hand during the bathing ritual. Dressed in a deep orange jersey and blue lowers, Modi offered prayers to the sun and the Ganga amid the chanting of mantras. "Blessed to be at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. The Snan at the Sangam is a moment of divine connection, and like the crores of others who have taken part in it, I was also filled with a spirit of devotion," Modi posted on X. "May Maa Ganga bless all with peace, wisdom, good health and harmony," he added. Modi took a boat ride from Arai ghat to the Triveni Sangam, the confluence of



Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati. He was accompanied by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. On the way, he acknowledged the greet-

ings of crowds that had lined up on both sides of the riverbanks to catch a glimpse of him. After the holy dip, the prime minister performed rituals, including an 'aarti' as he got on board a floater, a specially built makeshift platform on the river. He was dressed in a black jacket, white pyjamas, a saffron stole and a Himachali cap for the 'aarti' during which he offered milk and flowers to the holy rivers. He also offered a saree at the confluence of the rivers. A priest guided the prime minister in the rituals. Security was stepped up for the prime minister's visit, which comes on a day assembly polls are underway in Delhi and there are bypolls in Milkipur in Uttar Pradesh. However, barring some portions mandatory for security protocols, devotees continued to take a dip at other ghats during the VIP visit, officials said. Being held after 12 years, the Maha Kumbh started on January 13 and will continue till February 26. It is considered among the holiest pilgrimages by Hindus. According to the Uttar Pradesh government, more than 38 crore pilgrims have visited the Maha Kumbh since January 13.

Saurabh Bharadwaj accuses Delhi Police of putting barricades at AAP strongholds

ST Correspondent New Delhi, Feb 05: Delhi election: Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Wednesday accused the Delhi Police of putting barricades at 200 metres at polling stations at Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) strongholds. "Delhi Police at AAP strongholds has barricaded the polling station at 200 metres. It's there at Chirag Delhi polling station. No bike scooter car allowed," Bharadwaj wrote in a post on X. Follow Delhi election live updates here. "How will people vote? Will old and handicap walk 200 meters to vote?" the AAP minister sought to know. He also urged the Election Commission of India and Delhi Police to "show under what law or rule is this happening?" The Delhi Police, however, said that the elderly and those who cannot walk can bring their cars. "There is an exception for the elderly and those who cannot walk. For them, bringing their car inside is allowed," Ankit Chauhan, DCP, South Delhi told ANI. "This rule is being implemented everywhere. We will investigate the places where he (Saurabh Bharadwaj) is raising concerns about..." Voting is underway in all 70 of Delhi's assembly constituencies. The votes will be counted on February 8. President Droupadi Murmu, Union ministers S Jaishankar and Hardeep Singh Puri, and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi were among those who cast their votes for the Delhi Assembly polls early in the morning on Wednesday. The early voters also included AAP leader and former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva, Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora and Delhi Chief Electoral Officer R Alice Vaz. AAP's Greater Kailash candidate Saurabh Bharadwaj, BJP's Karawal Nagar candidate Kapil Mishra, Congress' New Delhi candidate Sandeep Dikshit and Kalkaji candidate Alka Lamba also voted soon after the voting began at 7am. There are around 1.56 crore eligible voters in the capital, which is witnessing a triangular contest between the ruling AAP, BJP and Congress. The AAP is seeking a third straight term, while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is making a determined push to reclaim the capital after more than 25 years.



Pictures of Indians getting handcuffed, humiliated while being deported from US saddening

Tejinder Kaur Babbar New Delhi, Feb. 05: The Congress on Wednesday expressed sadness over "pictures of Indians getting handcuffed and humiliated" while being deported from the US and recalled that America had to express regret over the treatment meted out to India diplomat Devyani Khobragade in 2013 after the then UPA government retaliated sharply. A military transport aircraft of the US is bringing a group of Indian migrants, in the first such deportation to India as part of the big crackdown on illegal immigrants by President Donald Trump in his second term at the White House. Without directly commenting on the deportation flight carrying the Indians, a spokesperson at the US embassy in New Delhi said on Tuesday that Washington is tightening immigration laws and removing illegal migrants. Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said,

"Looking at the pictures of Indians getting handcuffed and humiliated while being deported from the US saddens me as an Indian." "I remember in December of 2013, an Indian diplomat Devyani Khobragade was handcuffed and strip searched in America. Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh registered a strong protest with US Ambassador Nancy Powell," Khera said in a post on X. "The UPA government retaliated sharply. Leaders like Ms Meira Kumar, Sushil Kumar Shinde & Rahul Gandhi refused to meet the US Congressional delegation (George Holding, Pete Olson, David Schweikert, Rob Woodall and Madeleine Bordallo) that was visiting India at that time," he recalled. Khera said then PM Manmohan Singh termed the US action 'deplorable'. India withdrew several perks given to the US embassy, including



imports of food and alcohol at concessional rates by embassy staff, he said. Khera said Income Tax department started investigating the American Embassy school. "John Kerry expressed regrets at the treatment given to Devyani Khobragade. The US administration called up foreign secre-

tary Sujatha Singh to convey the regrets of the USA," he said. A 1999-batch IFS officer, Khobragade was arrested in New York on visa fraud charges, triggering a row between the two countries with India retaliating by downgrading privileges of certain categories of US diplomats among other steps. Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Tuesday said the media kerfuffle over the deportation of 150 plus illegal Indian migrants from the United States obscures a few facts. "This is not the first such plane load, nor is it directly related to the ascent of @realDonaldTrump. There were 1100 Indians deported in the previous fiscal year (ending September 2024), under Biden, not Trump. As of 2022, there were 725,000 undocumented Indian immigrants in the US - the third-largest group, outnumbered only by nationals of Mexico and El Salvador, he said.

Akhilesh Yadav accuses BJP of hiding Kumbh stampede death toll numbers

Naresh Malhotra Lucknow, Feb 05: Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party's "double-engine" government was hiding the number of deaths in the recent stampede at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, demanding strict disciplinary action against those trying to cover up the alleged mismanagement in organising the religious fair. Yadav, who was participating in the debate on the motion of thanks on the President's address, demanded that an all-party meeting be called to discuss the arrangements at the Maha Kumbh and hand over the disaster management and lost and found centre at the fair to the army. "At a time when the government is continuously reeling out the budget numbers, I urge them to first give the numbers of those who died in the Maha Kumbh. For an explanation on the arrangements at Kumbh, I demand that an all-party meeting be called. If there is no criminal intent, why is the data being suppressed, hidden, and

deleted?" Yadav said, stressing that hiding and destroying evidence is also a crime. The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister also demanded disciplinary action against those who have tried to cover up the "mis-management" in the arrangements for the Kumbh. "The figures for the deaths in the Maha Kumbh stampede, treatment of injured, availability of medicines,

doctors, food, water, transport should be presented in Parliament," he said. A pre-dawn stampede occurred during the ongoing Maha Kumbh on January 29 as millions of devotees jostled to find a toehold before taking a dip at the holy Sangam nose on the Mauni Amavasya, considered by many as the most auspicious day of the six-week festival. According to the figures provided by the Uttar Pradesh government, 30 people were killed and 60 others were injured in the tragedy that occurred between 1am and 2am on last Wednesday. Continuing his attack, the Samajwadi Party chief said the government claimed to organise digital Kumbh, but was hiding the digits of the dead. He said he was told that "for the first time on earth" Kumbh was being organised using digital technology, such as CCTVs, drones and live-streaming. "Those who guaranteed a digital Kumbh are unable to give the digits of the people who died during the stampede. On one side, these people don't get tired ranting digital, digital, digital, but the same government is not able to give digits of the deaths," Yadav said.

Remember who committed biggest scam in Delhi by talking about clean politics: Rahul

New Delhi, Feb. 05: In a swipe at the AAP, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday urged people of Delhi to remember while voting who committed the biggest scam in Delhi by talking about practising clean politics. The former Congress president said people's vote for his party will protect their rights, strengthen the Constitution and put Delhi back on the path of progress. Gandhi cast his ballot in the morning in the New Delhi constituency at the Nirman Bhawan polling centre. With voting underway for

the Delhi Assembly polls, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha issued an appeal to voters on X. "My dear brothers and sisters of Delhi. I appeal to all of you to go and vote today. Your every vote for the Congress will protect your rights, strengthen the Constitution and put Delhi back on the path of progress," he said in his post in Hindi. "While voting, remember who is responsible for polluted air, dirty water, and broken roads. Who committed the biggest scam in Delhi by talking about practising clean politics?" the former Congress chief said. Voting is underway for the high-octane Delhi Assembly elections, with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) eyeing a third straight term, banking on its governance record and welfare schemes, while the BJP and Congress look for a resurgence. Polling is underway at 13,766 stations across all 70 Assembly constituencies to decide the fate of 699 candidates in a contest that could reshape the political landscape of the capital.



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NEWS BOX

Boat services to Mattancherry resume after six-year break

KOCHI. Boat services to Mattancherry resumed on Tuesday after a gap of six years, enabling residents and tourists to reach the popular tourist destination quickly instead of over-an-hour long travel by road from the Kochi city. Transport Minister K B Ganesh Kumar unveiled a slew of projects, including resumption of boat service to Mattancherry, launch of night tourist services of Indra, dedication of renovated Fort Kochi terminal, launch of five dinghies, two new ferry boats and a silt pusher machine. The State Water Transport Department (SWTD) was forced to stop the operations in the Ernakulam-Mattancherry route, post formation of large silt deposits in the backwater channel post the 2018 floods. The services remained disrupted all these years after the irrigation department failed to carry out dredging works on a timely basis. It finally deployed the newly-acquired silt pusher machine to clear the navigation channel. "Initially we could operate only a few services daily, that during the high tide. It will take some more time to operate regular services as the dredging activities need to be completed," an SWTD official said. The minister travelled in 'Indra', the country's largest solar-electric vessel, to Fort Kochi and also launched the renovated Fort Kochi Customs boat jetty. Meanwhile, the minister also launched two new catamaran ferry boats, one 75-passenger capacity vessel and the other 100. "Another 50-passenger capacity.

Corporation to set up advanced composting plant to process food waste in Thiruvananthapuram

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM. With food waste management becoming a mounting issue in the capital owing to restriction on inter-state transportation of food waste to pig farms in Tamil Nadu, the city corporation has given nod to a proposal to set up an advanced composting plant having the capacity to treat 10 tonnes of food waste daily. According to sources, the civic body has given approval to begin the trial run of the new composting technology by mid-February, in the wake of the ongoing crisis. The composting plant is part of the decentralised waste management plan of the civic body and uses advanced technology to expedite the composting process. The state capital generates around 423 tonnes of solid waste daily, of which around 127 tonnes is non-biodegradable. Ever since the launch of household waste collection by Haritha Karma Sena members, the civic body has been able to implement source-level segregation of waste. The civic body's move to implement source-level waste management facilities in households is yet to gain acceptance among citizens owing to bad experiences in the past. The Haritha Karma Sena members are collecting approximately around 35 tonnes of food waste from households daily, but with the Tamil Nadu government imposing strict restrictions to ban the entry of waste from Kerala, the flow of food waste to pig farms in Tamil Nadu has halted.

TNSTC workers' federation urges CM Stalin to stop privatisation, implement wage revision

TIRUNELVELI. Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSTC) Workers' Federation urged Chief Minister M K Stalin to immediately halt the privatisation of transport corporations, expedite implementation of the 15th wage revision, and resume the dearness allowance hike for retired workers as per the Madras High Court order. Addressing the media here on Tuesday, federation's general secretary R Radhakrishnan, accompanied by other office bearers, said the government was taking steps that could lead to the gradual dismantling of state-run transport corporations. "Tamil Nadu government is engaging in privatisation by hiring contract workers, allowing private buses to operate on state routes during festival seasons with fare adjustments, permitting private mini-buses in Chennai, and leasing bus depots to private players. These actions will weaken the public transport system and reduce employment opportunities, particularly for people from marginalised communities," he said. Radhakrishnan added that transport corporations, which were restructured under the Companies Act, currently operate 20,260 buses across 26 divisions, covering 18,723 routes and transporting 1.76 crore passengers daily. He stressed that the sector provides direct and indirect employment to lakhs of people. Speaking on the 15th wage revision, he said the agreement, initially signed for three-years, was extended to four years under the 14th wage agreement. "Though the 14th wage agreement ended on August 31, 2023, negotiations.

Student's death: GPS letter putting victim in bad light draws criticism

KOCHI. Even as questions about what and who is responsible for the extreme step taken by 15-year-old Mihir Ahammed of Global Public School International are still being asked, the latest communicate by the school authorities to the parents of the students of the school has raised protests from various quarters. The letter has allegedly tried to paint the victim in a bad light. The letter is said to have highlighted how Mihir was given TC from Gems Modern Academy after an incident with a girl student and then at GPS International wherein he and a few of his friends got into a fight with another student. According to the letter, Mihir joined the school after being forced to take a transfer certificate from Gems Modern Academy. "We hear he was issued TC after an incident related to physical assault on a girl student. He sought admission to GPS International. Being a school which believes in giving a second chance to a student, we decided to give admission to the child, even though it was the middle of the academic year. We took an undertaking from his parents that he would abide by the school rules," says the letter. The letter highlights how Mihir was included in every activity in the school. "He was selected to the school basketball team. He was part of the Model United Nations team at school and even presented the school in the event held at Choice School. We did everything to get him



integrated into all the activities at the school," says the letter. As per the letter, the school conducted enquiries with the students and parents who were alleged to be involved in the bullying incident. The teachers and classmates were also questioned to find out the veracity of the incident. There was no evidence or eye witness and all of them denied any such incident. The complaint from Mihir's mother was immediately communicated to the SHO of the Hill Palace Police Station. Thereafter the police investigating teams including SHO and Intelligence units and Child Welfare Committee visited the school and hard copies of the mail from the parent along with attachments were also handed over to the Hill Palace station as per the request of the parents," says the letter.

Rajna P M, Mihir's mother, took the school to task for sending across a misleading message that he was expelled from Gems Modern Academy. "The fact is that the school wanted Mihir to continue his education there. We were the ones who made the difficult decision to apply for a TC. GPS International is trying to shirk its responsibility," Rajna wrote. She dismissed the school's claim that the parents had signed an undertaking regarding Mihir's claim of an exclusive undertaking further adds to the misleading narrative, suggesting that Mihir was a problematic student who required special monitoring—this is simply not true. As for the point that we hadn't raised any prior concerns regarding Mihir getting bullied, the school's narrative is false," she said in the letter.

Appointment of information commissioners subject to outcome of plea, says Karnataka HC

BENGALURU. The Karnataka High Court on Tuesday said the appointment of state chief information commissioner and information commissioners by the state government will be subject to the final outcome of the petition challenging their appointments. Referring to the oath taken by these officers on Tuesday evening, the court said the state and all the appointees are put on notice that merely because they were sworn in today, it should not preclude the court from considering the interim prayer made by the petitioner and the court may issue appropriate orders. Justice R Devdas passed the order after hearing the petition filed by K Mallikarjuna Raju from Bengaluru, questioning the notification dated January 30, 2025 by the state government appointing former IPS officer Ashit Mohan



Prasad as the state chief information commissioner and Raman K, Dr Harish Kumar, Rudranna Harthikote, Narayan G Channal, Rajashekara S, Badruddin K and former IAS officer Dr Mamatha BR as state information commissioners. The court issued notice to all the appointees while adjourning further hearing to February 10. The petitioner contended that as per Section 15(3) of

the Right to Information Act, 2005, a committee comprising the chief minister, the leader of the opposition in the Assembly and a cabinet minister nominated by the chief minister may recommend to the governor the appointment of the state chief information commissioner and information commissioners. As per the Supreme Court judgment in the case of Anjali Bhardwaj, every state needs to have a search committee, which should scrutinise the applications. Their recommendation has to be placed before the selection committee for recommendation. However, the state government has not complied with the directions of the Supreme Court, the petitioner claimed while also pointing out that Ashit Mohan Prasad did not apply for the post.

Major fire in Odisha's Pujariguda CHC, no injuries reported

UMERKOTE. A major fire broke out in the godown of a community health centre (CHC) in Nabarangpur district reportedly due to an electrical short circuit, causing two oxygen cylinders to explode on Tuesday. The mishap took place in Pujariguda CHC under the Umerkote block. Under the impact of the explosion, the roof of the godown was blown away. Though many patients and their attendants were present in the CHC during the incident, no



one reportedly suffered any injury. Sources said at around 11:30 am, a hospital employee noticed smoke coming out from the godown and informed medical superintendent Dr Patita Paban Dwivedi. Immediately, five patients admitted to the indoor ward, located adjacent to the godown, and their attendants were shifted to safety. The CHC authorities then asked around 40 to 50 patients present in the outdoor ward to leave the hospital. As the blaze started to spread gradually, the security personnel deployed at the CHC tried to control it using fire extinguishers. However, their efforts went in vain. On being informed, fire service personnel from Umerkote reached the spot and managed to douse the fire.

Ratha Saptami draws 60,000 devotees to Suryanarayana Swamy temple; chaos erupts over donor pass delays

SRIKAKULAM. Thousands of devotees visited the Sri Suryanarayana Swamy temple at Arasavilli on Tuesday and had the Nijarupa Darshan on the occasion of Ratha Saptami. Nearly 60,000 devotees from various parts of the Telugu States, as well as neighbouring Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal, had the divine darshan 1 am and 7 pm on Tuesday.

Principal Secretary of Endowments (Revenue) V Vinay Chand launched the celebrations by presenting silk robes to the Sun God on behalf of the State government. This was followed by milk anointing, Dwadasa Harati, and Maha Nivedhana to Sri Suryanarayana Swamy. Later, the temple officials allowed devotees to have the

Nijarupa Darshan. Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu, Srikakulam District Collector Swapnil Dinkar Pundkar, Parvathipuram-Manyam District Collector A Shyam Prasad, Visakhapatnam Range DIG Gopinath Jetty, Srikakulam SP Maheswara Reddy, MLAs, MLCs, judicial officials, police, and other VIPs had the darshan of Sri Suryanarayana Swamy.

