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## Four students fall ill due to food poisoning in Kamareddy

Kamareddy: In yet another case of food poisoning in government-run schools in the State, four students of Scheduled Castes Boys' Hostel in Jukkall mandal headquarters allegedly fell ill due to food poisoning on Friday.

According to reports, four students complained of stomach ache and vomiting after lunch. They were rushed to Banswada Area Hospital for treatment by the staff. A student of eight grade suffered severe stomach ache and was admitted to the hospital. The doctors treating the students said they suffered stomach ache due to uncooked rice. The doctors said the condition of the students was stable.

## Telangana High Court halts arrest of KT Rama Rao in Formula-E case



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Hyderabad: The Telangana High Court on Friday granted interim relief to BRS leader KT Rama Rao barring his arrest in the Formula E race corruption case until December 30. Justice N.V. Shrivani Kumar, while granting the relief, also allowed the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) to continue its investigation into the matter. KTR, the working president of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) and Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), had moved the High Court in a lunch motion seeking to quash the First Information Report (FIR) registered against him. The FIR alleges that KTR, during his tenure as Minister, misused government funds in connection with the Formula E race held in Hyderabad in 2023. The ACB registered the case accusing KTR of directing the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) to pay Rs 55 crore to a foreign company in violation of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) guidelines. The FIR filed under Sections 13(1)(a), 13(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act and Sections 409 and 120(B) of the Indian Penal Code, claims that the money was transferred improperly, causing financial misconduct.

Represented by Senior Counsel Aryaman Sundaram, KTR's legal team argued that the FIR was politically motivated and lacked sufficient evidence to support the serious charges. In his submission, Sundaram emphasized that the

case stemmed from a procedural lapse, not corruption. He also pointed out that no preliminary inquiry had been conducted before the FIR was filed, despite a 14-month delay. "We had to safeguard the event (Formula E). The worst case against the petitioner is that he did not follow procedure. That's the only charge," Sundaram told the court, adding that there was no evidence to suggest criminal misconduct by KTR. Sundaram further argued that the FIR did not meet the legal requirements for charges under the Prevention of Corruption Act. He stated that no allegations of financial gain or enrichment had been made against KTR. The legal team also highlighted that the Formula E event had generated significant profit for the state government, amounting to Rs 110 crore.

Sundaram also pointed out that a tri-partite agreement had been signed on October 25, 2022, between the Formula E organizers, the state government, and a sponsor for a four-year period. Following the sponsor's withdrawal in October 2023, the Telangana government stepped in to cover the required funds, including the disputed Rs 55 crore payment. Sundaram argued that the funds were transferred based on the existing agreement and that the government's actions were aimed at ensuring the success of the event, rather than involving any wrongdoing. One of the key points raised by KTR's defense was the delay in registering the FIR.

The complaint was lodged on December 18, 2024, and the FIR was filed just the following day, suggesting a lack of proper investigation before taking legal action. Sundaram further argued that the entire case appeared to be part of a political vendetta against KTR, given the timing of the complaint and the absence of a prior inquiry. He cited the Supreme Court's rulings in Lalita Kumari and Charan Singh cases, which require a preliminary inquiry in corruption cases before filing an FIR, especially when there is a significant delay. Sundaram also referenced the Bajjan Lal judgment, arguing that the court must look at the surrounding circumstances, which pointed to political motives rather than genuine legal concerns.

## BRS lashes out at Congress for replacement of Dharani, term

### Bhu Bharati an attack on farmers and their lands

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Hyderabad: The BRS legislators lashed out at the Congress government, condemning the replacement of the Dharani land management and registration system with the Bhu Bharati Act. They called the move a betrayal of farmers and charged the Congress with promoting land grabbing and corruption, with implementation of Bhu Bharati. Speaking to mediapersons after staging a walkout from the Assembly on Friday, BRS MLA Palla Rajeshwar Reddy criticised the Bhu Bharati Act as regressive, calling it a huge jolt for farmers that replaces transparency with chaos. "Dharani benefited 75 lakh farmers and ensured clear ownership of 1.52 crore acres. Branding it flawed for a few gaps, is baseless," he said.

He charged the Congress government with using the new law to facilitate real estate scams and revive outdated land practices like Jamabandi, which would only benefit the land grabbers and other criminals. MLA KP Vivekananda stated that the Assembly proceedings were being mismanaged under Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's leadership, with legislative rules being trampled upon. "The government is running on conspiracies, filing baseless cases against BRS leaders including KT Rama Rao to divert attention from its failures, including implementation of six guarantees," he said. He also slammed the Congress for refusing to discuss the Formula-E event, which boosted Telangana's global reputation. MLA Padi Kaushik Reddy explained that their



protest in the Assembly was for the people of Telangana, not an individual. He called the breach of contract case filed against the State over the Formula-E event a disgrace to Telangana and its people. "Revanth Reddy's diversion tactics will fail. The public will hold him accountable," he added. Earlier, the BRS moved a privilege motion against the State government for issuing advertisements in leading newspapers dated December 19, 2024, by stating the "Bhu Bharati Bill" as "Bhu Bharati Act" even before the bill is passed in the Legislative Assembly and the Council. The BRS stated that this tantamounts to disrespecting the House and also violation of the MLAs' rights under Article 245. The notice was served under Rule 168 (1) of the Assembly Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in this regard, requesting the Speaker to take necessary action.

## Furore in Telangana Assembly over Formula-E case against KTR



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Hyderabad: The Telangana Assembly witnessed chaos on Friday as BRS MLAs demanded a discussion on allegations surrounding the Formula-E car race. Both treasury and opposition benches engaged in sloganeering and disrupting proceedings, forcing Speaker Gaddam Prasad to adjourn the House for 15 minutes. The session began with BRS MLAs urging the Speaker to hold a discussion on the Formula-E issue before moving to the Bhu Bharati Bill placed for discussion. Senior BRS leader T Harish Rao criticised the Congress government for making baseless corruption allegations against former Municipal Administration Minister KT Rama Rao and the previous BRS government. "If the government has sincerity and courage, let us have an open discussion. Let the facts come out," he said. Harish Rao defended Rama Rao's decision to host the

Formula-E event, emphasising its aim to boost Telangana's economy and global reputation. He charged the Congress government with using false cases to distract attention from its unfulfilled promises and issues like the arrest of Lagacherla farmers. The Speaker maintained that the Formula-E issue involved an individual, whereas the Bhu Bharati Bill had Statewide relevance. Heated arguments followed, with BRS MLAs demanding an assurance on when the topic would be debated. With the Revenue Minister initiating discussion on the Bill, BRS legislators continued raising slogans. Opposition Congress MLAs countered with protests against Rama Rao and the previous BRS government, leading to further disruptions and to adjournment. Speaking to mediapersons, the BRS MLAs stated that Congress MLA Veernapally Shankar had thrown papers and hurled water bottle at the opposition MLAs protesting before the Speaker's podium. "He had also shown his shoe to one of our Dalit MLAs in the Assembly. He must be booked under an SC/ST atrocities case," MLA Padi Kaushik Reddy said. Another BRS MLA Palla Rajeshwar Reddy said the papers were thrown, shoe was shown, and abuses were hurled at the BRS MLAs. He said immediately after shoe was shown, the Speaker adjourned the House. "The Congress MLAs are trying to incite violence and evict the opposition MLAs. While Rahul Gandhi is attacking fellow Parliamentarians in Lok Sabha, the Congress MLAs are throwing water bottles and showing shoe at their opposition MLAs."

## U.S. Government launches children's book series to promote gender empowerment

New Delhi: U.S. Ambassador to India Eric M. Garcetti reaffirmed the U.S. government's commitment to girls' education by launching a new children's book series to promote gender-inclusive learning. Developed through the U.S. Agency for International Development's Scaling-up Early Reading Intervention and implemented by Room to Read India, the five-book series, written in Hindi, challenges stereotypes, promotes equality, and fosters inclusivity, with a special focus on gender diversity and inclusion. The U.S. Ambassador to India Eric M. Garcetti said, "As Ambassador to India, I have prioritized girls' education, recognizing it as one of the most transformative investments a society can make."