It is believed that the Nijarupa darshan of Sri Suryanarayana Swamy on Ratha Saptami will bring health, wealth, and prosperity. Ratha Saptami is the only day of the year when the lord is seen in Nijarupam, without any ornaments or decorations, attracting a large crowd. In addition to the darshan, devotees prepared and offered milk rice



(Kshirannam) near the Indra Pushkarini, performing Surya Namaskarams in the morning. However, chaos erupted when devotees with donor passes were forced to wait for over three hours in long queues. Several donors expressed their displeasure with the temple authorities, claiming that

Monkeys getting increasingly brazen, wreaking havoc: Khammam farmers

KHAMMAM. Farmers across Enkoor, Tallada, Bonkal and Raghunadhapalem mandals are battling a crisis as troops of monkeys ravage maize crops, threatening livelihoods and food security. With over 1 lakh acres of corn being cultivated during the current Rabi season, the four-month-old crops are now under relentless attack, forcing farmers to adopt desperate measures to protect their fields. Sources said thousands of monkeys swarm the fields daily, decimating crops and leaving farmers in distress. Many report spending sleepless nights guarding their land, while others lament the futility of their efforts. "We hoped to earn some income from this crop, but the survival of the harvest is now our only focus," said K Raghava Rao, a farmer. "We never anticipated such devastation from monkeys."

Earlier interventions under the previous BRS government, which involved trapping and relocating monkeys to forests, provided temporary relief. However, the problem has resurfaced inexplicably. "Monkeys vanished for a while, but now they're back in hordes—we don't even know where they're coming from," added Raghava. Farmers are experimenting with creative—and often unconventional—methods to deter the primates.

N Koteswara Rao of Tallada mandal installed Kondamucchulu (traditional scare devices), but monkeys simply attack from the other sides. Others have placed photos of tigers and predators, deployed sound systems or even worn animal masks to intimidate the invaders. M Sivaram from Raghunadhapalem shared, "I wear a mask to scare them, but they have grown fearless."

"Another farmer, G Nageswara Rao, hired a guard for 10,000 per month, but monkeys now attack the guard also. "No one wants this job anymore," he admitted. District Panchayat Officer R Ashalatha said financial constraints have prevented them from implementing solutions. "Professional monkey catchers demand at least 500 per animal, but funds are scarce," she added.

Capturing time and memory through the lens

Chennai. Photography is like a puzzle—each piece, whether light or shadow, subject or setting, emotion or technique, comes together to form a larger narrative. And for photographer Arun, every influence he draws from is a crucial part of that puzzle. Guided by French photographer Yannick Comier, he learned to channel personal expression into his work, piecing together the surreal chaos of Hieronymus Bosch's paintings, the philosophical musings of Walter Benjamin, and the critical lens of Susan Sontag.

The result? A body of work that feels both meticulously crafted and intuitively raw. His series 'Stopping by the Woods', an exhibition at Forum Art Gallery, Adyar, invites viewers into his journey through Tamil Nadu's mountains, blending artistic expression with documentary style to create surreal, dreamlike images that speaks to the soul. Arun's journey into photography is as layered and thoughtful as his work itself. "Early in my career, I approached photography as a way to earn a living, excelling in the



commercial world," he says. "However, after feeling like a 'production machine', I took a step back to reflect." This pause became pivotal, sparking his exploration of analogue techniques and photography's deeper history. An apprenticeship with large-format photographer Varun Gupta reintroduced Arun to the craft, encouraging experimentation and a slower, more meditative process.

'Stopping by the Woods' is an ongoing project which has been selected for a 45-day darkroom residency programme hosted by Chennai Photo Biennale. "The residency offers a unique opportunity to explore and experiment

with analogue photographic processes in a collaborative environment," he shares. The experience has allowed him to deepen his practice and develop fresh perspectives within his project. Today, Arun's practice delves into themes of identity, memory, and the passage of time, concepts he translates into deeply evocative imagery.

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Foot bridge at Greater Noida West's busiest intersection to open this month

Noida. The Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority (GNIDA) has completed the main structure of the foot overbridge near Gaur Chowk. Final touches, including the installation of lifts, are underway and the facility will likely be open to the public by the end of this month. Officials inspected the overbridge site, which is located near the Gaur City Mall, and directed workers to complete the remaining work by the end of month.

For years, pedestrians have risked their safety by crossing the high-speed traffic zone on foot in the absence of a designated crossing. Residents said that the new foot overbridge will not only enhance pedestrian safety but also reduce congestion and prevent jaywalking.

"This is one of the busiest intersections in Greater Noida West. In the absence of a foot overbridge, crossing the road was a daily struggle. With this overbridge, commuting will be much safer and more convenient," said Amarjeet Rathore, a



resident of Gaur City. Punit Kohli, a resident of Saya Zion in Gaur City, said that this overbridge was much needed. "A number of people cross Greater Noida West Link Road to come to Gaur City Mall. However, a foot

overbridge is also needed on the Taj Highway, which connects to different residential towers in Gaur City. The population of the area has immensely increased but not the infrastructure in that ratio," he added. GNIDA additional CEO

Prerna Singh said that while the primary structure is ready, final works such as lift installation and aesthetic finishing are still pending. "We aim to complete these by this month and open the foot overbridge for public use soon," she said. Situated in the heart of Greater Noida West — a densely populated housing hub with over five lakh residents — the six-lane road near Gaur Chowk has been struggling to cope with the increasing traffic influx from Noida, Surajpur, Crossings Republik, and the Delhi-Meerut Expressway.

Traffic snarls at Gaur Chowk are a daily occurrence, especially in the evenings, when vehicles from the six-lane Parthala flyover slow to a crawl, leading to massive congestion. While the Parthala flyover was initially expected to decongest traffic at Parthala Chowk, it has instead shifted the bottleneck further ahead toward Gaur Chowk.

Sectors & villages: Adjacent, but worlds apart

Noida. Along many of the city's wide streets that draw neat grids around its sectors lie the parallel world of its villages. Village can be a misnomer here — these are as integral to the city as the highrise hubs that have become Noida's identity and as urban as it gets, be it broadband speed or access to metro. But it's the state of amenities that put them a world apart from their adjacent sectors. Villages such as Chhalera in Sector 44, Salarpur in Sector 101, Mamura in Sector 66, Atta in Sector 27 and Behlolpur in Sector 63 have endured poor civic conditions for decades even as they have prospered through real estate and commerce. Take, for instance, Atta village in Sector 27 illustrates a stark contrast between urban areas, situated right across upmarket showrooms and shopping centres. Recently, villagers near these upscale areas protested against what they term "focus on urban sectors". However, Noida Authority officials assert that they routinely carry out several drives in residential

sectors and villages under 'Noida Apke Dwar' initiatives to tackle civic problems. Although exponential growth in population partly explains deteriorating infrastructure in numerous villages, the overall situation remains inadequate. In certain villages, like Salarpur Khadar, authorities acquired villagers' land for development, yet failed to deliver on promises. Residents also highlight the absence of a village head, who earlier served as an intermediary between officials and locals, following the notified status given to numerous villages. Despite the initial master plan ensuring equal treatment for urban and village areas, substantial work remains pending for residents. The disparity between these neighbouring areas persists, although the Noida authority might not acknowledge these differences. Speaking about Bahlolpur, situated near industrial sectors 63 and 65, president of Noida Village Residents Association (NOVRA) Ranjan Tomar said, "While

the sectors have been built by Noida Authority on the plots adjacent to the villages, locals have been treated unfairly. This is not just now but ever since Noida was established." Chhalera village, with a population of 80,000 to 90,000, is located near the premium Sector 44, with its post office in Sector 37. Around 20 to 30 years ago, a large number of those who moved here included civil labourers and contractors, as the village witnessed major developments near Sector 18. Despite the presence of Amity University, Asian Business School, and techies living in nearby areas, the village lacks reinforced cement concrete roads, Ganga water, a primary school, a community centre, and functional sewers and drains. "Sewage lines were installed about 30 years ago when the population of the village was almost one-fifth of the current count," said Puneet Rana, a resident of Chhalera. Rana said areas remain infested.

30 illegal colonies razed, 172 FIRs lodged in Ghaziabad in 1 year

Ghaziabad. The Ghaziabad Development Authority has reclaimed more than 60,000 sqm of land through its anti-encroachment drives over the last year. More than 30 illegal colonies have been razed so far as part of the drive. "Between Jan 1, 2024, and Jan 17, 2025, GDA carried out anti-encroachment demolition drives across all its eight zones. A total of 87 illegal structures and hutments were razed and over 60,000 sqm of land was reclaimed from land grabbers and secured," a GDA official said. In addition to demolition drives, officials have also carried out sealing of illegal structures, registered FIRs against individuals found encroaching spaces and handed



out fines. "FIRs were filed in 172 cases in different police stations. We also managed to seal 280 structures and issued challans in 785 cases. An amount of Rs 29.36 crore was collected as a compounding charge," the official added.

Anti-encroachment drives were also necessitated to increase the land bank, which the development authority may require for its Hamandipuram township project. GDA will need 501 hectares of land for its township, out of which 11 hectares are already under the purview of the development authority. "While the demolition drive has been carried out across the district, it was mostly in areas like RNE, Duhai, Basantpur Seinthli, Muradnagar, Modinagar, and Navipur areas. These areas are in proximity to the proposed township and also fall under the TOD zone," the official further explained. This has been GDA's most sustained drive to reclaim its land in the last few years. In 2021, GDA had identified 321 illegal colonies across the city, which included Brij Nagri, Nandini Enclave, Durga Enclave, and Pandav Nagar. In previous years, cracking the whip on illegal structures, the GDA had unilaterally banned the registration of land or properties that came up in designated illegal colonies. GDA had contended that the stamp and registry department should verify the land records and documents before executing land registries on lands and colonies that were encroached upon.

Builders can't deduct over 10% of base price in case of cancellation by homebuyers, says Supreme Court

New Delhi. Holding that one-sided agreement between homebuyers and real estate companies which is totally tilted in favour of the developer cannot be enforced, Supreme Court on Monday said that developers cannot deduct unreasonable amounts if the buyer seeks cancellation and it should not be more than 10% of basic sale price (BSP). A bench of Justices B R Gavai and S V N Bhatt said the contractual terms which are ex facie one-sided, unfair and unreasonable would constitute unfair trade practice as per the aforesaid definition of unfair trade practice and turned down the plea of real estate company Godrej Projects Development Ltd which said it should be allowed to forfeit 20% of the amount which was part of the agreement with a buyer. Referring to

various verdicts of the apex court, the bench said, "It can be seen that this Court has held that if the forfeiture of earnest money under a contract is reasonable, then it does not fall within Section 74 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872, inasmuch as, such a forfeiture does not amount to imposing a penalty. It has further been held that, however, if the forfeiture is of the nature of penalty, then Section 74 would be applicable.

This Court has further held that under the terms of the contract, if the party in breach undertook to pay a sum of money or to forfeit a sum of money which he had already paid to the party complaining of a breach of contract, the undertaking is of the nature of a penalty." The court was hearing an appeal filed by the company

challenging an order passed by NCDRC which had ordered that it cannot forfeit more than 10% of the amount. It contended that forfeiture of 20% was part of the agreement and there was nothing wrong to enforce it. But the bench said that the apex court and NCDRC in many cases held that forfeiture of 10% is reasonable and above that amount should not be allowed. "Relying on the aforesaid observations of this Court, the NCDRC, in a series of cases right from the year 2015, has held that 10% of the BSP is a reasonable amount which is liable to be forfeited as earnest money. The NCDRC has initially taken this view in the case of DLF Ltd. v. Bhagwanti Narula. The said view has been followed subsequently in various judgments of the NCDRC.

How 16-year-old murder case took cops to Bihar, made them pose as labourers

Noida. From camping at a remote village in Bihar's East Champaran to dressing up as workers at a construction site, it took cops 23 days to reach a man accused of killing a toddler 16 years ago in Noida.

Additional DCP (Noida) Sumit Shukla said the multiple police teams have worked on the case over the years, many came very close to cracking it too, but each time the accused managed to give them a slip. In 2009, Sanjay electrocuted a 2-year-old boy, the son of a woman he was seeing at the time, and flung him onto the floor, killing him on the spot, apparently after the child spotted them together. Since then, Sanjay has been on the run — never staying in one city for long, assuming a new name and identity, and refraining from using mobile phones to stay off the police radar. The breakthrough finally came after a four-member team was set up under sub-inspector Jaydeep Malik in Jan by Sector 58 SHO Amit Kumar, where the FIR was registered in July 2009 by the child's father.

The team camped in Bihar for days, narrowly missed the suspect twice as he fled to Nepal, set up a string of informers among local residents and even dressed as construction workers to track, follow and nab Sanjay, who now called himself Nitesh Kushwaha and worked as an electricity supervisor at a highway being constructed between Pakhri Dayal and



Dhaka Vihar in Champaran. "It is an old case. Most of the officers investigating the case then have retired or transferred. After being assigned the case, I spoke to some of the previous investigating officers to get some leads on Sanjay, his appearance who was just 27 in 2009," Malik said. Around 23 days ago, Malik and his team — head constable Parwinder Kumar and constables Sachin Rathi and Anuj Sehrawat — visited Bihar's Bokane Kala village in East Champaran district, nearly 1,100 km from Noida. "We hit the first hurdle almost instantly. The locals were unwelcoming and treated us as outsiders. As repeated attempts to build rapport with the locals failed, we dressed

as workers to blend among the people working at the highway construction site to find out more about Sanjay's daily movements. We would sit among the workers for hours and follow him for days to ensure he did not go out of the radar," Malik said. Cops said Sanjay would start from his house around 9 am on a bike each day to reach the work site around 15-17 km away. He would leave for home at 7 pm. At times, he would often stay back at a campsite, about 2 km from the construction spot. "We decided to nab him at the campsite to keep the operation low-key. But on D-day, we hit the second hurdle: Sanjay had disappeared right in front of our noses. We later learnt that he

got information about our movement from a relative and fled to Nepal, barely 20 km away. Subsequently, the team was asked to return to Noida. But before returning, we were able to set up informers in the village," another member of the probe team said. Around 15 days ago, Malik got a tip-off on Sanjay again and the team was back in Bihar. "But the accused didn't show up as the construction site was closed for two days. Then we got to know that Sanjay had fled to Nepal again. We changed our set of informers and put a watch on his house. We found that Sanjay was married and had five children. He earned Rs 12,000 monthly for the highway project," the SI said. On Feb 2, informers told the team that Sanjay was likely to travel to Noida to check why cops had become so active over the past few weeks. "Our teams started tracking him and on Monday, Sanjay was nabbed from Sector 62," the additional DCP said. Sanjay told interrogators after the murder he took a train from Noida. "He claimed to have lived in many places before returning to Bihar, where he initially worked as a TV mechanic. When cops visited his village, Sanjay's friends and family would alert him and help him flee to Nepal," Shukla said. On Monday, he was produced before a local court and sent to judicial custody.

News box

24 Ghaziabad police stns get top rankings for tackling online complaints in January

Ghaziabad. A total of 24 of 25 police stations in Ghaziabad have achieved top state rankings in the Integrated Grievance Redressal System (IGRS) in Jan. These stations scored 100% of the 90 marks awarded for efficiently and swiftly resolving residents' complaints on the portal. Vijay Nagar, which was a table-topper in Dec, scored lower than 80% and ranked 1,590th in the state. The 24x7 IGRS portal, which makes filing complaints flexible, facilitates quicker responses to grievances and allows real-time tracking of complaints, was launched in 2016. It typically redresses complaints on land-related disputes, corruption, cyber fraud and cheating. The rankings, released by Lucknow headquarters on Tuesday for districts and police commissionerates, show Ghaziabad commissionerate resolved the highest number of complaints logged on the IGRS portal in Jan and scored 100% marks out of 125. In Dec too, the commissionerate was ranked number 1 in the state, with 21 of the 25 police stations scoring 100%. The four police stations that ranked below 1,300 were Sahibabad (1,482), Ankur Vihar (1,448), Indrapuram (1,394) and Tronica City (1,307).

This month the four police stations are among the 24 that achieved 100% score out of 90 points in the district. The other top scorers include Kavi Nagar, Madhuban Bapudham, Nandgram, Modinagar, Nagar Kotwali, Loni, Sihani Gate, Loni Border, Masuri, Wave City, Crossings Republik, Bhojpur, Tila Mod, Niwari, Shalimar Garden, Link Road, Kaushambi, Women's Police Station and Muradnagar. Vijay Nagar police station, which secured 100% marks and ranked number 1 in Dec last year, scored 71 out of 90, which is only 78.9%, in Jan. Police commissioner Ajay Kumar Mishra told TOI that the commissionerate secured the first position in the state five times in resolving public complaints and was also consistently at the top for being the quickest to respond to Dial 112 complaints for the past 21 months. "We will review why Vijay Nagar police station is lagging and improve its performance," Mishra said. In Dec, the average response time for police to respond to emergencies flagged on Dial 112 number across the state was 6.4 minutes. In Ghaziabad, the average response time was 3.3 minutes.

FIR against mills if flour causes illness

Noida. The food safety department has issued a strict warning to eight buckwheat flour manufacturers, prohibiting the sale of products older than 15 days. Preventive measure comes ahead of Mahashivratri on Feb 26, when devotees traditionally consume breads made from buckwheat (kuttu) flour to break their fasts. Sarvesh Kumar, assistant commissioner of the food department, asserted that manufacturers found selling substandard buckwheat flour would face legal consequences. "We will get FIRs registered against manufacturers if people fall ill from consuming stale or adulterated flour. Our inspection teams are vigilant," he said. Food safety officials said they would conduct random sampling of buckwheat flour from markets across the city in the days leading up to Mahashivratri to ensure compliance with safety standards. The heightened vigilance follows a series of food poisoning incidents in recent years. In March last year, over 200 people — including hostel students in Greater Noida — fell ill after consuming contaminated buckwheat flour during Mahashivratri. In similar incidents through 2023, 150 people across NCR suffered food poisoning from adulterated buckwheat flour during the festive season. According to sources, cases of food poisoning from stale buckwheat flour have increased 40% during the festive season in the past five years. "On March 9, 2024, around 250 students from Aryan Residency and APJ College hostels became ill after consuming puris made from stale buckwheat flour," Kumar said. Food safety department also issued guidelines for consumers, emphasising the importance of purchasing fresh, properly packaged buckwheat flour from reputable stores.