## PM Modi's visit to Kuwait to open new chapter in bilateral ties: MEA



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal on Friday (December 20, 2024) said that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be visiting Kuwait from December 21 to 22. Mr. Modi's two-day visit to Kuwait will help in opening a new chapter in bilateral ties, the MEA said. Mr. Jaiswal said "During the visit, PM Modi will visit a labour camp that hosts Indian expat workers." "Mr. Modi will also be holding bilateral talks with the Crown Prince and Amir of Kuwait," Mr. Jaiswal added. The MEA added that "We are looking at bolstering ties in several areas including defence and trade." Mr. Modi is paying the visit at the invitation of Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-

Jaber Al-Sabah. The last Indian Prime Minister to visit Kuwait was Indira Gandhi in 1981. India is among the top trading partners of Kuwait. The Indian community is the largest expatriate community in Kuwait. Kuwait is among India's top trading partners, with bilateral trade valued at \$10.47 billion in the financial year 2023-24. Kuwait is India's sixth largest crude supplier, meeting 3 per cent of the country's energy needs. Indian exports to Kuwait reached \$2 billion for the first time, while investments by the Kuwait Investment Authority in India exceed \$10 billion. India and Kuwait have enjoyed traditionally friendly relations, with links dating back to pre-oil Kuwait when maritime trade with India was the backbone of its economy. Kuwait's economy revolved around its fine harbour and maritime activities which included ship building, pearl diving, fishing and voyages to India on wooden dhows carrying dates, Arabian horses and pearls that were traded for wood, cereals, clothes and spices, according to people tracking the ties between the two nations. The Indian Rupee remained legal tender in Kuwait until 1961, a symbol of the enduring economic and cultural ties. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were formally established in 1961, with India initially represented by a trade commissioner. Emir Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah came on a private visit to India in July 2017. The last high-level visit from either side was that of the prime minister of Kuwait to India in 2013.

## O P Chautala passes away: Haryana declares 3-day state mourning; leaders recall 'visionary', 'excellent administrator'

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

The Haryana government on Friday declared three days of state mourning in the wake of former Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala's demise. "During this period of state mourning, the national flag will be flown at half mast throughout the state of Haryana on all buildings where it is flown regularly. All state government functions shall stand cancelled and there will be no official entertainment during this period. Haryana government has declared December 21st as public holiday in all state government offices as a mark of respect to the departed soul. The state funeral shall be held on December 21st at 3 pm at Teja Khara farm," the government order read. The Sirsa district administration was also directed to supervise the arrangements for the funeral. Chautala, 89, was an Indian National Lok Dal leader who was Haryana chief minister for a record four times. He was the son of former deputy Prime Minister Devi Lal. Leaders cutting across party lines expressed their condolences on Friday and recalled their personal as well as political association with Chautala.

"Om Prakash Chautala ji's contributions to the development of Haryana and his commitment to the welfare of its people particularly 'Kisan' will always be remembered," Haryana Governor Bandaru Dattatraya said, adding that his demise was a great loss to the state and its people. Dattatraya referred to Chautala, then the Haryana CM, meeting him when he was the Union urban development minister regarding the development of NCR. "During the meeting... Chautala ji, who was also a member, used to share his valuable insights and vision about the region's all-round development," the governor recalled.

"With Om Prakash Chautala's passing, a significant chapter in Haryana's political history has come to an end, and it is hard to fill the void left by his departure," Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini said. "His immense contribution to Haryana's political landscape will always be remembered. Chautala ji's personality was a reflection of simplicity and resilience. He was a visionary leader who initiated numerous schemes for rural development, education,



and infrastructure improvement. His passing has left not just his family, but the entire state in deep sorrow," Saini added. Former Haryana CM and Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda said Chautala was "like an elder brother" to him. "I had strong relations both in the family and political sphere with Chaudhary Om Prakash Chautala. His sudden demise is extremely sad. Om Prakash Chautala ji had a long public life and contributed a lot to the development of Haryana during his tenure as chief minister. I pray to God to provide strength to his family members in this hour of grief," Hooda said. Haryana's Energy, Transport, and Labour Minister Anil Vij said Chautala was "an excellent administrator" with "an extraordinary memory". "Chautala Ji would always remember people he met and address them by name whenever he met them next. His contribution to politics was significant," Vij said. Several other politicians from Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, among others, also expressed their condolences on Chautala's demise.

## Shocking blasts at Hyderabad construction site: Stones fly, five injured in chaos



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Hyderabad: At least five persons were injured in construction site at Kokapet, Narsingi when huge stones fell on them during blasting of rocks on Friday. A real estate firm had set off detonators at a construction site near Neopolis. The blasts sent stones and construction debris flying, striking people and nearby vehicles. It is learnt that a series of not less than ten blasts were carried out suddenly without any prior intimation to the locals or taking any preventive measures by the construction company. Panic gripped locals who heard the blast sounds and stones falling from

above immediately rushed to safety. Initially, they suspected that the blasting was part of a movie shoot, but later confirmed it was a blast being taken up by a construction company. Some of the Ayyappa Swamy devotees and construction workers at nearby labour camps were injured when huge stones from the rocks fell on them. Based on a complaint, the Narsingi police have booked a case under sections 125 and 91B of the Explosives Act and took up investigation.

## Severe Low Pressure Area Triggers Heavy Rains in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha

A severe low pressure area over the Bay of Bengal is expected to move northward in the next 12 hours, gradually intensifying into a depression. Meteorologists predict that the depression will continue to strengthen over the west-central Bay of Bengal for the next 24 hours. As a result of this weather system, heavy rainfall is anticipated in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, with many areas in coastal Andhra experiencing moderate to widespread showers.

# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## The bag lady

WHO needs long speeches when a bag can say it all? Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's recent appearances in Parliament with her tote bags have turned serious issues into serious fashion statements. One day it was 'Palestine' written across her handbag; the next, "Stand with Bangladeshi Hindus and Christians". Forget fiery debates — this Winter Session will be remembered for the accessories. But Priyanka isn't alone in this trend of "message dressing". US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's "Tax the Rich" dress at the Met Gala in 2021 was the talk of social media. It turned an elite event into a debate on wealth inequality. Back in India, Opposition MPs have mastered the art of wearable protests. From jackets screaming "Modi-Adani Ek Ha" that they donned earlier this month to all-black outfits worn last year for solidarity with Manipur violence victims, their wardrobe seems to have become an extension of the manifesto.

Of course, such moves invite criticism. The BJP was quick to label Priyanka's bags as "appeasement politics", accusing her of prioritising foreign issues over domestic ones. But Priyanka brushed it off, calling the backlash "typical patriarchy". Her defiant "who's going to decide what I wear?" response proved she's carrying more than just a bag — she's carrying a message.

Symbolism in politics is a double-edged sword. While it captures attention, it risks being dismissed as superficial. Priyanka's gesture, however, transcends mere theatrics by invoking India's historical ethos of supporting oppressed communities, whether during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War or in advocating for Palestine's statehood. At the end of the day, whether it is dubbed as fashion activism or clever posturing, one thing is clear: Priyanka's tote bags aren't just an accessory but statements invoking India's moral responsibility in global humanitarian crises.

## Karnataka HC asks joint CBI-state SIT to work in tandem, without leader to probe advocate suicide



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

karnataka high courtThe High Court accepted the argument of CBI counsel that the agency's superintendent of police in Bengaluru "is virtually a senior" on account of being in charge of the whole state. The Karnataka High Court Tuesday turned down a plea by the state government for changing the composition of a Special Investigation Team — comprising CBI and state officers — to investigate the death of a lawyer who was under probe in the alleged Bhovi Development Corporation scam. On December 4, after the High Court ordered the creation of an SIT comprising CBI and state superintendents of police to probe Kumari Jeeva's death, the Karnataka government raised questions about the lack of a supervising senior officer for the team.