Gurgaon leads in TB detection in Haryana, cases up by 23%

Gurgaon. The city leads in detecting tuberculosis (TB) cases in Haryana from 2023 to 2024 even as the aggregate TB cases in the state escalated from 79,160 in 2023 to 86,171 in 2024, indicating an 8.86% increase.

In fact, Gurgaon, Kurukshetra and Faridabad have exhibited substantial increases in TB case detection, with gains of 22.93%, 18.50% and 17.33%, respectively, according to the health department data. Besides other factors — such as surveillance and better testing methods — urban districts like Gurgaon and Faridabad benefit from "superior healthcare infrastructure, including well-equipped hospitals and clinics for TB management", officials said. District-wise, Gurgaon TB cases increased from 7,605 in 2023 to 9,349 in 2024. Kurukshetra TB cases were up from 2,092 in 2023 to 2,479 in 2024. Faridabad TB cases were 8,031 in 2023 that went up to 9,423 in 2024.

The considerable surge in TB cases across these districts isn't solely attributed to increased infections but reflects enhanced surveillance and reporting mechanisms. Officials indicate multiple contributing factors, encompassing amplified testing, screening protocols, healthcare infrastructure and public awareness. Speaking to TOI, officials elaborated that these districts have intensified their TB testing and screening endeavours, facilitating improved case identification. Mobile testing units and community health workers have been instrumental in reaching marginalised populations. Public health initiatives have heightened awareness regarding TB symptoms and early detection significance, prompting increased voluntary testing. Chief medical officer (Gurgaon) Virender Yadav said, "We have been conducting Interferon-Gamma Release Assay (IGRA) tests for TB screening for the last two years. Earlier, we utilised less-sensitive TB screening tests that took more time to return results." The IGRA tests are whole-blood tests that diagnose the infection in 24 hours. "IGRA tests, unlike others, do not cause a false positive because of BCG (Bacille Calmette-Guérin) vaccination.

NEWS BOX

CIA offers buyouts to its entire workforce: Report

WASHINGTON. The US Central Intelligence Agency offered buyouts to its entire workforce on Tuesday, the Wall Street Journal reported. The move would make it the first intelligence agency to join a voluntary redundancy program initiated by President Donald Trump for federal employees.

The agency is also freezing the hiring of job seekers already given a conditional offer, the paper reported, citing an aide to CIA Director John Ratcliffe.

The anonymous aide said some of those frozen offers are likely to be rescinded if the applicants do not have the right background for the agency's new goals, which include targeting drug cartels, Trump's trade war and undermining China, according to the Journal. The move is part of a massive overhaul of the US government by Trump, who has vowed to radically downsize the federal workforce in the name of efficiency and frugality that has sent shock waves through Washington.

The report on the buyout offers at the CIA -- whose work gathering foreign intelligence is vital to US national security -- came just hours after Trump announced an extraordinary scheme for the United States to "take over the Gaza Strip."

India Featured In UN's Honour Roll For Timely Payment Of Regular Budget



New York. The Permanent Mission of India in New York announced on Tuesday that India has once again been included in the 'Honour Roll' of the United Nations (UN) for paying its regular budget assessments in full within the 30-day period specified in the Financial Regulations of the UN.

In a statement, the Mission said, "India yet again featured in the 'Honour Roll' of UN as one of the countries that have paid their regular budget assessments in full within the 30 day period specified in Financial Regulation 3.5 of the UN. The Honour Roll includes select Member States that have successfully fulfilled their financial commitment to the UN within 30 days of receiving a payment note."

The UN General Assembly approves UN's Regular Budget in December each year. Each Member State is then assessed based on the Scale of Assessment approved by the General Assembly, and corresponding payment notes are issued by the UN in early January. The statement emphasized that India has consistently figured on the UN's Honour Roll. "India's promptness in making contributions to the UN demonstrates its unwavering support to the principles and purposes enshrined in the UN Charter and commitment to upholding the financial stability and operational effectiveness of the UN", the statement highlighted adding, this further reaffirms India's role as a responsible member of the UN.

Iran Is Secretly Developing Nuclear Missiles Capable Of Hitting Europe, Claims Report



World. Iran is secretly developing nuclear missiles with the ability to reach Europe based on designs handed to the Islamic regime by North Korea, a new report released by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) claimed. According to the report, the weapons are being produced at two sites disguised as satellite launch facilities. The NCRI, an exiled opposition group, said that Tehran is expediting its alleged nuclear weapons program at these facilities. It also stated that the missiles are capable of travelling more than 3,000 km (1,800) miles, potentially targeting Europe. Citing the report, the New York Post reported that one of the facilities the NCRI flagged as a nuclear weapons site was the Shahrud missiles facility, which is being run by Iran's Organization for Advanced Defense Research and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The group believes that the nuclear warhead being developed at the site would be fitted on a Ghaem-100 missile and would be capable of reaching as far as Greece. It also estimates that Iran has already tested the rocket launchers at the Shahrud facility at least three times. Those rocket launchers were allegedly concealed as part of satellite launches, the NCRI claims. It believes that IRGC is planning to test launch more advanced Ghaem rockets in the coming months. The second testing facility is believed to be located more than 43 miles southeast of Semnan, where Tehran is developing Simorgh missiles based on North Korean designs. In its report, the NCRI said that portions of this site are hidden underground. It also accused Tehran of expanding this site since 2005.

Mr Armstrong revealed he was on a hunting trip with friends that turned into a nightmare. "I didn't think much of it as I have gotten burns."

Gaza Strip has long been a powder keg. Here's a look at the history of the embattled region

Trump's suggestion that displaced Palestinians in Gaza be permanently resettled outside the war-torn territory and the US take "ownership" may spark new tension over the enclave.

JERUSALEM. Gaza has long been a powder keg, and it exploded after Hamas fighters stormed southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, and began killing and abducting people, sparking a crushing Israeli military operation there that's only recently reached an uneasy ceasefire. US President Donald Trump's suggestion Tuesday that displaced Palestinians in Gaza be permanently resettled outside the war-torn territory and the US take "ownership" may spark new tension over the enclave on the Mediterranean Sea. Here's a look at the troubled modern history of the Gaza Strip:

1948 - 1967: Egyptian rule of Gaza. Before the war surrounding Israel's establishment in 1948, present-day Gaza was part of the large swath of the Middle East under British colonial rule. After Israel defeated the coalition of Arab states, the Egyptian army was left in control of a small strip of land wedged between Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean. During the war, some 700,000 Palestinians either fled or were forced from their homes in what is now

Israel—a mass uprooting that they call the Nakba, or "catastrophe." Tens of thousands of Palestinians flocked to the strip. Under Egyptian military control, Palestinian refugees in Gaza were stuck, homeless and stateless. Egypt didn't consider them to be citizens and Israel wouldn't let them return to their homes. Many were supported by UNWRA, the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, which has a heavy presence in Gaza to this day. Meanwhile, some young Palestinians became "fedayeen"—insurgency fighters who conducted raids into Israel.

1967 - 1993: Israel seizes control. Israel seized control of Gaza from Egypt during the 1967 Mideast war, when it also captured the West Bank and east Jerusalem—areas that remain under Israeli control. The internationally recognized Palestinian Authority, which administers semi-autonomous areas of the occupied West Bank, seeks all three areas for a



hoped-for future state. Israel built more than 20 Jewish settlements in Gaza during this period. It also signed a peace treaty with Egypt at Camp David—a pact negotiated by US President Jimmy Carter.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi has referenced this 40-year old treaty when he declined to permit Palestinian refugees from Gaza into Egypt, saying the potential entrance of militants into Egypt would threaten longstanding peace between Israel and Egypt. The first Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation erupted in Gaza in December 1987, kicking off more than

five years of sustained protests and bloody violence. It was also during this time that the Islamic militant group Hamas was established in Gaza. 1993 - 2005: The Palestinian Authority takes charge. For a time, promising peace talks between Israeli and Palestinian leaders made the future of Gaza look somewhat hopeful. Following the Oslo accords—a set of agreements between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat that laid the groundwork for a two-state solution—control of Gaza was handed to the fledgling Palestinian Authority. But the optimism was short lived. A series of Palestinian suicide attacks by Hamas militants, the 1995 assassination of Rabin by a Jewish ultranationalist opposed to his peacemaking and the election of Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister the following year all hindered US-led peace efforts. Another peace push collapsed in late 2000 with the eruption of the second Palestinian uprising.

Trump to sign executive order barring transgender female athletes in US from competing

WASHINGTON. US President Donald Trump will sign an executive order on Wednesday designed to prevent people who were biologically assigned male at birth from participating in women's or girls' sporting events. The order, which Trump is expected to sign at an afternoon ceremony, marks another aggressive shift by the president's second administration in the way the federal government deals with transgender people and their rights.

his campaign offered little in the way of details. Wednesday's order—which coincides with National Girls and



Women in Sports Day—will involve how his administration will interpret Title IX, the law best known for its role in pursuing gender equity in athletics and preventing sexual harassment on campuses. "This executive order restores fairness, upholds Title IX's original intent, and defends the rights of female athletes who have worked their whole lives to compete at the highest levels," said US Rep. Nancy Mace, a Republican from South Carolina. Every administration has the authority to issue its own

interpretations of the landmark legislation. The last two presidential administrations—including Trump's first—offer a glimpse at the push-pull involved. Betsy DeVos, the education secretary during Trump's first term, issued a Title IX policy in 2020 that narrowed the definition of sexual harassment and required colleges to investigate claims only if they're reported to certain officials. The Biden administration rolled back that policy last April with one of its own that stipulated the rights of LGBTQ+ students would be protected by federal law and provided new safeguards for victims of campus sexual assault. The policy stopped short of explicitly addressing transgender athletes. Still, more than a half-dozen Republican-led states immediately challenged the new rule in court. "All Trump has to say is, 'We are going to read the regulation traditionally,'" said Doriane Lambelet Coleman, a professor at Duke Law School. How this order could affect the transgender athlete population—a number that is incredibly difficult to pin down—is uncertain.

About 10 killed at adult education centre in what officials say is Sweden's worst mass shooting

World. Swedish police said that about 10 people, including the gunman, were killed during a shooting Tuesday at an adult education center. But a final death toll and a conclusive number of wounded hadn't yet been determined. The damage at the crime scene was so extensive that investigators were unable to be more definitive, said Roberto Eid Forest, head of the local police. The shooting happened on the outskirts of the city of Orebro, which is located about 200 kilometers (125 miles) west of Stockholm. Police said that the death toll could rise. Eid Forest told reporters that the suspected gunman was among those killed. Police believe the perpetrator acted alone, and he wasn't previously known to police, officials said. Authorities said that there were no suspected connections to terrorism at this point, but police didn't provide a motive. The school, called Camus

Risbergska, serves students who are over age 20, according to its website. Primary and upper secondary school courses are offered, as well as Swedish classes for immigrants, vocational training and programs for people with intellectual disabilities. Gun violence at schools is very rare in Sweden. But there have been several incidents in recent years in which people were wounded or killed with other weapons such as knives or axes. Police raided the suspect's home after Tuesday's shooting, but it wasn't immediately clear what they found. Eid Forest said there were no warning signs before the attack. Authorities were working to identify the deceased. Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson will hold a news conference at 7:30 p.m. local time (18:30 GMT) alongside Justice Minister Gunnar Strömmer. Earlier, Kristersson said that it was "a very painful day for all of Sweden," Swedish media

reported. "My thoughts are also with all those whose normal school day was exchanged for terror," Kristersson said. "Being confined to a classroom with fear for your own life is a nightmare that no one should have to experience." Swedish King Carl XVI Gustaf praised police and the rescue and medical personnel who responded to the shooting, and issued words of comfort to the families of the victims. Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson will hold a news conference at 7:30 p.m. local time (18:30 GMT) alongside Justice Minister Gunnar Strömmer. Earlier, Kristersson said that it was "a very painful day for all of Sweden," Swedish media reported. "My thoughts are also with all those whose normal school day was exchanged for terror," Kristersson said. "Being confined to a classroom with fear for your own life is a nightmare that no one should have to experience."

US plane carrying 205 deported Indians to land in Amritsar in afternoon

AMRITSAR. A US military aircraft carrying around 200 illegal Indian immigrants is likely to land at the Shri Guru Ramdas Ji International Airport here on Wednesday afternoon.

Earlier, the aircraft was expected to land in the morning. So far, details of those on the plane are not available. According to reports, the US military plane C-17 is carrying 205 illegal immigrants hailing from Punjab and neighbouring states.

Punjab Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav said on Tuesday that the state government would receive the immigrants and set up counters at the airport. Punjab NRI Affairs Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal on Tuesday expressed disappointment over the US government's decision and said these individuals, who contributed to that country's economy, should have been granted permanent residency instead of being deported. He said many Indians entered the US on work permits which later expired, making them illegal immigrants. The minister said he plans to meet External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar next week to discuss the concerns and interests of Punjabis living in the US.

Dhaliwal had also appealed to Punjabis not to travel abroad through illegal means, emphasising the



importance of acquiring skills and education to access opportunities worldwide. He encouraged people to research legal ways, acquire education and language skills before travelling abroad. After Donald Trump assumed office as the US President last month, the country's law enforcement agencies have launched a crackdown against illegal immigrants. Many people from Punjab, who entered the US through "donkey routes" or other illegal means by spending lakhs of rupees, are now facing deportation.

South Africa President Needed To Call Elon Musk. Tesla Head's Father Helps Him

So Bejani Chauke, an adviser to Cyril Ramaphosa, the South African president, called Musk's father, Errol, a 78-year-old engineer who lives in a luxury double-storey coastal villa.

Langebaan. South Africa. South Africa's president needed to call Elon Musk on Monday evening. The billionaire had publicly accused his post-apartheid government of anti-white racism, and now Musk's ally, US President Donald Trump, said he would cut more than \$400 million in funding to the country. So Bejani Chauke, an adviser to Cyril Ramaphosa, the South African president, called Musk's father, Errol, a 78-year-old engineer who lives in a luxury double-storey coastal villa in a two-hour drive from Cape Town, Musk senior said. "I was asked if I can arrange a quick talk between Ramaphosa and Elon last night...so I did and then they spoke a few minutes later," Errol Musk told Reuters at his home in Langebaan, a mostly white enclave looking onto a lagoon fed by the Atlantic Ocean where he keeps a Bentley and a Rolls-Royce. He briefly showed an

exchange of WhatsApp messages between himself and Chauke that backed up his account. Chauke did not respond to questions by Reuters about his role in contacting Musk's father. Ramaphosa's office confirmed the phone conversation with Elon Musk, who was born in South Africa, in a post on the tycoon's X social media platform. Contacted by Reuters, Ramaphosa's spokesperson declined to comment on how the conversation with Elon Musk came about or on its content, only saying: "Errol Musk is a private citizen, his views are his personal views." Elon Musk did not reply to multiple requests for comment from Reuters. The trigger for the sudden flurry of backdoor diplomacy was a post on Sunday by Trump who said - without citing evidence - that "South Africa is confiscating land" and "certain classes of people" were being



treated "very badly". He added that he would cut off funding to the country in response, prompting a nearly 2% slide in South Africa's rand in early trading on Monday, and a fall in stocks and government bonds. The cost of insuring South African debt against default rose to its highest since early August. Musk was referring to a bill signed into law by

Ramaphosa last month with the aim of addressing racial disparities in land ownership that have persisted in South Africa since apartheid ended 30 years ago -- a target of public criticism by Elon Musk and many white farmers. The law allows the state to expropriate land "in the public interest", in some cases without compensating the owner. South Africa had previously set a target for the government to transfer 30% of farmland to Black hands that has been repeatedly pushed back. As of 2018, only 8% had been transferred, according to a government survey of title deeds. White landowners possess three quarters of South Africa's freehold farmland, compared with 4% for Black landowners, according to the most recent state audit. Black people make up about 80% of South Africa's total population.

NEWS BOX

Power distribution network to be revamped in Kovai

COIMBATORE. The Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Ltd (TNPDC) formerly known as Tangedco will soon revamp 305 distribution lines under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) of the union government in the Coimbatore region which comprises Coimbatore, Tiruppur and Nilgiris districts. The field survey for the project, which is aimed at ensuring quality power supply and avoiding transmission loss, is at the final stages. "The scheme suggests construction of new substations, augmentation of existing substations, provision of aerial bunched cables or high voltage distribution system in high loss areas, segregation and bifurcation of feeders, replacement of conductors, additional HT lines and under-ground cabling works and other related works for system strengthening and loss reduction. We are collecting data for reforming the distribution line," said a senior official. In Coimbatore Metro Circle, 28 feeders will be revamped under the project. "Out of 164 feeders, 28 feeders need to be revamped in the Coimbatore metro circle and the work would be carried out at a cost of Rs 4.3 crore. As per the plan, the corporation would install 193 new 11kv transformers and 14 22-kv transformers after bifurcating the existing pattern which reduces the electricity loss and pressure. Further, the corporation is going to install 350 new 9-meter poles across the Coimbatore metro circle," said C Sathishkumar, superintendent engineer of Coimbatore metro circle.

Low-consumption consumers in Kerala getting power at cheap rates: Study

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM. With the exception of domestic consumers with monthly consumption of over 400 units of electricity per month and above, household consumers in other categories pay comparatively cheaper power bills in Kerala, a study of the electricity tariff of various states conducted by Kerala State Electricity Regulatory Commission has shown. According to government sources, the lower power tariff for industries has also contributed to its transformation into an industry-friendly state.

In the agriculture sector, Kerala offered the fourth best tariff in the country at Rs 2.79 per unit, also the best among all south Indian states. For electricity provided to Railways, the state was placed in the ninth position at Rs 7.16 per unit. However, the state's tariff for medium commercial establishments stood at Rs 10.68 per unit, which was quite higher in comparison to other states. For domestic consumers with a monthly consumption of 40 units, Kerala had the lowest energy charge in the country at Rs 1.50 per unit.

The corresponding tariff for other south Indian states were: Telangana (Rs 2.50), Tamil Nadu (Rs 4.80), Andhra Pradesh (Rs 6.95) and Karnataka (Rs 9.70). For domestic consumers with monthly consumption of 100 units, Kerala was ranked eighth with a tariff of Rs 4.67 per unit. Only Telangana topped Kerala among southern states in this category with a tariff of Rs 3.13 per unit. In the 250 units per month consumption category, Kerala was placed in the 12th position with a rate of Rs 6.40 per unit, with Tamil Nadu and Telangana offering lower tariffs among southern states.

IIT-BBS, ECRICC to find ways for seagrass restoration

BHUBANESWAR. IIT-Bhubaneswar in collaboration with the Enhancing Climate Resilience of India's Coastal Communities (ECRICC) on Tuesday organised a workshop to work out a plan for protection, restoration and management of seagrass and salt marshes that are vital to the state's ecosystem for carbon sequestration and coastal protection. UNDP India head for Energy, Environment and Resilience Ashish Chaturvedi provided an overview of UNDP Green Climate Fund (GCF) initiatives and the progress of the GCF-supported ECRICC project, while associate professor and head of School of Earth, Ocean and Climate Sciences at IIT-BBS SH Farooq outlined the scope of seagrass and salt marsh interventions, expected outcomes and deliverables.

Senior scientist at James Cook University, Australia Amrit Mishra spoke on stakeholder roles, timelines and capacity-building requirements for protection and restoration of seagrass and salt marshes in the state. The interactive discussions facilitated knowledge-sharing on global best practices, policy recommendations and innovative restoration methodologies tailored to Odisha's unique ecological and socio-economic context. The insights gained from the workshop will be included in the plan to be worked out for restoration, protection and management of seagrass and salt marshes, ensuring long-term environmental and socio-economic benefits for local communities of the state, ECRICC project officials said.

Anna University sexual assault case: Madras HC pulls up Tamil Nadu police's SIT for harassing journalists

CHENNAI. The Madras High Court on Tuesday restrained the Tamil Nadu police's Special Investigation Team (SIT) from harassing journalists by issuing repeated summons, grilling them with unnecessary questions about their families and seizing their electronic devices — including mobile phones — in connection with the case over the leaking of the FIR in the sexual assault of a student inside the Anna University campus.

The HC ordered the SIT to return the seized electronic devices while directing the journalists to cooperate with the investigations. The court also questioned why the SIT has not examined the police officers responsible for registering the FIR and uploading it to the official website. Justice G K Ilanithiraiyan passed the orders while hearing a batch of petitions filed by the affected journalists, belonging to mainstream television channels and a newspaper.

The judge posed a series of questions to the government advocate K M D Muhilan who represented the SIT. "How many people have you examined other than the journalists? Have you examined the officer who authored the FIR and uploaded it to the website," he asked, stating that the first person to be examined must be the Station House Officer who registered the FIR. "Before examining others, why are you harassing the journalists," the judge questioned. Pointing out that only police personnel can upload the FIR to the website, Justice Ilanithiraiyan said there is no question of



forwarding the document when it was available in the public domain.

He asked whether the media published news revealing the identity of the victim, and flayed the SIT for asking details of the journalists' families, including those of their "forefathers". Government advocate Muhilan denied the journalists' complaints being harassed, stating the SIT had just inquired with them about downloading the FIR and sharing it with others. "We are not trying to curtail the freedom of journalists.

We don't intend to harass and go after them," he told the court. He promised the court of sorting out irrelevant questions posed to the journalists

— via a questionnaire — and addressing their concerns. The SIT is simply tracking how the FIR went out, Muhilan added.

Advocates M R Jothimaniyan, K Balu, Vivekanandan, K Ilangovan and C Arunkumar appeared for the petitioners, including Saravanan (Polimer TV), Ramkumar (Jaya TV), Ebanezar (News 7), Senthil (Sun Network) and Srikanth D (DT Next), and M Haseef (general secretary of the Chennai Press Club).

The counsels submitted that, in the name of inquiry, the SIT summoned the journalists, seized their mobile phones and posed irrelevant questions.

Speeding goods train halts inches from slum, averts major tragedy in Rourkela

ROURKELA. A major tragedy was narrowly avoided in Rourkela when a speeding goods train broke through barriers and came to a halt just inches away from a slum household in the Malgodown area early on Wednesday morning.

Slum dwellers were left panicked and shocked as they spotted the train hurtling toward them. Had it not stopped on its own, with its wheels stuck in soil and debris, a disaster in the densely populated settlement seemed inevitable.

According to reports, the incident occurred between 6:00 and 6:15 am when the goods train was being placed out at the warehouse in Malgodown. Eyewitnesses said the train broke through the track buffer, destroyed the protective boundary wall, and ploughed through the paved road on its western side



before stopping dangerously close to a slum dwelling. "As the goods train forced its way towards the slum, panicked residents ran for their lives, but nothing could stop the locomotive. Everything happened in a fraction of a second, and the train stopped on its own," an eyewitness recounted.

The warehouse is several metres away from the Howrah-Mumbai main line and is connected to loop lines. Local railway authorities from

Rourkela and Bondamunda, including the Area Manager, rushed to the spot to assess the situation. Senior Divisional Commercial Manager and spokesperson for the Chakradharpur division of South Eastern Railway (SER), Aditya Chaudhury, said the mishap occurred during rake placement in the warehouse for loading and unloading goods. He confirmed, "The goods train broke through the buffer and the boundary wall and went about 50 metres beyond."

When asked how the train could have reached such high speed during rake placement, Chaudhury admitted human error, adding that an inquiry has been launched to determine the reasons and circumstances behind the incident for appropriate action.

Railway Board seeks location survey for all seven corridors of Circular Rail

BENGALURU. The Railway Board recently responded to the Detailed Project Report submitted by Bengaluru Division for one corridor of the Rs 23,000-crore Circular Railway network, by asking it to first complete the Final Location Survey (FLS) for all seven corridors. The 287-km network is aimed at increasing Bengaluru's rail capacity and decongesting train traffic. The FLS is the final stage of any survey, and outlines detailed plans accurately, marking the alignment, precise locations and grades of the project. This is followed by the Detailed Project Report (DPR) and then construction commences.

The proposed project is one of the biggest circular networks in the country and will cover the outskirts of Bengaluru by connecting Heelalige, Solur, Malur, Devanahalli, Doddaballapur and Nidavanda. Divisional Railway Manager Amitesh Kumar Sinha told TNIE that the division had submitted the FLS followed by the DPR for one corridor to the Board, by the end of last year. "The DPR had exhaustive information on the corridor from Devanahalli to Oddarahalli, running 28.5km. We were awaiting the nod



from the Railway Board in this connection," he said. The Board has now asked the division to complete the FLS for the remaining six corridors of the project before proceeding with the single corridor. "It is a circular rail and unless all the corridors are completed, the project would anyway be incomplete," the DRM explained.

180 nursing students crammed in building meant for 30 in NLG

NALGONDA. Students living in the hostel of the nursing college for girls in Nalgonda face a host of issues, which range from inadequate infrastructure to a lack of basic facilities and neglect in upkeep. Sources said that the hostel, spanning approximately 12,000 square feet and being rented at Rs 84,000 per month, was originally designed to accommodate only 30 women in various trades. However, it now houses all 180 students, leading to severe overcrowding.

Students have raised concerns about poor maintenance, lack of cleanliness and inadequate facilities. Many are forced to sleep on the floor due to space constraints, while some first-year students share single beds, a student said, adding that the hostel also lacks a water purification system, forcing students to buy drinking water on their own. Despite being sanctioned by the previous BRS government, the nursing college has been operating without a dedicated building for the past three years. Established in 2022 in the heart of Nalgonda, the college lacks essential infrastructure, such as adequate academic and hostel facilities.

Currently, 180 students across three batches are enrolled. First- and second-year classes are being conducted in vacant classrooms of the medical



college, while the hostel is situated in a women's campus building about four kilometres from the college.

To add to their struggles, third-year students have to attend classes in the hostel's dining hall due to a shortage of classrooms and labs. First- and second-year students rely on vacant classrooms at the medical college, but these are only available when not occupied by medical students. Some first-year students have even reported waiting in corridors or under parking sheds for classrooms to become available.

A college official stated, "Due to the lack of proper accommodation, 60 third-year students are staying in private rooms and hostels. Although the

Congress government has allotted five acres near the medical college for the nursing college, construction is yet to begin. We urge the government to speed up the construction of the college and hostel." Apart from infrastructure issues, students also struggle with transportation. With no dedicated bus service, they must walk nearly half a kilometre to reach the main road and rely on auto-rickshaws to commute to college. Many students report missing classes due to a lack of auto-rickshaws, especially in the evenings when transport options are limited. The students submitted a representation to the district collector, who assured them that a bus would be arranged.

Tamil Nadu: Misguided by officers, PwD travels 200 km in two days for certificate that was not necessary

COIMBATORE. Misguided by officers at the Anaimalai taluk office, a tribal man living in Pollachi travelled for nearly 200 km in two days carrying his 40-year-old sister, who cannot walk due to locomotor disability, to several government hospitals to obtain a disability certificate and get her government aid reinstated. After checking their records, the CMCH dean said the issue should have been solved in Anaimalai itself. The aid was reinstated on Tuesday. Seven months ago, the differently abled welfare department suspended assistance of Rs 1,500 to K Kittathal, a Malasar tribe who lives in Divansapur village with her brother K Mani (44), because the officers who conducted a door-to-door verification had recorded that she did not live in the address.

After pursuing the case with local body representatives, Mani approached officers at the Anaimalai taluk office recently. Without checking the facts, the officials told him to get a fresh disability certificate for Kittathal from a government hospital. On Monday, the family went to the Pollachi GH but found out that the post of the doctor who would approve the certificates was vacant. They were directed to go to Coimbatore Medical College Hospital. "On Monday afternoon, we reached CMCH after changing three buses, but the staff told us to come on Tuesday because the board that issues certificates meets only in the morning. We came back on Tuesday," Mani said. After learning about their hardship, this reporter took up the issue with CMCH dean Dr A Nirmala. After reviewing their records, she said Kittathal's existing disability certificate was valid till her life time and she need not get a new certificate.

To confirm this, the family was directed to the differently abled welfare department located in the collectorate. There staff reiterated that a new certificate was not required and told them to resolve the matter at the Anaimalai Taluk Office. When questioned, the special tahsildar (social security scheme) S Alamelumangai said she was unaware who misled them but confirmed.

Rising Vannamei shrimp seed prices threaten Nellore farmers' livelihoods

NELLORE. The steady rise in Vannamei shrimp seed prices has become a major concern for aqua farmers in the region. Until recently, shrimp seed was available at affordable rates, but increasing demand for high-quality seed and broodstock has driven up prices, making shrimp farming less viable for many farmers.

Previously, Vannamei shrimp seed was priced at 30 paise per seed in hatcheries across the erstwhile Nellore district. However, citing quality concerns, hatcheries have now increased the price to over 41 paise per seed. With prices rising almost daily, farmers are left uncertain about whether shrimp farming

will remain profitable. As per the prices 20 days ago, it costs around Rs 48,000 for 1,60,000 Vannamei shrimp seeds in an acre on average. With the surge in prices, it costs Rs 65,600 to cultivate the said variety. With indications of future price hikes, the regional aquaculturists are urging the State government to intervene and regulate the prices. "The cost of seed is rising too fast. If this trend continues, small-scale farmers like us may struggle to continue shrimp farming," said Ramesh Babu, an aqua farmer from Vakadu. Last year, aqua farmers in coastal regions such as Kota, Vakadu, Chittamuru, and Chillakur declared a "crop

holiday" for shrimp farming due to unfavourable weather conditions. Now, with temperatures improving and conditions becoming favourable for shrimp cultivation, farmers have started preparing their ponds again. However, hatchery owners have seized this opportunity to increase seed prices. The increasing shrimp seed prices and crop holiday last year have compounded their financial woes.

Broodstock (parent shrimp) for Vannamei shrimp is imported from the USA, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Japan to hatcheries in Pudukcherry and Tamil Nadu, where shrimp seed is produced. Hatchery owners claim

that the increasing cost of importing high-quality, disease-free broodstock has contributed to the price hike. Nellore district plays a crucial role in Andhra Pradesh's shrimp exports. The State produces around 6.34 lakh metric tonnes of shrimp annually, with Litopenaeus Vannamei being the dominant variety. Earlier, Tiger shrimp farming was highly profitable in the region, but the industry suffered major setbacks in 2000-2001 due to diseases like White Spot Syndrome. As a result, farmers switched to Vannamei shrimp from 2003 to 2016, which yielded high profits without major disease outbreaks.

Trump's migrant crackdown sparks trade wars

Four days after his second inauguration, US President Donald Trump signed the Laken Riley Act. It provides for the arrest, detention and deportation of illegal immigrants charged with minor crimes, such as minor theft, shoplifting, assault or bodily injuries to another person, without waiting for a conviction by a legal court. The signing of this Bill reflects the hardening of sentiments among certain sections of the American people whose votes had steered Trump to victory in the recent presidential elections.

Among the measures that Trump has taken to crack down on the undocumented migrants in the US is the provision of military aircraft to deport thousands of arrested migrants. Additionally, 1,500 troops have been deployed on the US-Mexico border to monitor the incoming illegal migrants and install barriers to stop them.

Also, the entry of undocumented migrants to the US has been suspended, their right to seek asylum tightened and the powers of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement personnel to arrest and detain the illegal migrants on the US soil expanded. On February 1, Trump imposed 25 per cent tariffs on imports from Canada (10 per cent tariffs on import of Canadian Energy) and Mexico, citing national security concerns due to illegal immigration and drug trafficking, particularly of fentanyl. The accusations against Mexico are that its government provides safe havens to powerful drug cartels involved in the manufacture and transportation of dangerous narcotics. The Chinese goods will face 10 per cent tariffs as "China allows the transnational criminal organisations to engage in money-laundering activities which finance the drug trafficking networks." The Trump administration has said that unrestricted access to the US market is a privilege and leveraging tariffs is a powerful tool it would use to compel foreign governments to take stronger actions against illegal immigration and drug trafficking. Canada, Mexico and China have stated that their governments have taken meaningful actions to stop illegal migration and drug trafficking and they are willing to discuss further coordinated actions with the US government. Canadian PM Justin Trudeau has announced retaliatory tariffs of 25 per cent on US imports worth \$30 billion immediately and \$130 billion in 21 days. Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has ordered her Economy Minister to implement tariff and non-tariff measures against the US to defend her country's interests. She has denied the slander made by Washington that her government was working in an alliance with the drug trafficker cartels. She clarified that they had seized 20 million doses of fentanyl and detained one lakh persons tied to drug trafficking.

China has deplored the US tariffs and said that it would take necessary countermeasures, including complaining to the WTO against the wrong US practices. While Trump's policies primarily target illegal immigrants from Canada, Mexico and Central American countries, there are reportedly about 7.25,000 undocumented Indians in the USA, mainly from Punjab and Gujarat, and the Indians comprised about 3 per cent of all illegal border crossings in the US in 2024. The Indian government has clarified that it does not support illegal immigration anywhere and it would accept any illegal immigrants proven to be Indians. After a phone call with PM Modi on January 27, 2025, Trump said India would do "what is right on the deportation of the illegal immigrants." On the issue of H1B visas, there are differing views among Trump's core supporters. While the big business represented by Tesla owner and important Trump supporter Elon Musk favours the continuation of the H1B programme as it fosters innovation and excellence, others like Steve Bannon oppose it as it takes away jobs from the Americans. As the highly qualified foreign immigrants bring rich skills which are different from those of the natives and help create new businesses, jobs and increased consumption, the Trump administration is yet to order any major change in this programme.

Defence budget grows, but combat deficiencies persist

What is even more glaring is that in the revised estimates for FY 2024-25, Rs 12,500 cr from the capital outlay is to be returned as unspent. This is a poor reflection on defence mgmt.

The defence allocation for FY (financial year) 2025-26 has been pegged at Rs 6,81,210 crore, which is about \$78.7 billion. This not-so-insignificant amount is 13.45 per cent of the total Central government expenditure (CGE) and has been estimated to be 1.91 per cent of the national GDP. However, there was no mention of the defence allocation in the Budget speech and this opacity is intriguing. Notwithstanding the 'invisibility', this amount needs to be contextualised against various other parameters and the net distillate is that this allocation falls below the optimum fiscal allocation needed to ensure that the combat capability of the Indian armed forces is at an appropriate level. At the global level, in 2024, the military spending of the USA was \$916 billion and China ranked second at \$296 billion. Merits recall that in 2018, the Standing Committee on Defence (SCOD) had recommended 3 per cent of the GDP as the benchmark for the Ministry of Defence to enable the steady irrigation and nurturing of the national ecosystem required to ensure the desired level of preparedness of the armed forces. However, this remains an elusive figure and over the last four years — from 2020-21 to the current FY — the trend has been a declining curve. The defence allocation to GDP percentage has dropped from 2.4 in 2020-21 to 1.91 in 2025-26. This gap has been highlighted over the years, but it is evident that a political decision has been taken by Team Modi that defence allocation will remain depressed even though the regional geopolitical environment and the internal security challenges remain complex and demanding.

The SCOD, in 2018, had also recommended that in the case of the Army — the lead service, which is manpower-intensive — the equipment/inventory mix should ideally be 30 per cent new equipment, 40 per cent current equipment and 30 per cent older-generation equipment. But the reality is grim. In March 2023, the Army, in a candid disclosure, apprised the standing committee "that only 15 per cent of the Army's equipment can be categorised as new equipment, while nearly 45 per cent continued to be older equipment." The Army representative also informed the parliamentary committee that "there is some time to go before we reach the ideal state of 30:40:30."

The composite combat capability of the Indian military has been denuded over the last decade due to inadequate fiscal allocation and indifferent strategic planning. This has been further compounded by the unrelenting, high-decibel focus on 'atmanirbharta' (self-reliance). While the latter objective is indeed desirable when India is seeking a place at the global high table, the reality is not encouraging in terms of combat capability versus indigenisation and self-reliance. M Modi assumed office in 2014 with a commendable resolve to reform India's defence and military sector and identified 'atmanirbharta' as a core mission. A decade later, the overall picture is mixed and opaque.



broad review reveals that while the objective has had a few success stories and some major projects are in the pipeline, the Indian military is dotted with significant inventory deficiencies. These include an army that is short of artillery guns, tanks and personal weapons; a navy waiting for carrier-compatible fighter aircraft and modern underwater platforms; an air force that is woefully short of combat aircraft and a DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) that is unable to deliver as promised. Realising the twin objectives of combat capability and indigenisation, the capital outlay of the defence budget is a critical indicator. An optimum figure is upwards of 35 per cent and here, the picture is bleak. In the current allocation of Rs 6,81,210 crore, the capital outlay is Rs 1,80,000 crore, which is under 27 per cent. An excellent PRS (Parliamentary Research Service) report of July 2024 has highlighted the fact that this capital outlay share "has declined between 2014-15 and 2023-24 to less than 30 per cent of the defence budget." The allocation for this FY is in keeping with this trend line and is unlikely to change in the near future.