Kumari Jeeva left a note accusing the police of harassment during the probe into the Bhovi Development Corporation case — which allegedly involved misuse of funds meant for loans to the members of the Bhovi community under a job scheme — before she reportedly died by suicide. A case was filed against the police by the lawyer's sister, Sangeetha S, who is also under investigation for alleged receipt of diverted funds.

After a deputy superintendent of police, Kanaka Lakshmi B M, approached the High Court to quash the police complaint filed against her by the deceased advocate's sister, the court ordered the creation of an SIT comprising one superintendent of police from CBI and two from the Karnataka Police. However, the Karnataka government raised questions over the SIT's composition by indicating that Supreme Court orders have stated that an officer of the rank of an inspector general of police is required to be part of a SIT to supervise investigations. On Tuesday, the High Court rejected the reservations of the state government and directed that the officers in the team should work in tandem without a designated leader and that investigations should begin immediately. "The change sought by the state to the team for the inclusion of a DIG in the matter in terms of the judgment of the apex court cannot be pressed into action in this case as the case there was of a larger magnitude and the necessity of the presence of an IGP was found imperative by the apex court," the HC said in a clarification of its December 4 order. "The composition of the SIT would remain and the officers of the SIT would work in tandem as directed by this court. The state government is directed to declare that the SIT constituted by the court to be a police station for the conduct of investigation and filing of the final report. The investigation need not wait till such declaration (of a police station) and shall commence immediately if it has not commenced," the court said.

The High Court accepted the argument of CBI counsel that the agency's superintendent of police in Bengaluru "is virtually a senior" on account of being in charge of the whole state. "Be that as it may since the SIT is constituted by the court all the three members of the team will work in tandem or without being described as the head of the team or otherwise... The apprehensions are also projected as to the officer of the CBI being brought in to head the Special Investigation Team, more so in the teeth of the fact that one of the members of the team is of the same rank as the officer of the CBI," the court observed. The Karnataka High Court also rejected a plea by the state government to allow the SIT's creation with only state officers, stating that the state police had already been lenient to the state police officer accused in the case. On December 4, the single judge bench of Justice M Nagaprasanna ordered the SIT's constitution — comprising three IPS officers — to probe the allegations of police harassment in the alleged suicide of Kumari Jeeva. The High Court observed that while there was no document to indicate the demand of Rs 25 lakh as claimed by the deceased advocate's family, these aspects could be investigated by SIT.

## PGIMER to push online appointment system in OPDs, plans mobile app for registration



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

The Advanced Eye Centre, PGIMER in August introduced a system wherein patients who register online in advance for the outpatient department (OPD) are given priority. According to Dr SS Pandav, head of the department, Advanced Eye Centre, the new facility to book online appointments would help in queue management, decongesting the OPD in morning hours and streamlining the process of registration. While more than 80 per cent of follow-up patients use the online system, this facility encourages new patients to use the website for registration, with 200 slots for online registration. With the success of the system, and more first-time patients using the system, which enables one to make an appointment seven days in advance, the department is now all set to introduce a QR code for ease of registration for appointments. This QR code will ease the process, saving time of logging into the website, and simply fill out a basic form to register for an appoint-

ment. The system will be initiated on a major scale in January. According to Pankaj Rai, Deputy Director, Administration, PGIMER, while online registration is offered for some departments, the plan is to popularise it and make it more advantageous for patients to opt for it so that the message travels.

"If patients after making an online registration have to stand in a long queue, then it defeats the entire purpose. So, we have asked department heads of hepatology, endocrinology, haematology, and skin, to make their standard operating procedures, as per the patient load, have their time slots and also decide how many patients they would open for online registration," explains Rai. The department of haematology here is keen to introduce the system and is working out modalities, on the number of patients who can book online, with the walk-in facility working alongside. The department has proposed that a separate room in the OPD may be kept for patients who have registered online.

"With the number of patients increasing in OPDs, the effort is to think of ways to save the time of patients, and with an appointment system, processes will be more streamlined, including decongestion of traffic and also reduce the rush in the hospital," adds Rai. In the future, the PGIMER plans to start a pilot project that will use a mobile app to schedule online registration. The app, explains Rai, which can be downloaded on a phone, will help patients register wherever they are, and with a deposit of Rs 10 a card number will be generated. A printout will be proof of registration and the patient does not have to go to the counter and be in a queue for the same.

## As Delhi grapples with 'severe' AQI, layer of fog engulfs national capital



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Delhi was engulfed by a layer of smog Wednesday morning as the air quality index (AQI) of the national capital remained in the 'severe' category. On Wednesday morning, the AQI of the national capital stood at 442, after a brief respite earlier this month, when Delhi's air quality was the cleanest it had been in the past five years. 32 out of 37 monitoring stations reported severe AQI, with the most polluted being Anand Vihar and Burari Crossing stations (481 AQI).

An anti-smog gun sprinkling water to control pollution

in Delhi. (Express file photo by Amit Mehra) An anti-smog gun sprinkling water to control pollution in Delhi. (Express file photo by Amit Mehra) Visibility in Delhi dropped to just 50 meters, according to the Safdarjung station at 6:30 am. The calm winds contributed to the thick fog, which combined with low temperatures, further deteriorated the city's air quality. On Tuesday, the AQI stood at 433. The last time Delhi's air quality was recorded in the 'severe' category was on November 23. As such, GRAP-IV measures have been imposed in the national capital region. Under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), Delhi has enforced strict anti-pollution measures, including a ban on construction activities and truck entry into the city. Schools have shifted to a hybrid learning model for junior classes, while restrictions have been imposed on BS III petrol and BS IV diesel vehicles. Cold wave conditions The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast a continuation of cold wave to severe cold wave conditions over the next 5-7 days. IMD defines cold wave conditions to occur when actual temperatures dip below 4.1 degrees Celsius or when departures are more than 4.4 degrees Celsius in plains, provided the normal minimum is less than or equal to 10 degrees Celsius. Delhi saw cold wave conditions set in early this year compared to the past 23 years, as per IMD officials.

## Operation Zeenat: Human shield, tracking teams in place as Tigress Zeenat roams free

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Forest officials and guards have formed a human shield cordoning off the area in Jharkhand where Zeenat, a three-year-old tigress, has been currently located. While special tracking units and tranquilizing teams, both from Odisha and Jharkhand are on their toes to contain the tigress, state forest officials in Bengal have intensified patrols just 10 kilometers from the borders. A month ago, Zeenat, a tigress, and a tiger were introduced to Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha from Tadoba - Andhari Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra, on November 14, as a part of a programme to strengthen the reserve's gene pool. On December 10, Zeenat escaped Simlipal Tiger Reserve and walked into Jharkhand, covering a distance of at least 35 kilometers. For the past eight days the Tigress has been in Jharkhand and is yet to show signs of returning to Odisha. Satyajit Singh, chief conservator of forests, Jharkhand government pointed out that the "situation is critical". "The tigress is presently located in the Chakulia area and just 300-400 metres from the nearest village. It has eaten cattle in the area a couple of days back. Our officials and guards have formed a human shield around the location where the tigress is. We have completely cordoned off the area where she is. We want to avoid any conflict situation and are trying to avoid panic among the locals. It has been eight days and the tigress is not moving back to Odisha as of now," he said while speaking with over the phone. "There is a radio collar on the tigress and it is being tracked 24/7. Teams of Simlipal Tiger Reserve and Odisha Forest department are constantly monitoring the situation from the ground along with us. We are playing a supportive role. Teams include tracking and tranquilizing experts who are present in the area where the Tigress is located," added Singh. He also stated that, "It is Odisha officials who will take a call on whether to finally tranquilize it. I am personally in touch with forest department officials in West Bengal who are on high alert at the border."

Meanwhile, the escape of the tigress has sent forest officials of Odisha, Jharkhand, and West Bengal into high alert and a tizzy. "We are constantly monitoring the tigress.