What is even more glaring is that in the revised estimates for FY 2024-25, an amount of Rs 12,500 crore from the capital outlay is to be returned as unspent. This is a poor reflection on higher defence management and strategic

planning for a military that is plagued by obsolescence and inventory shortage and must be redressed.

R&D is at the heart of acquiring the much-desired level of technological competence in strategic sectors of national endeavour and here, the Indian space and nuclear domain are islands of proven success. However, the DRDO trajectory in relation to enabling the military to move up the 'atmanirbharta' ladder has been poor. The PRS 2024 report notes that several projects undertaken by the DRDO have been marred by delays and adds: "In an analysis of 178 DRDO projects, CAG observed that 119 projects did not adhere to the original timeline. In 49 projects, the additional time taken was more than the original schedule which was envisaged. Projects have been declared as successful despite them not meeting one or more key objectives and parameters." Year after year, the defence budget goes through this phase of transient scrutiny in the public domain and even while deficiencies are highlighted, the standard refrain is that if there is a need, the purse strings will be opened. This is reactive posturing and when the chips were down, as in Kargil 1999, national sovereignty was retrieved by the loss of life and limb. Redible military preparedness to deter the adversary from adventurism of any kind cannot be realised by prioritising visibility, spectacle and opacity.

Battleground Delhi

BJP looks to turn the tables on AAP

Delhi votes tomorrow after a no-holds-barred election campaign that saw the main contenders giving absolutely no quarter to their rivals. It is expected to be a fight to the finish, unlike the 2015 and 2020 Assembly elections that were reduced to a one-horse race. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) knows very well that it won't be a walk in the park this time. The BJP has pulled out all the stops in a bid to remove the thorn in its side — Arvind Kejriwal. However, the former CM, out on bail in a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy, continues to be the face of AAP and a potent threat to the saffron party.

The wily Kejriwal has managed to deflect attention from the 'Sheesh Mahal' row and the corruption charges against him by accusing the BJP government in Haryana of 'poisoning' Yamuna water supplied to Delhi. A notice, promptly issued by the Election Commission on the BJP's complaint, has



forced him to clarify that he was referring to "unprecedented high levels of ammonia in raw water". Nevertheless, BJP leaders have expended a lot of time

and energy on refuting one conspiracy theory after another. This has helped AAP regroup and refocus ahead of voting day.

In this high-stakes battle, the BJP has not shied away from taking the revdi route to woo the electorate. Curiously, voters of the national capital have been resisting the temptation of electing a double-engine government; the Modi magic has been confined to the Lok Sabha elections. In the last roll of the dice, the BJP-led Centre has provided huge relief to the much-taxed middle class, an important vote bank in Delhi. Another factor that gives the BJP hope is the conflict between AAP and the Congress, which are part of the Opposition's INDIA bloc. Both have learnt no lesson from the 2024 fiasco in Haryana, where they played into the BJP's hands by going solo. Their avoidable one-upmanship will have a bearing on the Delhi verdict.

Middle-class voter takes pride of place

Tax relief announced in the Budget goes beyond the need to spur consumption demand

There is a reason why the annual Union Budget grabs attention, even if disproportionate. Embedded in the Finance Minister's speech and the numbers — the sanctity of which has been questioned in recent years — are signals on how the government proposes to stabilise the economy and make it grow, and how income and wealth will be redistributed. There are multiple signals sent out through the 2025-26 Budget that reflect the intent of the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre. The strongest signal was reserved for the last paragraph of the FM's speech, when she doled out unexpectedly large sops for the middle-class, salaried taxpayers. The ceiling on tax-free annual income has been raised from Rs 7 lakh to Rs 12.75 lakh (with standard deduction of Rs 75,000). The revised rates in various tax slabs give substantial benefits to those who pay income tax. According to the minister, potential direct tax revenue to the tune of around Rs 1 lakh crore has been foregone to deliver this benefit. These sops have been justified on the ground of spurring consumption demand that has been slack in recent times, contributing to a deceleration in the GDP growth that has troubled the government.

The second signal is a desire to declare that the government is intent on sticking to its efforts at fiscal consolidation by keeping the deficit on a downward "glide path", so as to limit and stabilise the public debt-to-GDP ratio. This is clearly meant to appease foreign investors, who have in recent years rushed into India, and hugely increase the presence of foreign financial investments in the country. Being footloose, this capital can exit at a short notice. Financial investors loathe government deficits, not least because of the fear that they would stoke inflation and erode the real value of financial assets. Fiscal conservatism must be the price to pay to retain the confidence of these investors.

If taxes on the rich as well as corporates recording high profits are not being raised and direct tax sops are being

provided to the middle class, fiscal consolidation can be ensured only by reducing expenditure. This seems to be corroborated by the fact that total expenditure is slated to fall from 14.6 per cent of the GDP in 2024-25 to 14.2 per cent during 2025-26. But a third signal that the Budget sends out is in conflict with the fiscal contraction narrative. That's the government's ostensible intent of raising capital expenditure to support private investment. A lot of that investment is expected to be realised with marginal outlays aimed at incentivising private investments through public private partnerships, but the expenditure figures do point to a 17 per cent hike in capital spending relative to the revised estimates for 2024-25. Optimistic expectations of tax buoyancy and inflated numbers on receipts from non-tax revenue and privatisation partly explain this capacity to raise capital expenditure. But, an important part of the explanation is a willingness to rein in welfare expenditure, including on erstwhile flagship programmes that the NDA government inherited and then claimed credit for.

The outlay for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, having fallen from Rs 90,800 crore in 2022-23 to Rs 86,000 crore in 2024-25, is expected to stay at the same level, even though wage payments are in arrears and demand for jobs is high. Similarly, the food subsidy bill for an enhanced safety net under the National Food Security Act, having fallen from Rs 27.3 lakh crore in 2022-23 to Rs 19.7 lakh crore in 2024-25, is projected at just Rs 20.3 lakh crore in 2025-26. Measures announced in the Budget are sometimes a response to the government's assessment of the prevailing

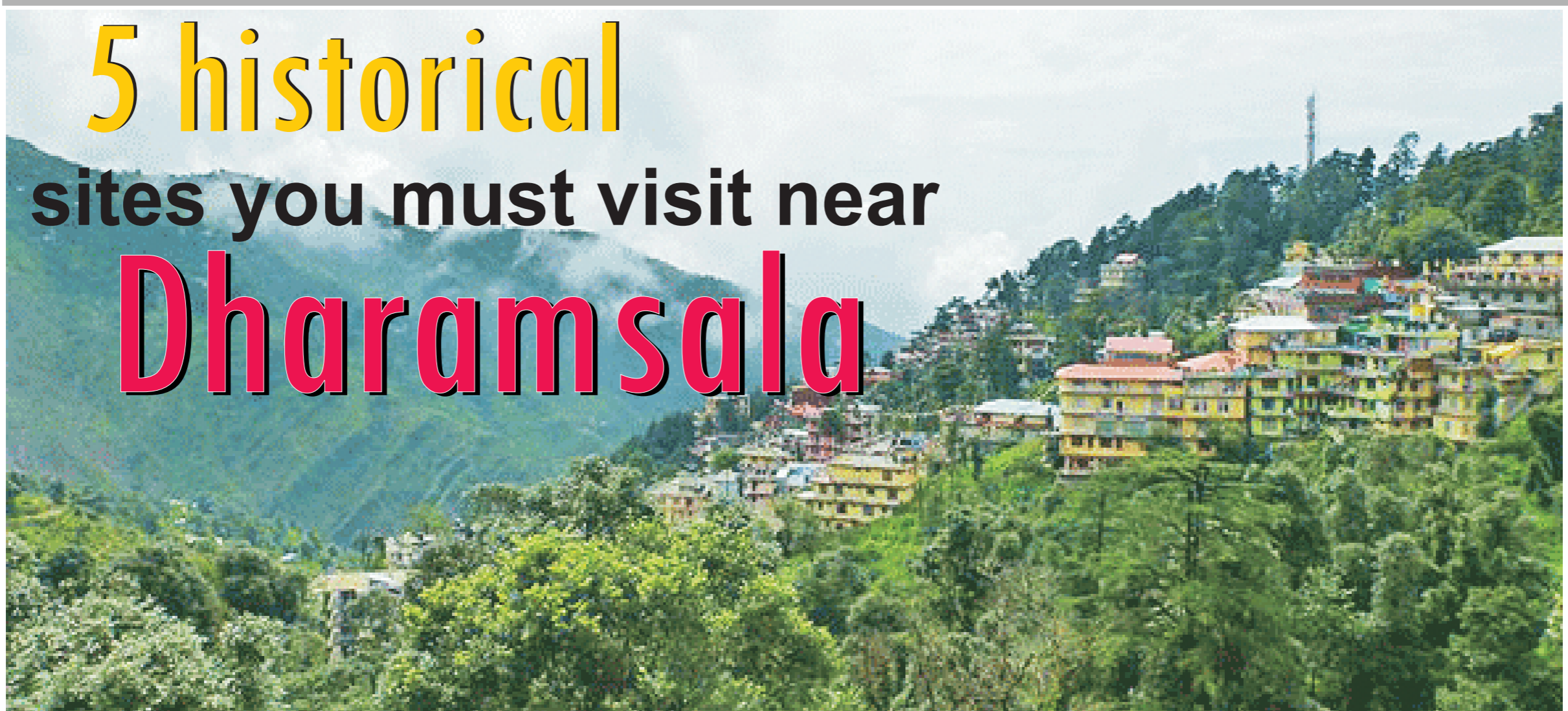


economic situation. But more often and increasingly so in the 'new India', budgets are instruments in the hands of the ruling party to build vote banks and sway voters. Central budgets are crucial here because of accelerated centralisation of resources in the hands of the Union Government, often at the expense of states (through, for example, the reliance on cesses and surcharges not included in the divisible pool of taxes to be shared with the states as per the constitutional mandate). As a result, the ruling party at the Centre has greater leeway in deploying resources through its own tax and subsidy schemes, and through its choice of Centrally sponsored and Central sector schemes to emphasise upon.

Thus, statements from within the ruling coalition and

outside have attributed the FM's direct tax largesse to the need to consolidate a middle-class vote bank, especially with an eye on upcoming state elections, including the one in middle class-dominated Delhi. Special allocation for projects like the Western Kosi Canal extension and renovation, the creation of a Makhana Board to support production of the crop and other forms of assistance for Bihar are clearly driven by the need to appease a key ally, the JD(U), and woo voters in the state that will go to the polls later this year. Meanwhile, governments in Opposition-ruled states — Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal — have complained that their legitimate demand for funds has been ignored. Riding on the analysis in the Economic Survey, which flags the fact that depressed consumption demand and inadequate government capital spending underlie the deceleration in economic growth, the FM claims that tax cuts to

boost middle-class demand and increased capital expenditure would help reverse the slowdown. This argument makes the hold on welfare spending a sacrifice needed to revive growth. But an alternative explanation could be that the government expects greater immediate political mileage from consolidating its middle-class vote bank than from providing more support for the weakest sections. The latter, the ruling party possibly believes, have already been won over with the limited support on offer, and by the concerted efforts to attribute to the Centre and the PM the benefits provided under Centrally sponsored schemes that are partly financed by states.



5 historical sites you must visit near Dharamsala

When you think of Dharamsala, you think of the massive Dhauladhar Ranges, and of the Dalai Lama. There is so much to see and do here; whether you go trekking in the mountains or visit monasteries. Another aspect of Dharamsala is its rich heritage comprising impressive monuments and forts. Ruled by Katoch Dynasty for centuries and then passing into Mughal hands and later the British, the Kangra valley has many impressive monuments built by successive rulers. There are forts and temples galore, which take you back into the past. Here are five historical monuments you must visit, if you are visiting Dharamsala or the Kangra Valley.

detailed. One of the most interesting festivals here is Dussera, where, unlike the rest of North India, effigies of Ravana are not burnt or beheaded, as a mark of respect to him!

Location:
The Baijnath Temple is about 51 km away from Kangra.

Nurpur Fort

The Nurpur Fort, located on the route from Pathankot to Dharamsala, is not on any tourist's itinerary. The impressive fort stands on a hillock just off the main highway, but is only visited by locals, that too, for a temple within the fort premises. The name of the fort comes from the town, which was once called Dhameri. Its name was changed to Nurpur when the empress Nur Jahan visited, and was enamored by the place! The fort must have been once the stronghold of the Katochs, and then the Mughals, but today, it is in use as various government offices and a primary school! The Brij Raj Swami Mandir inside the fort was once the royal court. Once the king visited Chittorgarh and brought home the idol of Krishna once worshipped by Meera. He converted his court into a temple for the lord, and decorated the entire temple with paintings, depicting the various leelas of Lord Krishna. Some of these paintings are still there, a testament to the erstwhile beauty of the temple, but a part of it has been whitewashed, a clear sign of its state today. Outside are more impressive structures—the queen's quarters, an old well, and ancient temple—with amazingly beautiful and detailed sculptures. Sadly, only the base of the temple stands today! The fort is a must-visit for heritage enthusiasts.

Information:
Nurpur is 28 km from Pathankot and 60 km from Dharamsala.

is full of memorial stones of those who passed away here. One memorial speaks of death due to a bear attack, while the most impressive

Fort was also the capital of Raja Parmanand Chandra, better known as Porus, whose clash with Alexander the



one is just behind the church. It is dedicated to Lord Elgin, the Viceroy of India from 1862-1863. The church also boasts of two magnificent stained glass panels, and a bell, cast by Mears and Stainbank, and brought all the way from England!

Information:
Location:
The church of St. John in the Wilderness is located just before McLeod Ganj on the road from Dharamsala. It is within walking distance of the main market and the bus stop.

Masroor Temple

The Masroor Temples are rock cut temples, sometimes called the Ellora of Himachal. They are believed to have been first built by Pandavas while they were travelling through these mountains; historically they belong to the 7th and 8th centuries. They must have been built by the Katoch Dynasty; the information available is very less though. The temples are magnificent structures, carved into the rock and rising towards the heavens. These are covered with amazingly detailed carvings depicting Shiva, Kartikeya, Indra, Surya, as well as many forms of the goddesses. The main shrine today has idols of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana found here during the excavation though it is believed to have been a Shiva Temple. Steps cut into a mountain nearby and lead to a sort of store house, where some broken idols were found. This hillock also provides a superb view of the temples against the Dhauladhar Ranges in the background.

Location:
Masroor is 32 km away from Kangra and 51 km from Dharamsala

How to reach:
By air: The nearest airport is at Gaggal, about 15 km away from Dharamsala. There are regular flights from New Delhi.

By train: The nearest well-connected railway station is at Pathankot, (87 km from Dharamsala). The Kangra Railway Station is only connected by a narrow gauge train from Pathankot to Joginder Nagar.

By road: Dharamsala is well connected to Pathankot by road, and there are frequent buses ply on the route. Masroor is on the road to Nagrota, and there are few buses here. It is best to hire a vehicle from Dharamsala or Kangra.

Kangra Fort

The Kangra Fort is one of the oldest forts in India, and has a history going back centuries. Built by the Katoch Kings, who trace their lineage back to the goddess Ambika, Kangra

Great is something we all have read about, in our history books. Located atop a hill at the confluence of two rivers, the gorge around the hillock provides a natural moat for the fort, further strengthening it, and rendering it difficult to capture. The fort remained invincible till Mahmud of Ghazni invaded, and carried away much of the wealth of the fort, and the temple inside. Today, the temple has no idol of Ambika, but has one of Mahavir, considered to be one of his oldest ones, and is a place of pilgrimage for Jains. One of the best things about the Kangra Fort is the superb audio guide, which makes the fort and its stories come alive.

Information:
Location:
The Kangra Fort or Nagarkot, as it is called, is located in Old Kangra town, just 1 km from the Kangra Railway Station, and 21 km from Dharamsala.

How to reach:
If you stay at Kangra, you can hire autos to take you to the fort and back. Buses are infrequent. If you stay at Dharamsala, hire a car.



Baijnath Temple

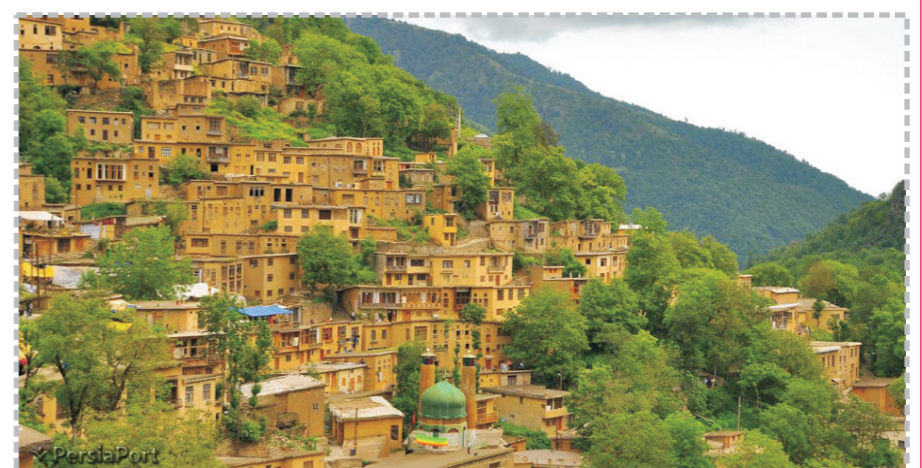
The Baijnath Temple, built in the 12th century, is one of the most impressive and important temples in the Kangra Valley. Built by two brothers over a shrine already present here, the Baijnath Temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva as Vaidyanath—the healer. The temple legend refers to Ravana's penance, in which he cuts off his heads and offers them to the Lord, and Shiva eventually relents and restores him the 10 heads, and also blesses him. It is also believed that the lingam housed here is one given to Ravana by Shiva himself, and that the Gods tricked Ravana into placing it here instead of taking it home to Lanka. The temple is an impressive monument, with scores of interesting depictions of Gods. The sculptures are incredibly beautiful and

How to reach:
Pathankot is the nearest city, and is well connected to the rest of the country by the railways. Nurpur Road is a small railway station on the Kangra Valley railway, between Pathankot and Dharamsala. The nearest airport is at Gaggal (Kangra/Dharamsala) 45 km away.

St. John in the Wilderness church

The church of St. John in the wilderness is one of the oldest Anglican churches in Dharamsala/McLeod Ganj. Nestled in a cove of mighty Deodar trees, the church is rather aptly named, and even today, is an island of wilderness in a rapidly growing tourist destination. The church was built in 1852, to provide a place of worship for the British soldiers posted here, and the church

The historic village of Masouleh



The village of Masouleh is located in Gilan Province in Iran, perched high on a densely forested mountainside about 60 km inland from the Caspian Sea. Forever covered in fog, which barely leaves the village, Masouleh is an incredible spectacle—a series of cottages built on a slope, such that each house's courtyard is another house's rooftop.

The village is located about 1,050 m above sea level, but the range of elevation varies by over a hundred metres in the village. Because of this, houses are constructed in stepped terraces and are interconnected. The terrace of each house functions as the courtyard of the house above. In some cases, public streets are laid out along interconnected roofs. Due to its unique layout, Masouleh does not permit any motor vehicles to enter as the small streets and many stairs make it impossible for vehicles to operate in the village. Masouleh's peculiar architecture can be compared, to some extent, to the Libyan village of Ghadames, where interconnected rooftops create a network of passageways.

The village buildings are mostly two storeys and made of adobe, rods and bole. Between these houses are narrow, meandering steps that lead to the upper

level of the city. Given that these old houses are mostly made out of clay and wood, it is truly amazing that the roofs can also serve as sidewalks and walkways. Moreover, they are constantly exposed to wear and tear of the weather, such as deluges of rain and heaps of snow. Due to its high location, the climate of Masouleh is different from the rest of Iran, which is hot and dry. Here, warm, moist air blowing southwest from the Caspian is blocked by the Alborz Mountains, creating heavy precipitation and fog on the seaward side of the mountains. The abundant rainfall has spawned dense forests and gushing rivers in the area.

The first village of Masouleh was established more than a thousand years ago, around 6 km northwest of the current village and is called Old Masouleh. Masouleh had once been the 'Silk Road of the Gilan' region and people from far and near gathered here for business to sell and buy merchandise; however, as of late, there are fewer signs of the young and old selling dream dolls and colourful socks in the alleys of Masouleh as people have migrated from this once trade centre due to unemployment and lack of income. As of recent, Masouleh is developing into a popular tourist destination.

As Delhi Votes, AAP vs BJP Over Seized 'Promotional Materials', Cops Respond

Arvind Kejriwal Goes To Vote With Family, Parents In Wheelchairs

New Delhi. As Delhi voted to elect its new government, Arvind Kejriwal, former Chief Minister and the ruling Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) national convener cast his vote along with his family in the New Delhi Assembly segment, where he is also a candidate. Mr Kejriwal arrived at the polling booth in Lady Irwin Senior Secondary School along with his parents, wife and son. His elderly parents Gobind Ram Kejriwal and Gita Devi were on wheelchairs. While Mr Kejriwal pushed his mother's wheelchair, his son Pulkit pushed his



father's. His wife Sunita walked alongside them. Earlier today, Mr Kejriwal urged voters of the national capital to vote for development and honesty. He also hoped that "hooliganism" would lose and Delhi would win.

Dear Delhi residents, today is election day. Your vote is not just a button but a foundation for your children's bright future. Good schools, good hospitals and an opportunity to give every family a dignified life. Today, we have to defeat the politics of lies, hate and fear and make development and honesty win. Vote and inspire your family, friends and neighbours. Hooliganism will lose, Delhi will win," he said. The New Delhi constituency, which has elected Mr Kejriwal in the 2013, 2015 and 2020 polls, is witnessing a three-cornered contest this time. Mr Kejriwal is up against the BJP's Parvesh Verma and the Congress's Sandeep Dikshit. Both are sons of former Chief Ministers. A total of 699 candidates are in the contest for 70 Assembly seats in the national capital. Delhi has 1.5 crore registered voters, including 83.76 lakh men, 72.36 lakh women and 1,267 from the third gender. In the 2020 polls, AAP won 62 seats and the BJP eight.

Delhi HC seeks SC clarification on court jurisdiction for Engineer Rashid's bail plea

NEW DELHI. The Delhi High Court has approached the Supreme Court seeking clarification regarding the appropriate trial court to hear the bail plea of Baramulla MP Engineer Rashid, currently imprisoned in a terror funding case under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The issue arose after the special NIA court, which had reserved its order on Rashid's bail plea, later transferred the matter, stating that only a designated MP/MLA court has jurisdiction to hear cases involving elected lawmakers. Justice Vikas Mahajan, while hearing Rashid's petition for an expedited bail decision, directed the Delhi High Court's Registrar General to obtain clarification from the Supreme Court on the matter. The case is now listed for further hearing on February 6. Rashid has also sought interim bail to attend the ongoing Budget session of Parliament. Senior Advocate N Hariharan, representing Rashid, argued that his client had been granted interim bail in the past, including instances when he was campaigning during the Jammu and Kashmir elections. "I am ready to address all objections, but for now, I am only requesting interim bail. The merits of the case can be discussed later," Hariharan submitted. Opposing the request, Senior Advocate Sidharth Luthra, appearing for the National Investigation Agency (NIA), contended that Rashid's bail plea must be heard by a division bench as per the NIA Act. However, the high court noted that Rashid had been granted interim bail multiple times in the past without any allegations of misuse.

Issuing a clarification, the police confirmed that some promotional material had been seized, but that it had been taken from booths set up by independent candidates and not those nominated by the BJP.

New Delhi. On Wednesday morning, as voting for the Delhi Assembly election took place, a furious Aam Aadmi Party claimed that promotional material for the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party had been found at some polling booths in the national capital, in violation of the Model Code of Conduct that is in force. The AAP - which has had several tiffs with the Election Commission in this election, including party boss Arvind Kejriwal and Chief Minister Atishi accusing it of bias, a charge firmly refuted last evening - also claimed Delhi Police, which reports to the Union Home Ministry, were "mute spectators".



In a post on X the AAP said, "What is going on? There is election material openly displayed at the BJP booth... and the police are doing nothing. And the election officers are just watching." Issuing a clarification, the police confirmed that some promotional material had been seized, but that it had been taken from booths set up by independent candidates and

not those nominated by the BJP. The AAP also posted a tweet mocking BJP workers leaving a booth; "Run BJP, run. When no one came to the booth, BJP supporters took their chairs and ran... Sweeping is happening all over Delhi." Multiple allegations of election impropriety have been levied by the AAP against the cops today. The party's Greater Kailash MLA, Saurabh Bhardwaj, alleged police were trying to stop people from voting at booths in Chirag Delhi. Speaking to the media,

Mr Bharadwaj claimed the police were putting up barricades and attempting to influence voters in all 18 polling booths there. "You (the cops) have been standing here since morning to influence voting. Why are barricades being put up? Which senior officer of Delhi Police has instructed this? This is being done to disturb poor voters. Malviya Nagar police are openly doing this wherever there is an AAP stronghold of AAP."

South Delhi DCP Ankit Chauhan said the claims would be investigated. "There is an exception for the elderly and those who cannot walk. For them, bringing their car inside is allowed. This rule is being implemented everywhere. We will investigate these concerns," Mr Chauhan told news agency ANI.

The 2015 and 2020 poll were dominated by the AAP, which won 67 and 62 seats, respectively. The BJP and Congress finished a distant second and third. But this time the BJP is hopeful of a strong showing to upset Mr Kejriwal's chances of a third successive term in the national capital.

Pictures of Indians getting handcuffed, humiliated while being deported from US saddening: Congress

NEW DELHI. The Congress on Wednesday expressed sadness over "pictures of Indians getting handcuffed and humiliated" while being deported from the US and recalled that America had to express regret over the treatment meted out to India diplomat Devyani Khobragade in 2013 after the then UPA government retaliated sharply.

A military transport aircraft of the US is bringing a group of Indian migrants, in the first such deportation to India as part of the big crackdown on illegal immigrants by President Donald Trump in his second term at the White House. Without directly commenting on the deportation flight carrying the Indians, a spokesperson at the US embassy in New Delhi said on Tuesday that Washington is tightening immigration laws and removing illegal migrants.

Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said, "Looking at the pictures of Indians getting handcuffed and humiliated while being deported from the US saddens me as an Indian." "I remember in December of 2013, an Indian diplomat Devyani Khobragade was handcuffed and strip searched in America. Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh registered a strong protest with US Ambassador Nancy Powell," Khera said in a post on X.

"The UPA government retaliated sharply. Leaders like Ms Meira Kumar, Sushil Kumar Shinde & Rahul Gandhi refused to meet the US Congressional delegation (George Holding, Pete Olson, David Schweikert, Rob Woodall and Madeleine Bordallo) that was visiting India at that time," he recalled. Khera said then PM Manmohan Singh termed the US action 'deplorable'. India withdrew several perks given to the US embassy, including imports of food and alcohol at concessional rates by embassy staff, he said.

Centre says will give Rs 25L to trust for construction of Singh memorial

NEW DELHI. The Centre is ready to allocate land and funds to the trust to be set up to construct the memorial for former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Sources said the government would give Rs 25 lakh to the trust to be formed by Singh's family. Sources said the government has thrice reminded the family, but the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), the nodal agency for land allotment, is still awaiting a response from them. Singh passed away last December. Following the demand by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, the government offered two adjoining plots at the Rashtriya Smriti complex for his memorial. The ministry also carried out groundwork to facilitate its construction. This newspaper also reported that the architect of the Central Public Work Department (CPWD) inspected the two pieces of land - measuring about 10,000 square feet - and later discussed the memorial's design and other modalities.

The selected sites are close to the memorials of former presidents and prime ministers such as Giani Zail Singh, Shankar Dayal Sharma, Chandra Shekhar, I.K. Gujral, and P.V. Narasimha Rao.

According to government officials, the CPWD will carry out the construction, and the trust will bear the expenses. The proposed memorial's cenotaph would be identical to those already existing on the campus.

Each memorial is a square piece of land surrounded by about two-foot-high sandstone-latticed screens with a 5x5 black granite platform in the centre. This is the standard design for memorials at the Rashtriya Smriti complex.

The only exception is Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Samadhi. It comprises nine square black polished granite solid stone blocks, capped with a 'diya' in the centre. The blocks are placed in a circular lotus-shaped pattern and enclosed by nine bas-relief walls, which have inscriptions of the prose or poetry of Vajpayee.

Memorial plots at Rashtriya Smriti Sthal

Dr Manmohan Singh passed away last December. Following the demand by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, the government offered two adjoining plots at the Rashtriya Smriti complex for his memorial.

BJP accuses AAP of trying to block votes from key communities ahead of Delhi polls

NEW DELHI. A day before the Delhi assembly elections, BJP president Virendra Sachdeva accused the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) of attempting to prevent votes from key communities, including the Vaishya, Brahmin, and Purvanchal groups.

Sachdeva alleged that AAP leaders had submitted lists to election officials in nearly 50 constituencies, claiming that thousands of Purvanchali, Vaishya, and Brahmin voters were either deceased or no longer residing at their registered addresses, and thus should be disqualified from voting. To support his claim, Sachdeva presented around 15 individuals whose voting eligibility had been questioned by AAP, yet were confirmed to be

present and qualified to vote. He accused AAP of attempting to block these voters, particularly Purvanchalis, from voting early in the



day, with the intention of disrupting the election process and influencing the outcome.

Sachdeva urged the Election Commission (EC) to dismiss any

objections raised by political parties and allow all voters listed in the official Booth Level Officer (BLO) records to cast their votes without hindrance.

"The AAP wants to influence the voting process by creating long queues at polling booths, thus reducing voter turnout where BJP is strong," Sachdeva said. "If you deny the legitimate voters of Delhi their right to vote, the people will punish you at the polls. If you are losing the election, accept it. Do not steal the votes of Delhi's citizens." The BJP has formally complained to the EC, calling for immediate action to prevent any

interference with the voting process. The intense campaigning for the assembly polls ended on Monday, with the top leadership of all parties canvassing for their candidates.

Before Oxford and Harvard, there was Nalanda

NEW DELHI. Established in 427 CE, Nalanda University in present-day Bihar, was home to one of the world's first great universities, thriving centuries before Oxford and Harvard. However, its foundation dates back even further. To honour Sariputra, one of Buddha's chief disciples, Mauryan emperor Ashoka built a stupa at the site in the third century BCE, which became the nucleus of the Nalanda Mahavihara. Beside it, he constructed a vihara (monastery) for Buddhist monks, which gradually evolved into the Nalanda Mahavihara - one of the greatest centres of learning in the ancient world.

Abhay K, author and diplomat

In his new book, Nalanda: How It Changed the World (Penguin), author and diplomat Abhay K. threads together the many stories and events associated with the university and its

vast history. The book spans eight chapters, covering episodes from the time of Bimbisara, who established the Haryanka dynasty in Magadha, to Nalanda's relevance and impact in the current global scenario.

Growing up in Nalanda, Abhay regularly visited the ruins of the



Nalanda Mahavihara. "I used to read the small locally printed booklets sold on the footpath there, which carried information in bits and pieces about the founding of the great

monastery," he recalls. These early visits to the ruins and the stories told by local guides sparked his lifelong curiosity and gave him a unique perspective, allowing him to bring a personal touch to his portrayal of Nalanda's history.

The rise and fall

Despite the challenges of navigating through extensive historical data, much of which is shrouded in mystery, Abhay makes the narrative engaging by channeling his curiosity into answering the many questions that arose in his mind. "I was fascinated by the origins of the vihara at Nalanda - how and why it became such a celebrated seat of learning and its legacy beyond the 14th century," he says. His aim was to gather information from reliable sources, connecting the dots across different time periods to create a comprehensive account.

Delhi sees cloudy skies, light rain as IMD forecasts mix of rain, fog ahead

As per the IMD bulletin, fog will dominate the morning scene in the capital from February 5 onward.

NEW DELHI. The national capital woke up to a cloudy morning skies with light rainfall in parts of the city on Tuesday with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasting light showers throughout the day. On Wednesday the sky is likely to remain clear, the weather office said. Smog and shallow fog are expected in most places in early morning, with moderate fog in isolated areas, it added. As of 5 pm on Tuesday, the Safdarjung weather station recorded 0.5 mm



rainfall. The minimum temperature settled at 12.8 degrees Celsius, 4.4 degrees above average, while the maximum temperature was 26 degrees Celsius, 3.7 notches above normal, as per IMD. Humidity levels fluctuated between 91 and 76 per cent during the day, while the air quality remained in the "poor" category, with average Air Quality Index (AQI) recorded 264. As per sources, Delhi weather is likely to take a U-turn from sunny mornings, returning to colder morning conditions. This week, the national capital is slated to experience a mix of rain and foggy conditions. As per the IMD bulletin, fog will dominate the morning-scapes in the

capital from February 5 onward. Temperatures are likely to hover between 9°C to 25°C in the coming days.

Meanwhile, the city witnessed its hottest January since 2019, attributed to lack of rain-bringing western disturbances.

Hottest January since 2019

This year, the national capital experienced its warmest January since 2019, with an average maximum temperature of 21.1 °C, slightly above the long-term average of 20.1 °C.

IMD data has indicated higher-than-usual night temperatures. Meteorologists have attributed this warmth to lack of strong western disturbances, which typically bring rain and cooler conditions. "This month, while western disturbances did pass through North India, most of them were feeble and did not bring significant snow or rainfall," expert Mahesh Palawat said.

What tour Guides won't tell you

You need to carry your passport to any nightclub if you're planning to party hard in Sydney. Local beverages are more affordable in Oz Land. Tipping isn't recommended. Here's all that cricket fans and travellers need to know about Australia. Plane loads of Indian tourists visit Australia for cricket, annual vacation or honeymoon. We list a few must dos in and around major Australian cities Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. We also suggest some of the must dos and don'ts in and around these cities so that you save money and avoid all roadblocks while planning your holiday. Have an amazing Australian experience the

Aussie way.

Sydney, New South Wales

Trike Ride on Harley Davidson Bikes: How about soaking in Sydney while roaming across popular attractions like The Opera House, The Harbour Bridge, Central Business District and suburbs on an open Harley 'rickshaw'? Rather than riding pillion behind a burly rider, why not opt for a trike ride? There are several bike tour operators such as Troll Tours in the city offering a trike ride. This bike has three wheels instead of two, and a bigger seating

area at the back. **Cafe and Pub Hopping:** You've ogled at every Master Chef preparation; this is your chance to feast on them. Sydney is the food capital of Australia. Ample cafes, pubs and clubs run by celebrity chefs dot the city. Darling Harbour, Darlinghurst and Cowper Wharf Road have some of the best dine out spaces. There are ample Indian restaurants and other eateries have enough vegetarian options too.

Melbourne, Victoria

Colonial Tramcar Restaurant: This is a city

tour like no other. Nibble on gourmet fare for lunch or dinner inside an old tram refurbished as a Victorian rail bogey. Among the best tramcar restaurants, these trams take you on a three-hour journey around the city and its suburbs while you enjoy a three-course meal and sights of the city from your tram window. **12 Apostles, Great Ocean Road:** The road and rock formations are hailed as an Aussie wonder worth a visit. The four-hour drive along the sea takes you to majestic rock and limestone formations named 12 Apostles. Some of the arches emerging out of the sea are as high as 45 metres. These formations change colour right through the day with the changing colours of the sun.