It has halted to a place and is there. It is of balanced mind presently, as per our observation. We plan to observe it more and then make a decision. It may also turn back to Odisha. That will be the best thing. We will only take decisions like tranquilisation if there is a conflict. Till now there is no conflict," said Prakash Chand Gogineni, director, Simlipal Tiger Reserve, on a telephonic call with on Tuesday evening. With the tigress merely 10 kilometers away, forest officials and police personnel in Bengal's Jhargram district are on high alert, closely monitoring the border. Quick Response Teams (QRTs) are standby, poised to swing into action at a moment's notice, should the tigress cross into Bengal. "Our patrolling teams are there inside the forest along the state border. Police are also on alert and maintaining vigilance. We also have specialized teams including tranquilizing experts ready on standby.

If and when it enters Bengal we will act according to the situation. We are in regular touch with Odisha and Jharkhand officials," said a senior Bengal forest department official. "We are not updating locals regarding the exact location of the tigress to avoid panic. Apart from the three patrolling teams which are positioned inside the forest at the border areas with Jharkhand, other teams are positioned near villages. We have asked our officials to keep a watch on forest pathways, which are frequented by villagers and school children," said a highly placed forest department official.

## Congress to surround UP Assembly; security stepped up

Security was stepped up on Wednesday with all roads leading to the Uttar Pradesh assembly premises barricaded ahead of the state Congress' assembly 'siege' programme to protest against the policies of the government. Officials said prohibitory orders are in place and no one will be allowed to flout the orders. Curbs under Section 163 (power to issue an order in urgent cases of nuisance or apprehended danger) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) are in place in Lucknow, a senior officer said. Barricadings have been put on the roads leading to the state assembly and force has been deployed outside the Congress office in the Mall Avenue area here. Congress spokesperson Manish Hindi said thousands of workers have already reached the party office and the 'gherao' will begin around noon. "It will be led by Congress state president Ajay Rai and UP in-charge Avinash Pande," he added. Asked

about the proposed gherao, Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak said that it has only been planned to grab newspaper headlines and the Congress has no connection with the people. The Congress is surrounded by "misdeeds and its workers are directionless", Pathak said, adding the gherao will prove to be a "flop show". "The state is progressing rapidly with its all-round development after 2017. The people of the entire state believe that the government has worked to bring Uttar Pradesh to number one position in the nation. The law and order has improved," he asserted. Rai has on Tuesday claimed that the state government, fearing the Congress protest against its "unjust" policies, has placed party members under house arrest in several districts to prevent them from participating in the demonstration. "The Yogi government, panicked by the Congress' Assembly siege programme, is resorting to undemocratic means.

## 5-year-old boy dies after getting trapped in water tank in Mumbai's Malad West

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

express-fileThe accident occurred after Shaikh allegedly drowned in the overhead water tank at the Nav Jivan Society in Malvani MHADA. A five-year-old boy died after he was allegedly trapped inside a water tank of a residential building in Mumbai's Malad West Monday. The Mumbai police said the victim has been identified as Abdul Rehman Mohammad Riyaz Shaikh, who reportedly went missing on Monday afternoon.

As per the preliminary information by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the accident occurred after Shaikh allegedly drowned in the overhead water tank at the Nav Jivan Society in Malvani MHADA. BMC said the accident was reported at 10.33 am on Tuesday. According to the police, Shaikh, who lived with his family in the colony, left his house on Monday afternoon saying he was going to his neighbour's house to play. When he did not return home, his family and neighbours started a search for him. The police said while looking for the boy, a girl noticed the uncovered water tank on the terrace, and when she looked inside, she found Shaikh. She alerted others and the boy was pulled out and rushed to the civic-run BDBA Municipal General Hospital where he was declared "brought dead". Officers said the police at Malvani station have filed an Accidental Death Report in the case and begun a probe.

## Firefighter injured in Pune while responding to early morning blaze at storage facility



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

A firefighter was injured after he fell from the roof of a shed while the fire brigade responded to a major blaze at a storage facility in Pune's Warje area early on Wednesday. The blaze was reported around 3.45 am at the facility in the Dangat Patil Nagar area. "The place stores items like bamboos, wooden planks, cloth and drapery used to set up pandals and temporary stages. After receiving information, we deployed fire tenders from nearby stations. Water was sprayed from all sides to control the spread," Fire Officer Prabhakar Umratkar said. "To extinguish a fire in one section of the facility, firefighter Akshay Gaikwad climbed up the roof of the shed. It appears that a part of the tin roof did not have adequate support because of which it came in and Gaikwad fell around 14 feet," Umratkar added. Gaikwad reportedly sustained a shoulder fracture and other injuries and is under treatment at a hospital. After the fire was brought under control, a cooling operation was conducted by spraying water to avert a secondary blaze. Early on Wednesday, the Pune Fire Brigade also responded to another incident at a plywood storage facility in the Mangdewadi area of Katraj. The blaze started around 4.30 am and fire tenders were deployed in response, including from the Pune Metropolitan Region Development Authority (PMRDA). The fire was brought under control after a 30-minute operation.

## Karnataka HC hears PIL against mandatory registration of e-khatas in Bengaluru

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

The e-khata registration on relevant BBMP portals requires documentation, including Aadhaar-based eKYC, GPS coordinates of the property, a photo of the property. The e-khata registration on relevant BBMP portals requires documentation, including Aadhaar-based eKYC, GPS coordinates of the property, a photo of the property among others. A private citizen has filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Karnataka High Court against the mandatory use of the online khata or e-khata system through the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike's (BBMP's) e-Aasthi scheme for property registrations. The matter was first heard on December 13 by a bench of Chief Justice N V Anjaria and Justice K V Aravind, who have sought responses from the state government. The case has been posted for hearing on February 3, 2025. The e-khata registration on relevant BBMP portals requires documentation, including Aadhaar-based eKYC, GPS coordinates of the property, a photo of the property, the registered deed of the property, an encumbrance certificate dating back to April 1, 2004, self-assessment scheme property tax or application number, and a Bescom electricity meter number. The PIL by Bengaluru resident Gowrishankar S raised the concern that despite a September 17 circular from the Stamps and Registration Department requiring all BBMP area land transactions to be linked to an e-Aasthi khata, the system had only been partially implemented, preventing some owners from registering their properties. The petition highlights several concerns, including the media-reported 60 per cent drop in property registrations, clarity on khata transfer fees, and the lack of a mechanism to address unauthorized properties. "The BBMP's partial rollout, coupled with the ongoing digitization of properties and numerous inaccuracies in draft e-khatas, creates substantial barriers. ... requiring its use for property registration is premature," the petition argues. The petition prayed that the September circular be voided insofar as the e-khata was required for registering properties and that registration should be allowed without it if the system was not enabled for e-khatas, etc. Along with requesting clarity in processes, fees, and timely delivery, the petition sought to relax the requirement to use e-Aasthi to register properties in the interim period that the case was underway.

## A lot at stake, AAP keeps 'ace campaigner' Punjab CM Mann for last two campaigning days



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

With campaigning for the December 21 municipal elections in the state ending on Thursday, AAP has kept its ace for the last two days to make a last ditch effort to get as many votes as possible. Facing a drubbing in the Lok Sabha elections this year and with prestige of the party at stake, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has decided to himself campaign the next two days. While Mann will campaign in Phagwara, Jalandhar and Amritsar on Wednesday, he will be in Patiala and Ludhiana on Thursday. Five municipal corporations — Patiala, Jalandhar, Phagwara, Ludhiana and Amritsar — and 43 municipal councils will vote on December 21. It is not usual in the state for any CM to campaign in the municipal elections. Former CM Captain Amarinder Singh didn't campaign in civic body polls and had left the job for his juniors in the party. Even former CM Parkash Singh Badal chose not to campaign as CM for MC elections. It was his son and deputy CM Sukhbir Singh Badal

who campaigned extensively during the municipal elections.

The fact that Mann would be out campaigning is indicative of how seriously the ruling party has taken these local elections. The AAP had lost the Lok Sabha elections in Patiala, Ludhiana, Amritsar and Jalandhar and had won Hoshiarpur and Phagwara, both parts of Hoshiarpur Lok Sabha constituency. Sources said that Mann is an avid and charismatic campaigner. "Barring Mann, the party does not have many faces. Apart from Mann, AAP's newly appointed state president Aman Arora and working president Amansher Singh Sherry Kalsi will also accompany Mann," the source said. Arora is already on the ground and has been campaigning for the party. The party has even then decided to bring Mann on the last two days. Mann had earlier held a meeting of party workers and leaders from all the corporations. He had asked them to mark every voter and ensure a grassroots connect. He had told them to take the policies of the government and its flagship schemes like free power and aam aadmi clinics to every household. CM's entry into the poll-bound corporations is coming after the AAP faced allegations of having used "excesses" to not allow rival parties candidates to file nomination papers. A video from Patiala in which a woman BJP candidate's nomination papers were being snatched and taken away had gone viral. The election is being watched as the AAP is facing important elections in Delhi after the municipal elections in Punjab. "They will be able to showcase Punjab's results in Delhi elections also. It is important for the party to win these elections. If they lose, then it will not look good ahead of Assembly elections in Delhi," a party leader said.

## Mother-in-law entitled to maintenance when daughter-in-law gets compassionate job: Punjab and Haryana HC

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

In 2022, her mother-in-law moved an application seeking maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC (now Section 144 of the BNSS) from the petitioner and was granted Rs 10,000 per month interim maintenance in March 2024. In 2022, her mother-in-law moved an application seeking maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC (now Section 144 of the BNSS) from the petitioner and was granted Rs 10,000 per month interim maintenance in March 2024. Dismissing a plea of a widow against an order of a family court granting interim maintenance of Rs 10,000 to her mother-in-law, the Punjab and Haryana High Court has held a mother-in-law is entitled to maintenance from daughter-in-law who obtained a job on the compassionate ground after the death of her husband. The petitioner submitted before the HC that her husband was a constable at Rail Coach Factory in Kapurthala and passed away in March 2002 while in service. Following this, the petitioner was appointed as a junior clerk on January 28, 2005, on compassionate grounds and she left her in-laws' home subsequently. In 2022, her mother-in-law moved an application seeking maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC (now Section 144 of the BNSS) from the petitioner and was granted Rs 10,000 per month interim maintenance in March 2024. The petitioner's counsel contended before the HC that her deceased husband's parents had five children and they were not dependent on him. "After getting the compassionate appointment, the petitioner left her in-laws home, along with her son. She is raising the child as a single mother. The petitioner's husband died in 2002 and the petitioner was appointed as a junior clerk in 2005. However, the respondent filed an application seeking maintenance in 2022, after a delay of about 20 years," the counsel said. "Moreover, a mother-in-law cannot be considered a dependent in terms of Section 125 of CrPC (now Section 144 of the BNSS), upon a daughter-in-law," the petitioner's counsel said.

The respondent's counsel, however, contended that the petitioner was only appointed as Junior Clerk because her husband, son of the respondent, died while in service and the underlying objective of compassionate appointment is to assist the family in navigating the financial crisis caused by a sudden death. "As such, once she accepted the compassionate appointment, the petitioner must be deemed to have stepped into the shoes of the deceased son of the respondent and is liable to maintain his dependent," said the mother-in-law's counsel. Upon hearing the matter, the single bench of Justice Harpreet Singh Brar said, "It is clear that Section 125 of Cr.P.C. (now Section 144 of BNSS) does not place any liability on the daughter-in-law to maintain her parents-in-law or vice versa... However, the petitioner was employed by the RCF on compassionate grounds. The idea behind granting a compassionate appointment is to assist the family in dealing with the financial crisis that follows the



death of a bread-earner. The husband of the respondent passed away a little while before filing the present petition and since his demise, the respondent, a sexagenarian, has no one to maintain her. The respondent has three children — her son (Praveen Kumar Saini) has passed away, her daughter is already married and her other son is a rickshaw puller, who has to take care of his severely sick child. As such, neither of her surviving children is able to take care of her basic necessities." Justice Brar said, "The object and purpose behind granting maintenance under Section 125 of Cr.P.C. (now Section 144 of BNSS) is to avoid destitution or vagrancy. At the same time, a just and careful balance must be struck to ensure that this provision does not degenerate into a weapon of harassment. The Courts are required to conduct the maintenance proceedings while being alive to the legislative intent behind the provision under Section 125 of Cr.P.C. (now Section 144 of BNSS) in its true spirit, which is to provide speedy assistance and social justice to women, children and infirm parents." The bench said, "Since the petitioner was given her current job on compassionate grounds, she is liable to take care of the respondent, as she has stepped into the shoes of her deceased husband. While this Court is conscious of the plight of a single mother, the petitioner cannot be allowed to merely take up the benefits of a compassionate appointment and avoid the responsibilities that come with it. The record reflects that the petitioner is earning a handsome amount of Rs 80,000 per month, as such, the petitioner can comfortably pay Rs 10,000 per month to the respondent as maintenance."

"The overarching aim of justice is to serve what is deserved and accountability and fairness are identifying features of the same. However, the said purpose would be defeated, if justice is viewed in its absolute mechanical form, devoid of context and nuance. While justice in itself is a dynamic concept, directly influenced by the morality of an ever-evolving society, it can be said with certainty that absolute impartiality and lack of compassion often claims fairness as a casualty," Justice Brar observed while dismissing the widow's plea.

## Karnataka Assembly okays Rs 500 cess for two-wheelers, Rs 1,000 for cars during registration



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

The Karnataka Assembly Tuesday passed a Bill to levy an additional cess of Rs 500 for two-wheelers and Rs 1,000 for cars at the time of their registration. The Karnataka Motor Vehicles Taxation (Second Amendment) Bill, 2024, was passed despite opposition from BJP legislators. Leader of Opposition R Ashok said the cess would be a blow to the common man when the government had already hiked taxes on fuel earlier this year.

The Bill was piloted by Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H K Patil on behalf of Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy. According to the statement of objects and reasons for the Bill, the amendment was introduced to collect the additional cess at the time of registration of vehicles "for the purpose of the Karnataka Motor Transport and other Allied Workers Social Security and Welfare Fund." The proposed legislation, which is yet to be passed by the Legislative Council, introduced a new sub-section 1(B), to section (3A) of

the Karnataka Motor Vehicles Taxation Act, 1957, which deals with levying cess when new vehicles are purchased. As per the existing provisions of the Act, a 10 per cent cess is being levied for the purpose of various infrastructure projects across Karnataka, equity in investment in Bangalore Mass Rapid Transit Limited, the Mukhya Mantri Grammena Rasthe Abhivruddhi Nidhi, and one per cent cess for Urban Transport Fund. The new cess will be in addition to the 3 per cent cess levied on transport vehicles for the purpose of the Karnataka Motor Transport and Other Allied Workers Social Security and Welfare Fund.

## BRS legislators demand justice for auto drivers, take out rally in auto-rickshaws

Hyderabad: BRS MLAs and MLCs took out a rally in auto-rickshaws from the MLA quarters at Adarshnagar to the Assembly, demanding the immediate implementation of promises made to auto-rickshaw drivers in the State.

The party also moved an adjournment motion in both Houses, seeking a discussion on the issue.

Raising slogans for justice, the leaders highlighted the financial distress faced by auto drivers, which had led to 93 suicides in the State.

## Mahim, the neighbourhood where Zakir Hussain was born, mourns his loss; hopes for his burial alongside his parents



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

"Beta, do you know where the burial is happening?" asked Salma Ansari, a woman in her late 60s. She was talking about late tabla maestro Zakir Hussain who breathed his last in a hospital in San Francisco (USA) where he had been admitted for over a month. "Ammaji (Hussain's mother Bavi Begum) and Abbaji (Hussain's father, Ustad Alla Rakha) were buried here at Mahim Kabrastan. We are hoping Zakir bhai will be brought here too." By "here," she means Mahim, the neighbourhood where Hussain was born and brought up before the family moved to Shimla House on Nepean Sea Road. The exact year of their departure is unclear, but residents remember the family living on the ground floor of a now-purple building, which has changed hands twice since. Salma Ansari, a woman in her late 60s, from Mahim.