Adelaide, South Australia

Country Homes for Stay: Adelaide is an ideal city to experience both the bustle of Sydney and Melbourne, as well as the calm countryside that this place offers. Many locals rent out their country homes. Book one of these cottages and experience a staycation with an Australian family. Most of the houses have kitchen gardens from where you can source your basic ingredients. Do remember to go fishing with locals too. **Winery Tour:** Seppeltsfield and Jacob's Creek are two of the biggest vineyards of the region and close to the city. A wine educator takes you through the history of the vineyard and the region and offers professional wine-tasting sessions at each winery.

Checklist

Club rules

Your passport is a must for entry into any

club or a pub. Sydney has a lockout hour where the entry to a club closes at 1 am. The clubs would stay open till 3 am but no new entry or re-entry is allowed. Tipping is not the norm and no encouraged either.

House rules

Cabs are expensive. Trams and walking are the usual modes chosen by locals. Locals take their kitchen gardens very seriously. Don't run amok. Pluck only what's needed.

Road rules

Australia enforces strict speed limits. Empty stretches are tempting but resist pushing the accelerator.

Local flair

Beer and wine of the state you are in will be more affordable. A South Australian beer will be cheaper in Adelaide than Melbourne and vice versa. The menus mention which states the beverages are from. Try local brews.

Right gear

Your bermudas or denim shorts are NOT swimming shorts. Wear proper swimming or surf gear that dries quickly rather than roasts around in drenched lowers post a swim.

Safety first

Australia has strict traffic rules. Wear seat belts even while riding trike bikes. Seat belts on rear seats of cars are also a must.

Civic sense

Smoking in public places is allowed in Australia but stubbing the butt on streets is an offence. While you will not be punished for smoking you can be fined for littering! Always stub it in trays installed.



With a medley of steep red cliffs, swaying palm trees and the deep blue Arabian Sea, it isn't hard to imagine why Varkala is described as one of the most beautiful beaches in India. A more laid-back alternative to Kovalam, Varkala is fast catching up to its more popular cousin, thanks to its stunning beaches and an assortment of restaurants and hotels clustered around the North Cliff.

6 reasons to visit Varkkala

Papanasham Beach

Synonymous with Varkala, this is the town's most popular beach. With waves lapping its sun-kissed white sands at one end and breaking against the imposing red cliffs on the other, Papanasham is quite a sight to behold. While swimming is allowed, visitors need to watch out (as with all the other beaches at Varkala) for strong underwater currents.

Besides lounging about on the sands at Papanasham, visitors can try their hand at parasailing, scuba diving and paragliding, while anglers can go deep-sea fishing. The beach is lined with a surfeit of restaurants serving up fresh-from-the-ocean seafood and small shops hawking souvenirs. The panoramic bird's eye view from the top of the cliff (easily accessed via a winding path) is highly recommended. The beach also attracts a steady stream of the faithful: Hindus believe a dip in the water here can absolve sins, and the immersion of cremation ashes leads to salvation for the deceased.

Thiruvambadi Beach

If isolation is what you seek then this stretch of sand, also known as the Black Sand Beach, fits the bill to a tee. One of the quietest beaches in Varkala, this beach has, as the name suggests, black sand. Accessible by climbing down from the North Cliff, or driving down Thiruvambadi Road.

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Yoga at the beach

Yoga and Ayurveda have always been big draws in Kerala and Varkala is no exception. Most seaside resorts offer yoga sessions on the beach: the trick is identifying which type of yoga you'd like to practice and picking a resort that offers it. Hotel Green Palace hosts 'hatha yoga' classes by Haridas, a teacher trained in the Sivananda school. Sharanagati Yogahaus is a yoga retreat that offers

Sivananda yoga classes twice a day and Vipassana meditation sessions. The family-run Eden Garden hotel couples yoga with traditional Ayurvedic therapies.

Anjengo Fort

History buffs will find the 20-minute drive out of town to this fort, located in a fishing village, entirely worth the effort. This 17th century fort was initially used by the Portuguese as a depot for trading goods and arms, and later served as a signalling station and a trading depot for pepper and coir, for the British. Briefly besieged by the locals during a local rebellion in 1721, the fort also served as a British ammunition store during the Anglo-Mysore Wars in the 18th century. Soak in the gorgeous views from the ramparts and don't forget to check out the 130-foot tall lighthouse that once guided ships arriving from

Britain. There are some old churches and a cemetery nearby, while the beach remains clean and unspoiled.

Kappil Beach and Lake

Still flying under the tourist radar, serene and picturesque Kappil is the one of the few beaches in Kerala that hasn't been inundated by shops and

eateries. The secluded beach is at the confluence of the Kappil Lake and the Arabian Sea, and is also one of the cleanest in the state. Visitors can take a boat on the backwaters adjunct to the ocean; stroll on the bridge that runs across the lake; or even climb up the Kodi Cliff for a panoramic glimpse of the Arabian Sea.

Janardhana Swamy Temple

Believed to be around 2,000 years old, this Vaishnavite temple, perched on a hilltop near Papanasham Beach is an important pilgrimage centre for Hindus. Devotees often take a dip in the sunken water tank inside which is fed by a perennial spring. Note that non-Hindus are not allowed in the inner sanctum, and there's a strictly enforced dress code of saris for women and 'mundus' for men.



Saluja's plea against her removal as director rejected

NEW DELHI. In a setback for Rashmi Saluja, executive chairperson of Religare Enterprises (REL), the Delhi High Court (HC) has denied relief to her in a plea against a resolution seeking to replace her with a new director at the upcoming annual general meeting (AGM) on February 7.

Saluja had moved the Delhi High Court against her removal as a director of REL, as she had argued that her appointment was for a fixed term of five years till 2028. The decision clears the way for the AGM and the voting on the appointment of a new director to replace Saluja, an important update in the ongoing dispute between the Burman family of Dabur and Saluja. The Burmans open offer to acquire a majority stake in REL is already underway and will close on Friday.

Saluja's plea has been opposed by four independent directors of REL. Additionally, the proxy firms — Stakeholders Empowerment Services, Institutional Investor Advisory Services, and InGovern Research — have recommended an 'against' vote on the resolution pertaining to Saluja's reappointment, citing concerns over corporate governance, employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs), and higher remuneration. REL described the proxy firm's reports as 'orchestrated and motivated'. In addition to Saluja's plea, minority shareholder Sapna Rao filed a separate case with the Delhi HC to consider the counter-offer made by Danny Gaekwad. The court on Tuesday stated that SEBI will consider Gaekwad's offer in accordance with law and that the open offer by Burmans can continue.

Welspun Energy to invest Rs 13,500 crore in Odisha

MUMBAI. Welspun New Energy, green energy arm of Welspun World, has signed a Rs 13,500 crore pact with Odisha to build pumped storage and floating solar projects, which will generate 2,200 mw of green electricity.

In a statement, the company said on Tuesday that Welspun New Energy will invest Rs 13,500 crore to develop 11,200 mw pumped hydro project and a 1,000 mw floating solar power project in the state. These projects are likely to enhance the state's



energy storage capacity and support the integration of renewable energy into the grid. It announced ongoing work in Odisha conclave in Bhubaneswar. Kapil Maheshwari, the chief executive of Welspun New Energy, said the committed Rs 13,500 crore investment in green mark a key milestone in the state's mission to accelerate renewable energy adoption and highlights his company's commitment to innovation and sustainability.

Pumped storage utilises the height difference between the upper and lower reservoirs to store energy with excess wind solar generation and generate electricity during low renewable generation hours.

Growth in services sector slows to more than 2-year low: PMI survey

New Delhi. Growth in India's dominant services sector in January slumped to the slowest in more than two years as demand softened but remained strong and led to a substantial rate of hiring, said a private survey on Wednesday. The HSBC final India Services Purchasing Managers' (PMI) Index, compiled by S&P Global, fell to 56.5 in January from 59.3 in December, lower than a preliminary estimate of 56.8 but ahead of the 50-mark separating contraction from growth. The index has been above the neutral 50-mark that separates contraction from expansion for 42 months straight.

"Overall new business continued to increase strongly but the rate of expansion softened to the weakest in 14 months. The rise was attributed to strong demand and decisions to offer better prices than rivals. Growth was reportedly curbed by intense competition," said the survey.

"The business activity and new business PMI indices eased to their lowest levels since November 2022 and November 2023 respectively," said Pranjal Bhandari, chief India economist at HSBC.

"That said, new export business partly countered the downtrend and continued to rebound from a dip in late-2024, in line with official data which showed India's services exports shining in December and capturing a larger share of global trade," she said. The survey reported a quicker increase in international sales as respondents noted gains from clients in Asia, Europe, West Asia and the Americas.

International demand in January hit a five-month high. The survey said that new business intakes and capacity pressure prompted service providers to recruit additional staff in the early third quarter of the financial year. "According to them, full- and part-time positions had been filled. The rate of job creation accelerated from December and was among the fastest seen since data collection started in December 2005." Services firms noted another uptick in expenses, driven by staff costs and food prices. The rate of inflation was little-changed from that seen around the turn of the year, therefore remaining above its long-run average.

Explained: Is China playing it safe in latest trade war with US

US-China trade war: China's countermeasures appear more restrained compared to its approach during the previous trade war. This has raised a key question: Is China playing it safe in the latest trade standoff with the US?

NEW DELHI. China has hit back after US President Donald Trump announced new 10% tariffs on Chinese goods. Beijing's response included duties on about 80 American products, an investigation into Google, tighter controls on critical minerals, and the blacklisting of two US companies. However, this time, China's countermeasures appear more restrained compared to its approach during the previous trade war. This has raised a key question: Is China treading cautiously in

the latest trade standoff with the US? The answer lies in Beijing's current economic challenges and the large trade gap it has with America. Rather than matching Trump's move entirely, China imposed tariffs on a smaller set of US goods worth around \$14 billion, according to Bloomberg News. The careful response marks a shift from its earlier strategy, when it would retaliate with equal measures against US tariffs. Instead of matching Trump's move completely, China only put tariffs on a small portion of US goods worth \$14 billion, reported Bloomberg News. This careful approach is in stark contrast to how China acted during Trump's first term, when they would match US tariffs dollar for dollar.

WHY CHINA HAS MORE TO LOSE

The change in China's strategy seems to be due to ongoing economic challenges. The country is dealing with falling prices and trying to fix problems in its property market. Right now, China heavily depends



on selling goods overseas to keep its economy growing. The math makes China's position even more difficult. China sells more than three times as much stuff to the US as it buys from them. This means China has fewer American products it can put tariffs on if it wants to fight back. As Larry Hu from Macquarie Group told Bloomberg, China is being restrained because it "has more to lose" due to this huge trade imbalance with the US. Therefore, instead of getting into a full-blow tariff war, China might focus

more on supporting its own economy through internal measures. Experts suggest China might try to make peace by promising to buy more American oil and gas, keeping its currency stable, or fulfilling previous trade promises. Both sides seem interested in making a deal. Trump has said he wants to talk with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, though he's in no rush. There are other issues on the table too, like Trump wanting China's help to stop the war in Ukraine and demanding changes to TikTok's ownership. For now, China is trying to look strong without making things worse. Joseph Gregory Mahoney from Shanghai's East China Normal University told Bloomberg that it's like "two giants sizing each up and testing each other's resolve while also playing to their domestic audiences before shaking hands." But if things escalate, China's heavy reliance on exports to the US means it might have the most to lose in a full-blown trade war.

RBI MPC meeting starts today: Will new Governor Sanjay Malhotra cut rates

New Delhi. The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting begins on Wednesday under the leadership of newly appointed Governor Sanjay Malhotra. This will be the first policy meeting of Sanjay Malhotra as RBI Governor.

Analysts are divided on whether the RBI will cut the repo rate for the first time in nearly two years or maintain the current rate to manage inflation and currency stability. The six-member committee will announce its decision on February 7, 2025.

WILL RBI CUT KEY LENDING RATES?

Experts believe the RBI may reduce the repo rate by 25 basis points (bps) to support economic growth, especially after the Union Budget 2025 focused on boosting demand. The repo rate has been unchanged at 6.5% since February 2023, and the last rate cut was announced during the Covid-19 pandemic in May 2020.

Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist at Bank of Baroda, believes economic conditions are suitable for a rate cut. The budget has provided a growth stimulus, and inflation is expected to



ease. However, the rupee remains under pressure due to global trade uncertainties," he said. While some believe a rate cut is likely, others feel the RBI may wait for global economic conditions to stabilise before making any changes.

Edelweiss Mutual Fund predicts a 50 bps rate cut in the first half of 2025, saying that monetary policy will have to play a key role in supporting economic growth. Rumki Majumdar, Economist at Deloitte, believes the RBI will take a cautious approach. "Balancing inflation and credit growth is tricky. While there is pressure to cut rates, the RBI may choose to keep rates unchanged but maintain an easy policy stance," she said. Umeshkumar Mehta, CIO at SAMCO Mutual Fund, feels that

global factors will influence the RBI's decision. "Bond yields in the US are rising due to inflation concerns, putting pressure on the Indian rupee. To avoid further depreciation, the RBI may choose to keep rates unchanged," he explained.

FACTORS THAT COULD IMPACT RATE CUTS

The RBI's decision will depend on several factors: Inflation trends: Inflation has remained above 5%, but a downward trend could encourage a rate cut. Currency stability: The rupee has been under pressure due to rising US bond yields and global trade tensions. Economic growth: With the government focusing on economic expansion, a rate cut could help boost demand. Global uncertainties: Trade wars and fluctuating commodity prices could impact the RBI's approach. The stock market and bond markets will react based on the RBI's decision. If the central bank cuts rates, banking stocks may see gains, and borrowing costs for businesses and individuals could come down. However, if rates remain unchanged, markets may turn volatile as investors adjust their expectations.

Gold consumption in India to cool in 2025 as prices soar, says WGC

New Delhi. India's gold consumption in 2025 is set to moderate from last year's nine-year peak, as a rally in prices to a record high is seen dampening jewellery demand, even as investment demand rises, the World Gold Council (WGC) said on Wednesday. Demand for gold could stand between 700 metric tonnes and 800 metric tonnes, compared to last year's 802.8 tonnes, which was the highest since 2015, Sachin Jain, CEO of WGC's Indian operations, told Reuters. Historically, rising gold prices first affect jewellery customers, and if prices keep rising and remain volatile this year, jewellery demand will be impacted, Jain said. Domestic gold prices hit a record high of Rs 84,399 (\$968.62) per 10 grams on Wednesday. They have risen 10 per



cent so far in 2025 after rising more than 21 per cent in 2024. "Households that buy jewellery have a set budget, and when they purchase jewellery, their budget does not increase at the same rate as the rise in gold prices," Jain said. However, the soaring gold prices,

leading to effectively higher returns, are boosting investment demand, which will rise further in 2025 after surging 29 per cent in 2024 to an 11-year high of 239.4 tonnes, he said.

Jewellery accounts for nearly 70 per cent of India's total gold demand, while investment demand makes up the rest. "It is anticipated that the trend of robust gold investment demand will continue, with retail investors showing growing interest in gold ETFs, digital gold, and coins and bars," Jain said. (Only the headline and picture of this report may have been reworked by the Business Standard staff; the rest of the content is auto-generated from a syndicated feed.)

Ratan Tata's millennial friend Shantanu Naidu gets top role at Tata Motors

In 2018, Shantanu Naidu began working as Ratan Tata's assistant, a role that brought him public attention, especially after a viral video of his birthday surprise for the industrialist.

New Delhi. Shantanu Naidu, known for his special bond with late industrialist Ratan Tata, was promoted to General Manager, Head of Strategic Initiatives, at Tata Motors after spending more than six years at Tata Sons. Naidu, 32, shared the big career update on LinkedIn. "I'm happy to share that I'm starting a new position as General Manager, Head - Strategic Initiatives at Tata Motors!" he wrote. Turning nostalgic, he added, "I remember when my father used to walk home from the Tata Motors plant in his



white shirt and navy pants, and I would wait for him in the window. It comes full circle now." A mechanical engineering graduate, Shantanu Naidu began his professional journey as an intern at Tata Technologies before joining Tata Elxsi. It was in 2014 that he first caught Ratan Tata's eye. Naidu, an automobile design engineer, developed a dog collar design with a safety innovation to protect homeless dogs from speeding vehicles.

Tata, a known animal lover, not only decided to invest in the project but also became his mentor.

The industrialist's backing of the initiative marked the beginning of a long-standing professional and personal bond between the two. In 2018, Naidu assumed the role of Tata's assistant, a position that brought him into the public spotlight. His close relationship with the business tycoon

and large mid-cap stocks."

Rajesh Bhosale, Technical Analyst at Angel One Ltd., suggested that a buy-on-dips strategy remains ideal, as it has been successful in recent sessions. He added, "The Budget Day high of 23,630 now acts as immediate support, while the bullish gap near 23,400 is a key demand zone." However, he warned that geopolitical tensions and ongoing trade wars could lead to volatility in the markets. Domestic factors such as the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting and the Delhi state elections will also influence investor sentiment.

Banking stocks have been rising ahead of the RBI policy meeting, where analysts expect a rate cut. This will be the first policy meeting under the new RBI governor, making it a key event for investors. Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said, "While overall market sentiment remains positive, large-cap stocks are the preferred choice. Meanwhile, banking stocks are rallying in anticipation of a rate cut in this week's RBI policy."

won hearts, especially after a video of him singing a birthday song for the billionaire philanthropist went viral.

Naidu chronicled their unique friendship in his book, *I Came Upon a Lighthouse*, which offered a rare glimpse into the personality of Ratan Tata beyond his business empire.

Beyond his corporate endeavours, Naidu is also an entrepreneur. In 2021, he founded Goodfellows, a startup dedicated to providing companionship for senior citizens living alone. The venture, valued at Rs 5 crore, received backing from Ratan Tata, who later relinquished ownership of the company.

Following Ratan Tata's death on October 9, 2024, at the age of 86, Naidu shared an emotional tribute on LinkedIn. "The hole that this friendship has now left with me, I will spend the rest of my life trying to fill. Grief is the price to pay for love. Goodbye, my dear lighthouse," he wrote. According to reports, Naidu's MBA expenses at Cornell University were covered under Tata's will.