While the younger generation knows of legendary tabla virtuoso's connection to Mahim loosely, a general store owner directed this writer to Salma phuphi, seated on a chair at the entrance of a narrow lane leading to the dargah. "I was very young when Ammaji and Abbaji moved to Nepean Sea Road. Ammaji treated me like a daughter and took me with her. I stayed there until I got married," she said, adding, "Even now, I would visit the family whenever they would come to India. Zakir bhai would always ask me 'how am I doing' and 'if all is well' and even his wife Tony bhabhi (Antonia Minnecola) was very kind."

She breaks into tears as she recalls the moment she heard the news. "I was at home when my nephews came asking if I'd heard. It was really unfortunate. Since then, I've been trying to figure out when and where the burial is happening. I tried reaching out to his team and his sister's son

but to no avail," she added. Salma fervently wished the burial would take place in Mahim. "When Abbaji passed away, his maiyyat (body) was brought here. Thousands of people came to bid him adieu," she recalled. Nearby, in a home on the fifth floor of an old building just 300 metres away, lives a family of musicians whose ties to Zakir Hussain go beyond blood. "We are related by music," said Arfat Shakil Khan, 54, whose father Iqbal Ahmed played the sarangi for Doordarshan and had performed with Hussain and Alla Rakha, both. "My husband Shakil Khan is a singer and teacher. My jeth (elder brother-in-law) is also a singer, and my devar (younger brother-in-law) is both a singer and a tabla player. He learned from Abbaji himself," she said. Recalling fond memories of Zakir Hussain's concerts, she said, "We last met at CCI, where he performed with the late Pandit Shivkumar Sharma. I was taking a photo of him and my husband when he said, 'Aapa, aap bhi aayiyen na (Sister, you also join us).' He was always so thoughtful and charismatic," she said, adding, "Don't mind, but no words can describe what he did, achieved, and meant to thousands of people." When she learned that the burial was happening in the United States, she nodded with understanding. "His family is there," she noted softly, though she admitted she wished it could have been in Mahim. "So many would have liked to attend his last rites and pay their respects." Behind her, in her 1 bed-room-apartment is a photo of her husband who shares a resemblance to Zakir Hussain. "Sometimes he does get mistaken for Zakir bhai at gatherings and fairs," she admitted. "My father and Alla Rakha were close friends. When my sister got married, the family was invited, and while Zakir was in the US, Abbaji came to give his blessings," said her husband Shakil Khan over a telephone, adding that he dedicates every Guru Purnima to Hussain. Their nephew, Tajdar Khan, who lives in the adjacent flat, carried forward the family's memories of Zakir Hussain. "There are not enough words to describe him. My father attended Abbaji's funeral and told us that Zakir's sister Razia had also passed away the same day. It's a big loss for anyone. Yet, my father said, Zakir remained calm, bowing down to all the elders who came to pay their last respects," said the young singer and anchor, adding that he too hoped that the maestro's last rites were happening in Mahim. "His passing away is like tabla losing its soul," he concluded.

## 2020 Delhi riots: HC dismisses Salim Malik's plea seeking discharge in case of rioting and arson at car showroom

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

The Delhi High Court Tuesday dismissed a petition by 2020 riots accused Salim Malik alias Munna seeking that the charges framed against him in a case of rioting and arson at a car showroom be dropped. The Delhi High Court Tuesday dismissed a petition by 2020 riots accused Salim Malik alias Munna seeking that the charges framed against him in a case of rioting and arson at a car showroom be dropped. The Delhi High Court Tuesday dismissed a petition by 2020 riots accused Salim Malik alias Munna seeking that the charges framed against him in a case of rioting and arson at a car showroom be dropped. While a detailed order has not been made public, Justice Anish Dayal pronounced in open court that the petition is dismissed. Malik was seeking that the 2023 Karkardooma Sessions Court order by Additional Sessions Judge Pulastya Pramachala, where the court had framed charges against him in relation to a Dayalpur police station FIR, be set aside. While framing the charges for rioting and arson, the trial court concluded that there was no material to establish the ingredients of criminal conspiracy. Malik is facing charges under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 147, 148 (rioting), 149 (unlawful assembly), 427 (mischief), 435, 436 (mischief by fire), and 450 (house trespass). He is accused of alleged rioting and arson at Air Deal Cars Pvt Ltd at Main Wazirabad Road in Bhajanpura, Delhi, on February 24, 2020.

Malik is also an accused in the larger conspiracy case, along with others such as Umar Khalid, Abdul Khalid Safi and others, all booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and provisions of IPC for allegedly being the "masterminds" of the 2020 Delhi riots, which left 53 people dead and over 700 injured. The riots erupted during the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in the city. The prosecution has alleged that Malik attended a meeting of the conspirators on February 22, 2020, at Chand Bagh, and delivered "provocative" speeches from



the stage at the Chand Bagh protest site against CAA-NRC legislation. It relied primarily on police witness statements to implicate him. Malik, meanwhile, seeking quashing of the charges framed against him, pointed out that the allegation of attending the meeting is already part of the larger conspiracy case in the FIR by the Special Cell and that the prosecution had failed to cite the words used by him which could have provoked or incited any offence. He also submitted that no overt act has been attributed to him, and no evidence has been placed on record which establishes that he was part of the unlawful assembly. Malik submitted before the Delhi High Court the statements under Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) Section 161 of police witnesses that were present at the site of the protest "would serve to show that at its highest, the revisionist's (Malik's) role is only that of a speaker at a protest site which is separate and independent of the rioters." An employee at the car showroom Vikas Rai filed a complaint on February 27, 2020. Malik was arrested on October 30, 2020, more than eight months after the complaint was filed, and was granted bail on November 25, 2020. Malik was named as an accused only in the first supplementary chargesheet filed in the case in March 2021.

## Former MLAs in Haryana demand loans at 4% interest, land for housing society in Panchkula

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Cutting across the party line, former legislators in Haryana have demanded loans for cars and houses from the Vidhan Sabha Secretariat at an interest rate of 4 per cent as is being provided by Himachal Pradesh. In a representation handed over to Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini and Speaker Harvinder Kalyan Tuesday, they demanded land for a housing society for them in Panchkula. Seeking medical allowance on the pattern of Chhattisgarh, the former legislators said they should be given at least Rs 20,000 per month for outdoor treatment, apart from the provision of cashless cards for indoor treatment in hospitals. Ranbir Mandola, general secretary of the former MLAs' association, said, "Banks do not give us loans after the age of 60. In Himachal Pradesh, the MLAs are given loans by their Vidhan Sabha Secretariat at an interest rate of 4 per cent. In Haryana, too, loans up to Rs 25 lakh should be given to former MLAs for purchasing houses and cars at the same interest rate." Mandola, a former INLD legislator from Badhra, said, "Keeping in view the increasing prices of petrol and diesel, the legislators' travel allowance should also be increased. In Madhya Pradesh, the legislators are given Rs 2 lakh annual travel allowance while this amount is Rs 3 lakh in Jharkhand. In Haryana, too, this allowance should be increased from the current Rs 10,000 per month to Rs 25,000."

The former legislators demanded a revision of their pension, stating it has not been revised for the past several years. Mandola said, "The central government and the state governments give 20 per cent additional pension to their former staffers when they turn 80. Now, staffers have sought a slab system to increase pension. They have sought an additional pension of 5 per cent after attaining the age of 65 while a 10 per cent additional pension after attaining the age of 70. Similarly, after attaining the age of 75, an additional



pension at the rate of 15 per cent has been sought apart from seeking an increase of 20 per cent for the age of 80 and 30 per cent after attaining the age of 85. We have learnt the central government and a few states, in principle, have agreed to their demand. The pension of former MLAs in Haryana should also be increased on this pattern."

On the pattern of Chhattisgarh, the former legislators also sought telephone and sevadar allowances. As representatives of the people, the former legislators said, they have to give donations for social, religious, sports and cultural events, apart from looking after many guests at their residences. Association president Rambir Singh (Congress), former MLAs- Ramphal Kundu (INLD), Azad Mohammad (BJP), Bijender Singh Kadyan (Congress), Ramesh Gupta (BJP), Shashi Ranjan Parmar (BJP), Master Dharmal Obra (INLD), Dr. Shiv Shankar Bhardwaj (Congress), Ishwar Singh Palaka (BJP), Kulwant Bajigar (BJP) and Anita Yadav (Congress) were among those who met the Speaker. On his part, the Speaker assured the former legislators to bring their demands to the notice of the state government.

## In a first in PGI, 8-yr-old successfully undergoes awake brain surgery



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

During the surgery, the neuroanesthesia team utilised awake sedation to keep the child alert and responsive while monitoring her brain activity. During the surgery, the neuroanesthesia team utilised awake sedation to keep the child alert and responsive while monitoring her brain activity. In a significant breakthrough for paediatric neurosurgery, a team at PGIMER has successfully performed an awake craniotomy on an 8-year-old female patient — the youngest ever to undergo this innovative procedure at the institute. Awake craniotomy is a specialised surgical technique where the patient remains awake and responsive during the operation, allowing for real-time monitoring of critical brain functions such as language and motor skills. Traditionally performed on adult patients, this complex procedure presents unique challenges in younger demographics due to their limited ability to cooperate amid the fear and anxiety associated with the surgery. Over the past 4-5 years, the PGIMER has successfully integrated awake craniotomy

into its routine practice for adult patients. However, the recent case of this young patient, who presented with focal seizures and weakness in her left limbs due to a right-sided large insular glioma, pushed the boundaries of this technique into paediatric surgery. The latest surgery was performed by neurosurgeon Dr Sushant Kumar Sahoo and supported by PGIMER's senior resident Dr Lalit Tomar.

Building rapport for success Before the surgery, extensive preparations were made to build rapport with the young patient. The neuro anaesthesia team engaged in detailed discussions about the procedure, educating the child about various tasks like recognising items, counting, and storytelling that she would be required to perform during surgery. This emphasis on communication and trust was crucial in ensuring the patient's active participation throughout the operation.

Innovative techniques for safe resection During the surgery, the neuroanesthesia team utilised awake sedation to keep the child alert and responsive while monitoring her brain activity. The application of electrical stimulation on the brain's surface provided vital information regarding functional brain areas, enabling the surgical team to navigate around crucial regions and minimise post-operative deficits. "With meticulous planning, skilled execution, and the child's cooperation, a safe maximal resection of the tumour was performed without any post-operative complications," the PGIMER said. Following the surgery, the young patient has shown no additional weakness and is recovering well, the institute claimed. This landmark achievement sets a precedent for future cases involving awake craniotomies in children. With continued teamwork and innovative approaches, the prospects for treating complex brain tumours in younger patients are advancing rapidly.

## Tragic death of chef cum cashier in Georgia leaves family grieving after years of separation

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

"Who will bear the expense of my children's education now? How can I give them a bright future?" These were the only questions on the lips of Kanchan Kumari, the wife of Ravinder Kumar, a 45-year-old who tragically lost his life in a devastating gas leak last Friday night at an Indian restaurant in Georgia's Gudauri area. The loss is particularly heart-wrenching for his wife and their three children, who had not seen Kumar in over eight years. His youngest son, born after Kumar left for Dubai in 2017, had never even met him. During this long period of separation, Kumar worked tirelessly abroad, driven by the dream of securing a better future for his family back in India.

Kumar, originally from Abadi Kot Ram Das in Jalandhar, Punjab, left India eight years ago in search of a brighter future. Initially, he moved to Dubai spent five years there, but after falling victim to a fraudulent travel agent, he was burdened with significant debt, which prevented him from returning home. Determined to provide for his family, he later moved to Georgia, where he worked as a chef. Despite the physical distance, Kumar remained steadfast in supporting his family both financially and emotionally. Tragically, his death came just hours after a phone call with his family. During a video call with Kanchan and their children, Kumar spoke about a powerful snowstorm and a power outage in his area. He promised to call again the next morning—a call that would never come. His sudden passing has left his wife and children devastated, struggling to cope with the loss of a man who worked tirelessly to ensure their well-being, even from thousands of miles away. "My Papa had two phones, and he was sitting on a sofa while talking to us on Friday night. On the other phone, he was telling someone that a very strong snowstorm had hit the area, uprooting all the poles and causing a blackout," said Harshita Pal (11), the eldest daughter of Ravinder Kumar. "My Papa always said he would come to take us along, and my Mummy was trying to get our passports made," added Harshita, who was just three years old when her father left.

Kanchan also recounted her final conversation with her husband. "When we spoke on Friday, he sounded scared. The storm had caused a complete blackout in his area. He kept saying he would call me the next morning, but I never heard from him again," she said. "He wanted to visit us but he could not because of providing better future



to our children. And I now face an uncertain future. Our three children, including a seven-year-old son whom Kumar never had the chance to meet in person, are left without any primary source of income. The children, who are currently enrolled in Kendriya Vidyalaya, face the prospect of losing their education without financial support. I am now alone, struggling to care for my children," pleaded Kanchan, as she sought government assistance to ensure her children's education continues. "It seems my husband died soon after his call to us on Friday because he was found sitting in the same position the next morning. Eyewitnesses told me he was found dead with the phone still in his hand, sitting upright," said Kanchan, adding that she wants his body to be brought back home so that his son can see his father physically one last time. Neelam Kumari, Kanchan's sister, spoke with deep emotion about the hardships the family has endured. "I have seen my sister struggle her entire life. When Ravinder was in India, he ran a kirana (grocery) shop and supported his entire joint family. But with the weight of his debts, he had no choice but to leave for Dubai, and later Georgia. He worked hard, but it was never easy," she shared. Neelam also recalled how the family often went to bed hungry, a memory that still lingers in her mind. "Not only should his body be brought back, but we also request that his family be looked after," Neelam said. "Kanchan should be given a job to support her children, and their education should be taken care of. It's the least the government can do after all the sacrifices Ravinder made for his family." Surjeet Kaur, Ravinder Kumar's mother, was inconsolable. People from the area have been thronging to their house, mourning the loss of a man who lived his life for his family. Now, they rally to support those he left behind.

## Express report on Tuberculosis drug shortage: Delhi Health dept forms panel to look into supply gaps



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

The Delhi government Tuesday formed a committee to look into gaps in the supply of tuberculosis medicines in the city. This comes after The Indian Express on December 17 reported on the non-availability of TB medicine to a 16-year-old patient named Harshita Singh Chandel; she filed a writ petition in the Delhi High Court on the erratic supply from the district dispensary and the hospital. The court directed the state government to provide her with medication. According to the order issued by the office of the Directorate General of Health Services, "The committee shall look into the factual situation and gaps in the supply of these medicines, reasons thereof, and action taken till now to fill the gaps. The committee shall also submit recommendations to ensure uninterrupted supply of medicines to TB patients in Delhi." Harshita, who lives in Jahangirpuri with her parents and two sisters, has been unable to attend school since July after she was diagnosed with multidrug-resistant tuberculosis. The medication she needs is mostly out of stock at the government dispensary five minutes from her home. Her mother Jyoti Singh said in five months, she got the medicines — Linezolid and Cycloserine — from the dispensary only for a single month. On Monday, she managed to get tablets that would last five days. Speaking to Jyoti said she received calls from sev-

eral officials who assured her that the issue would be resolved. "I also received a call from the dispensary on Tuesday to collect the medicines," she added. She said officials also assured her that Harshita would receive the monthly incentive of Rs 500 for TB patients. The family had claimed she hadn't been receiving the amount. An official from the state health department said the committee will also find out how many such patients are unable to avail of medicines. Meanwhile, the central government is running a 100-day campaign across 347 high-priority districts in 33 states and union territories to eliminate tuberculosis in India. This is being done to enhance detection in select high-burden districts with a mission to eliminate TB by 2025. In Delhi, the campaign is being run in all 11 districts. Last month, the World Health Organisation highlighted two significant milestones in India's fight against TB: an 18% dip in cases over the past 10 years, more than double the global rate; and a 24% reduction in deaths in the same period, higher than the global average of 23%. But there has been a shortage in the supply of key TB drugs since 2023, The Indian Express reported on December 6. The Centre has now directed states to procure them locally for three months, with no restrictions on size or formulation.