NEWS BOX

Pat Cummins likely to miss Champions Trophy, Steve Smith or Head to lead Australia

New Delhi. Australia coach Andrew McDonald hinted that captain Pat Cummins is likely to miss the ICC Men's Champions Trophy due to his ankle issue. The Australian coach also said that Steve Smith and Travis Head are in contention to lead Australia in the ICC tournament. Cummins skipped the Test tour of Sri Lanka for the birth of his second child while also managing an ankle issue that worsened after a demanding Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Australia's ODI squad members, who were not involved in the Test series, are set to fly out for Sri Lanka on Thursday. However, McDonald indicated on Wednesday morning that Cummins is unlikely to join them. "Pat Cummins hasn't been able to resume any type of bowling so he's heavily unlikely, so that would mean that we do need a captain," McDonald told SEN. "Steve Smith and Travis Head are the two that we've been having conversations with while we've been building out that Champions Trophy team along with Pat back home. They'll be the two that we look at for that leadership post. McDonald praised Smith's leadership credentials, highlighting his experience in Test and ODI cricket. "They're the two obvious ones. Steve has done a great job here in the [first] Test match. He's done some good work in one-day international cricket across the journey as well. So it's between those two." But, as I said, Patty is



hugely unlikely, which is a bit of shame, and we've also got Josh Hazlewood, who is battling [to be fit] at the moment. So that medical information will land over the next couple of days and we'll be able to shore that up and let everyone know the direction. "Meanwhile, Josh Hazlewood's availability also remains uncertain. Hazlewood is nursing a hip issue after recovering from side and calf injuries that sidelined him for much of the India series and the Sri Lanka tour. Mitchell Marsh has been ruled out of the Champions Trophy with a back injury and is unlikely to feature in the domestic season, though he may still play in the IPL for Lucknow Super Giants. Australia are yet to name a replacement for Marsh. Coach Andrew McDonald confirmed.

Parunika Sisodia absorbs Laxman pep-talk, Mithali Raj advice to live World Cup dream

New Delhi. It didn't quite seem all that pleasant for India as they vied for a berth in the summit clash of the U19 Women's T20 World Cup. Davina Perrin was breathing fire in the semi-final with her breathtaking strokes as England raced to 37 without loss in the first four overs. But a certain left-arm spinner had other ideas. 19-year-old Parunika Sisodia was in no mood to throw in the towel. In the fifth over, she castled Jemima Spence with a delivery that went on with the arm. Two balls later, Parunika cleaned up Trudy Johnson down the leg side. India didn't look back from there on as England scored only 76 runs off their last 93 balls, finishing at 113 for eight. All it took for India was 15 overs to chase down the



target, and it was Parunika who became the Player of the Match.

The match against England was the only instance when India found themselves in a spot of bother throughout the tournament, but Parunika's match-winning spell of 4-0-21-3 powered them past the finish line. Parunika did not find a place in the Team of the Tournament where her spin bowling partners, Aayushi Shukla and Vaishnavi Sharma, and India's openers, Gongadi Trisha and G Kamalini, featured. But Parunika had an economy rate of 2.71, the best amongst all the Indian bowlers. In fact, none of the Indians had an economy rate of less than three, with Aayushi's 3.01 being the second-best. Parunika picked up 10 wickets from six matches, backing up her stupendous performance in India's title-winning campaign in the U19 Asia Cup, where she shone with nine scalps at an economy rate of 4.22.

Rohit Sharma's ODI batting has been game-changing, helped team a lot: Shubman Gill

Shubman Gill feels that Rohit Sharma's ODI batting has been a game changer for the Indian team in recent times. Rohit started using the attacking template during the ODI World Cup 2023.

New Delhi. Shubman Gill has claimed that Rohit Sharma's ODI batting has been a game-changer for the Indian team as the captain continues to lead from the front with his aggressive intent. Rohit started using this template during the ODI World Cup 2023, scoring 597 runs with an impressive strike rate of 125.94. The Indian skipper continued to use this mantra during India's T20 World Cup triumph.

Even during India's tour of Sri Lanka, Rohit scored 157 runs in 3 matches with a strike-rate of 141.44. Speaking at the press



conference ahead of the Nagpur ODI, Gill said that Rohit manages to take the momentum right from the start and it makes the job of the non-striker and the other batters easier. "The way Rohit bhai has been

batting in the ODIs in the past one year and a half, it's been really game-changing for us." "Taking the momentum right through from the start and taking the game away from ball one, and it makes the job of the

England hopeful wicketkeeper Jamie Smith will recover in time for Champions Trophy

New Delhi. England remain optimistic that Jamie Smith will recover in time to participate in the ICC Men's Champions Trophy later this month, despite confirming his absence from the first two ODIs against India. The Surrey wicketkeeper-batsman experienced calf discomfort during the third T20 international in Rajkot, which marked England's only victory of the series. Since then, Smith has been undergoing treatment in an effort to regain full fitness. England plan to assess Smith's fitness in the final match of the tour in Ahmedabad next Wednesday, which coincides with the deadline for submitting finalised Champions Trophy squads to the International Cricket Council (ICC). Smith's injury setback means he will miss the initial two ODIs against India, with England hoping he can return in time for their last 50-over fixture before the Champions Trophy opener against Australia on February 22. The three-match ODI series



begins in Nagpur on Thursday, with the second match scheduled for Sunday. Joe Root has rejoined the squad for the ODI leg, providing some much-needed experience to a batting line-up that struggled during the T20 series. Smith's absence further limits England's options at the top of the order. Phil Salt and Ben Duckett are expected to open, with Root slotting in at number three for his first 50-over international appearance

since the 2023 World Cup. Captain Jos Buttler, Harry Brook, Liam Livingstone, and Jacob Bethell make up England's middle-order options. Rehan Ahmed, who was initially only selected for the T20 series, has been retained for the ODIs. Although he did not feature in the T20s, England now have the option of pairing him with fellow leg-spinner Adil Rashid in the 50-over format.

India have made a notable addition to their squad, bringing in spinner Varun Chakravarthy after his standout performance in the T20 series, where he finished as the leading wicket-taker with 14 scalps at an average of 9.85. The 33-year-old is uncapped in ODIs and has only played 23 List A games in his career. India also welcome back key senior players, including captain Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant. However, there is no place for Abhishek Sharma, who hit a century in the fifth T20 in Mumbai.

Rashid Khan breaks Bravo's record to become highest wicket-taker in T20 cricket

Highest T20 wicket-taker: Afghanistan legspinner Rashid Khan became the highest wicket-taker in the history of T20 cricket. Rashid took his wicket tally to 633 in T20s — better than West Indies legend Dwayne Bravo.



New Delhi. Star Afghanistan spinner Rashid Khan scripted history by surpassing West Indies legend Dwayne Bravo to become the leading wicket-taker in T20 cricket. Rashid achieved this remarkable feat during MI Cape Town's Qualifier One match against Paarl Royals in the SA20 league. "It's a great achievement," Rashid told the broadcaster. "I never thought about it, if you asked 10 years before this if I would get there. It's a proud feeling to be from Afghanistan and to be at that level where you top the table. DJ (Bravo) is one of the best T20 bowlers. It's a great honour and I'm looking forward to continuing." Rashid now boasts an

impressive tally of 633 wickets in 461 T20 matches, maintaining an outstanding bowling average of 18.07. His best bowling figures stand at 6/17, and he has registered four five-wicket hauls in his career. In comparison, Bravo, who enjoyed an illustrious 18-year T20 career, accumulated 631 wickets in 582 matches at an average of 24.40, with best figures of 5/23 and three five-wicket hauls. Following these two T20 stalwarts on the all-time wicket-takers list are West Indies all-rounder Sunil Narine, South African spinner Imran Tahir, and Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan.

Highest T20 wicket-takers:
Rashid Khan: 633

Dwayne Bravo: 631
Sunil Narine: 574
Imran Tahir: 531
Shakib Al Hasan: 492

Rashid remains one of the most sought-after players in T20 leagues worldwide, plying his trade in prestigious tournaments such as the IPL, BBL, CPL, SA20, The Hundred, ILT20, and MLC. His T20 journey began in 2015 when he made his debut for Afghanistan at just 17 years old against Zimbabwe. Since then, he has established himself as one of the format's most formidable bowlers, deceiving batsmen across the globe. MI Cape Town put up a strong total of 199/4 after Paarl Royals elected to field first. The opening duo of Ryan Rickelton and Rassie van der Dussen laid a solid foundation with an 87-run stand in just 9.2 overs. Despite a minor setback with three wickets falling for just six runs, George Lind's quickfire 26 off 14 balls swung the momentum back in MI Cape Town's favour. Dewald Brevis and Delano Potgieter capitalised on wayward bowling to add 74 runs in the final five overs.



understand how vital that can be," said McCullum. England aim to end 40-year drought in India. England will be boosted by the return of their star batter Joe Root in ODIs who will be playing his first ODI since the World Cup 2023. Root has been in sensational form of late in Test cricket, finishing as the highest run scorer of the format in 2024 with 1556 runs from 17 matches at an average of 55.57. England would hope that Root carries his form in ODIs as well which will hold them in good stead ahead of the Champions Trophy. Meanwhile, India have held the upper hand over England in recent times, having won the last two series against them. Moreover, England have won just one ODI series in India way back in January 1985. Hence, the Jos Buttler-led side will be eager to end their 40-year wait in the upcoming series.

Australia captain Pat Cummins was seen sledging star India batter Virat Kohli in a new advertisement for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025.

New Delhi. Australia captain Pat Cummins was recently seen practicing to sledge star India batter Virat Kohli in an advertisement for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025. Virat Kohli will be one of the batters to watch out for in the tournament which is scheduled to begin from February 19. Hence, ahead of the mega event, Cummins was seen rehearsing how to disturb Kohli's rhythm when he comes out to bat against him in the event. The hilarious clip from the advertisement shows Cummins shaving as he looks into the mirror



and comments on the strike rate of the India star. The viral video has gained massive traction on social media with people loving Cummins' hilarious side.

"He Kohli, I've never seen you bat this slowly. Slowly!" said Cummins in the viral video. Cummins' participation in doubt

Meanwhile, Cummins is likely to be ruled out of the Champions Trophy as head coach Andrew McDonald recently hinted that he's unlikely to join the team. Cummins skipped Australia's ongoing Test tour of Sri Lanka for the birth of his second child while also managing an ankle issue that worsened after

a demanding Border-Gavaskar Trophy. "Pat Cummins hasn't been able to resume any type of bowling so he's heavily unlikely, so that would mean that we do need a captain. Steve Smith and Travis Head are the two that we've been having conversations with while we've been building out that Champions Trophy team along with Pat back home. They'll be the two that we look at for that leadership post," McDonald told SEN.

Cummins will be a huge miss for Australia given his excellent record as captain across formats. The speedster led his team to World Test Championship and ODI World Cup triumphs in 2023. Under his leadership, Australia are also the current holders of the Test bilateral series trophies against all the opposition he's captained against.

The Australian fans will hope that Cummins regains his fitness in time ahead of the WTC final 2025 where they're set to face South Africa at the iconic Lord's Stadium in June.



Rakul Preet Singh

Jackky Bhagnani Dance To Kala Chashma At Cousin's Baraat



Jackky Bhagnani's cousin Vicky Bhagnani is getting married to his long-time girlfriend, Nidhi Siddaraj today in Mumbai. Ahead of the pheras, the Bhagnani family left their house to reach the wedding venue. Amid much fanfare, Jackky and his wife Rakul Preet Singh were seen shaking a leg in the baraat. In a video that is going viral, the couple is seen dancing to the song Kala Chashma from the film Baar Baar Dekho. They looked elegant in traditional attires. While Jackky wore a white kurta and black pants, Rakul looked beautiful in an embellished suit.

Vicky Bhagnani's sangeet ceremony took place on Sunday, February 2. Jackky Bhagnani and Rakul Preet Singh attended the event in their traditional best. In one of the viral videos, Jackky was seen posing with his wife in front of the paparazzi stationed outside the venue. While Jackky wore a shimmering black Indo-western outfit, Rakul chose a stunning silver saree.

Other celebrities who attended Vicky and Nidhi's Sangeet ceremony included producer Vashu Bhagnani, music composer Anu Malik, producer Ramesh Taurani with his wife Varsha, Sonakshi Sinha's mother Poonam Sinha with her son Kush Sinha and actress Poonam Dhillon.

From the pictures, it appears that the party's theme was black and silver, with the entire Bollywood crowd dazzling in these two shades. As for Vicky Bhagnani, he is known for his work on projects like Nikita Roy And The Book of Darkness and Badtameez Gill. He is also the co-founder of Nicky Vicky Bhagnani Films. On the professional front, Jackky and Rakul's upcoming film Mere Husband Ki Biwi is set for a grand release on February 21.

Starring Rakul, Arjun Kapoor, and Bhumi Pednekar, the film is directed by Mudassar Aziz. Mere Husband Ki Biwi is backed by Jackky's home production, Pooja Entertainment, and also features Dino Morea and comedian Harsh Gujral in significant roles.



Malaika Arora

Serves Pure Workout Motivation In A Purple Athleisure

Malaika Arora can be easily crowned one of the fashion queens of Bollywood, who takes immense pleasure in working out. She is often spotted shedding a few kilos and sweating it out in the gym. And the result of her rigorous fitness regime is undeniably inspirational. The actress keeps serving goals with her workout journey. Additionally, it is her gym fashion that leaves enthusiasts taking notes. In a video on Instagram, Malaika Arora was seen exiting her residence when she was spotted by the paps stationed outside her home. She was reportedly seen outside her gym while she was heading towards her home in the coolest athleisure. The Kaante actress was wearing purple-hued athleisure. It included a bralette featuring noodle straps, a deep neckline and a criss-cross in the back, accompanied by a pair of body-hugging ankle-length pants.

Malaika teamed her look with a pair of pink slippers and was carrying a sipping bottle in her hand. For accessories, she also picked a pair of black sun shields that added an oomph factor to her look. She kept her makeup minimal and tied her hair in a top-knotted bun hairdo. Altogether, the 51-year-old raised the temperature in her overall gym attire. Undoubtedly, the diva flaunted her toned physique, which served major fitness goals for her fans and others.

In the comments section, one of Malaika's fans wrote, "She is definitely an inspiration." While another person stated, "So pretty," one more user called her "Gorgeous." We must say, despite her age and alleged breakup with Bollywood actor Arjun Kapoor, the diva's glow has remained intact. For those unaware, Malaika was initially married to Salman Khan's brother, Arbaaz Khan, until 2017 when they divorced. The couple has two children from their marriage. After their separation, while Malaika was reportedly dating Arjun, Arbaaz tied the knot with Sshura Khan. Recently, reports surfaced on social media revealing that Malaika had parted ways with her boyfriend, courtesy of their indirect social media posts. Professionally, Malaika has been riding high ever since. She recently launched a lavish restaurant in Mumbai named Scarlett House in Bandra, housed in a 90-year-old Portuguese bungalow. Her close friends and family were even spotted hanging out over there and spending some surreal and scrumptious time.



Boney Kapoor Packed 13 Large Suitcases For Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar Shoot, Says Khushi Kapoor: 'He Didn't Have Many Scenes'



Khushi Kapoor is gearing up for her big-screen Bollywood debut with Loveyapa, alongside Junaid Khan. Speaking at the SCREEN Live event in New Delhi on Tuesday, she shared a fun insight about her father, producer Boney Kapoor, revealing that despite having two daughters at home, he is actually the "biggest diva." Khushi said, "He is the star of the house, in my opinion. He is bigger than all of us. He is the biggest diva, actor—everything, it's him."

Recalling a hilarious moment from Boney's small role in Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar, starring Ranbir Kapoor and Shraddha Kapoor, Khushi revealed that he personally selected his outfits and even packed a whopping 13 suitcases for the shoot. She said, "He played a role in Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar. He didn't have many scenes in the film. He had to shoot in Delhi, and suddenly, I saw 13 large suitcases being moved from his closet. I realized he had packed his entire wardrobe for the film. He wore his own clothes on screen. When I visited him on set, he was dressed in the exact outfit he wears at home, with his boy standing next to him. I thought, 'Is he on a movie set, or is he just chilling at home?' He is the most relaxed and luxurious person I have ever met."

Khushi Kapoor's Loveyapa promises a delightful blend of love, drama, and confusion. Backed by Phantom Studios and AGS Entertainment, the film also features an ensemble cast including Grusha Kapoor, Ashutosh Rana, Tanvika Parlikar, Kiku Sharda, and Kunj Anand. Loveyapa will hit theatres on February 7. This means that it will clash at the box office with Himesh Reshammiya's upcoming film Badass Ravikumar. Meanwhile, Khushi Kapoor will also be seen in Saif Ali Khan and Amrita Singh's son Ibrahim Ali Khan's Bollywood debut, 'Nadaanayan'.

Shahid Kapoor Shows His 'No Photography' Hoodie At Mumbai Airport



Shahid Kapoor is currently basking in the glory of his latest film Deva. Recently, the actor was spotted at the Mumbai airport, heading to an undisclosed location. In one of the videos making the rounds online, the Jab We Met actor can be seen exiting his car and walking towards the airport entrance. What caught the netizens' attention was Shahid's sleeveless hoodie. It featured the text, "No Photography," written on the back. Too cool Shahid, too cool.

Meanwhile, Shahid Kapoor's Deva features Pooja Hegde as the female lead. The project has been helmed by Rosshan Andrews. On Monday, the film earned Rs 2.75 crore at the box office, according to industry tracker Sacnilk. So far, Deva has garnered Rs 21.9 crore in the domestic market. Produced by Roy Kapur Films, Deva follows the story of ACP Dev Ambre (Shahid), an impulsive cop and womanizer who loses his



memory while investigating the death of his best friend. Deva is an adaptation of Rosshan's 2013 Malayalam film Mumbai Police, with some changes made to the storyline. Ahead of the release of Deva, Shahid Kapoor conducted an Ask Me Anything session on X (formerly Twitter), where he answered several fans' questions. When asked about his reaction to the film's climax, he shared that he was "shocked post-climax" and found it "very fresh." Shahid Kapoor will be next seen in director Vishal Bhardwaj's upcoming gangster action drama film. Set for release in December 2025, the movie also stars Triptii Dimri, Nana Patekar and Randeep Hooda in important roles. Shahid Kapoor will also reportedly star in Cocktail 2, directed by Homi Adajania. Produced by Maddock Films, the film will be a love triangle.