## MANUU to expand its campus, introduce new courses for women

Hyderabad: The Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) would soon expand its campus and start new courses for women at Urdu Hall, Himayat Nagar, said Prof. Syed Ainul Hasan, Vice Chancellor MANUU. Participating in the seminar on 'Urdu University se Taleem meri Kamiyabi ka Raaz' organized by Dean Alumni Affairs,

## Soon, bus routes at Delhi's ISBTs to be reorganised to reduce traffic, pollution



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Soon, passengers wanting to catch a bus to Uttar Pradesh or Bihar can get it directly from Anand Vihar Inter-State Bus Terminal (ISBT) and need not go elsewhere. Similarly, anyone wishing to head off to the hills or Punjab can get a bus at Kashmere Gate. This is as per the Transport Department's plan to decentralise inter-state bus operations and to reduce traffic congestion on roads, travel time, and curb vehicular pollution. There are three ISBTs in Delhi — Kashmere Gate, Anand Vihar and Sarai Kale — from where inter-state buses to different states or cities originate and terminate. "Currently, there is no systematic segregation... A lot of buses originating and terminating at Anand Vihar also ply from Kashmere Gate... this also includes private buses... leading to heavy traffic snarls on roads and creating difficulties for passengers... Under this plan, buses from a certain state can originate and terminate only at a dedi-

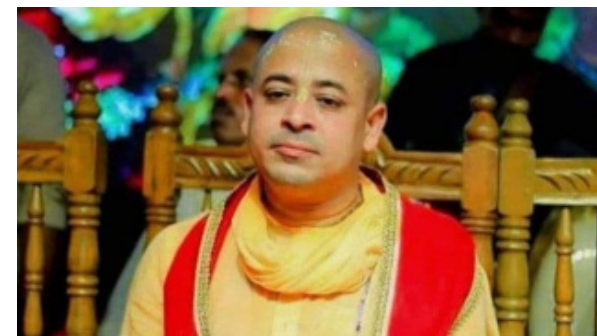
cated ISBT," said a senior official. Officials said it will be on similar lines to Delhi's railway stations. "There is a method to departures and arrivals at Sarai Rohilla, New Delhi, Old Delhi and Nizamuddin stations... We are planning something similar for buses. For instance, if I have to go to Bihar, I know the bus will ply only from Anand Vihar... and need not go to Kashmere Gate... This plan will help tackle congestion on roads and make it convenient for people," added the official. The department has also issued a notice seeking comments from the public and stakeholders. Buses coming from Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh, Himachal Pradesh, J&K, Nepal and other Northern states will originate and terminate at ISBT-Kashmere Gate

— Those from UP, Uttarakhand, Bihar and other eastern states will originate and terminate at ISBT-Anand Vihar. Buses from Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and other Southern and Western states will originate and terminate at ISBT-Sarai Kale Khan. As per officials, the highest number of inter-state buses run from Kashmere Gate — it sees 1,500 to 1,600 buses a day, which increases to 1,750 a day during the festive months of October, November and March. Anand Vihar, meanwhile, sees 800-850 buses per day and touches 1,000 during festival time; Sarai Kale Khan sees 200-260 buses on an average per day. This includes private-run All India Transport Buses. In September, similar changes to decongest the bus terminals were announced such as the same parking fees for private and government buses, fixed time slots for the use of the bus bay, and the use of FASTag for tracking the vehicles. The decision to enforce these changes, as per officials, was taken at a high-level meeting chaired by L-G V K Saxena.

## BJP leaders meet Bangladesh lawyer of ISKCON monk

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

A delegation of BJP leaders, including Arjun Singh, along with Hindu monk Kartick Maharaj on Tuesday met Bangladeshi lawyer Rabindra Ghosh, who has been defending jailed Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das, in North 24 Parganas district. They felicitated Ghosh for his efforts in standing by the rights of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh. The meeting took place at the residence of Ghosh's son in Barrackpore, where the lawyer is currently staying for medical purposes after bone injuries. He is a courageous man. We appreciate his efforts and everything he has done so far to fight for justice for Hindu minorities in Bangladesh despite such tough circumstances. Rabindra Ghosh's courage in fighting for justice for Hindu minorities in Bangladesh. Despite threats to life he didn't fear and it is inspiring for many of us," said Arjun Singh. Emphasising the importance of standing up for human rights Kartick Maharaj said, "We pray for Chinmoy Krishna Das's release. Supporting Das is about standing for human rights. Also,



Rabindra Ghosh's commitment to justice reflects the true spirit of humanity." Meanwhile, Ghosh said, "I am grateful for the support. The situation of minorities in Bangladesh is dire, and I will continue to fight against injustice." "The interim administration's silence on fundamentalist and violence is alarming. It's a travesty of justice," he said.

## Delhi cop helps save Armyman and his IAF officer wife trapped in overturned car



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

It was around 2.30 am. DCP (Traffic) Shashank Jaiswal was on his way to meet his mother when he saw an overturned car near Subroto Park, Dhaula Kuan. As he asked his driver to pull over near the accident site, he found a man and a woman trapped in the car that had overturned on its left side, cutting off access to both doors. What followed was Jaiswal, his team and some passersby, saving

the lives of the couple — an Army subedar and his wife, an Air Force officer. "On the other side of the car, the doors were jammed, and the couple couldn't open them from inside..." Jaiswal said, adding that he immediately called the PCR. Jaiswal, his team, and the bystanders smashed the car windows and pulled the couple out. "Fortunately, they didn't suffer any major injuries," the DCP said. The couple were on their way to their residence in Delhi Cantonment. "They were trying to avoid a collision with a truck when their car swerved and overturned," Jaiswal said.

He added that fuel was leaking from the couple's car. "The situation could have become dangerous if the vehicle had caught fire," Jaiswal said. This isn't the first time that Jaiswal has come to the rescue of accident victims. On September 2, he spotted a crowd near Mahipalpur bypass in South Delhi. A man injured in a motorcycle accident was lying unconscious and bleeding heavily. Jaiswal had called an autorickshaw and rushed Rangpuri resident Anil Kumar to the hospital. Kumar had survived. Jaiswal credited the autorickshaw driver, Deepak Pal, and traffic constables Jasbir and Shailesh, for saving Kumar's life.

## Fame, mimicking gangsters, social media: Why murder cases in Delhi involving juveniles is up over the last 10 years

—December 11, Jafrabad: Two teenagers, aged 15 and 16, allegedly stabbed a man to death after he resisted their attempt to rob him. The boys made off with Rs 200 to fulfill their alcohol needs, said police. —December 1, Naraina: Three juveniles were apprehended for allegedly stabbing to death a 36-year-old man, Manoj, inside a park. One of the accused juveniles was earlier linked to the murder of Manoj's younger brother, Pramod. —October 31, Farsh Bazar: Juvenile hatched a plan to kill 40-year-old property dealer, Akash Sharma. On Diwali, he and another man, gangster Hashim Baba's aide Sonu Matka, went to the victim's house where the latter opened fire — killing Sharma and his nephew. As per police, the juvenile, who was later apprehended, claimed during questioning that he had a dispute with Akash involving Rs 70,000. —October 3, Kalindi Kunj: Three minors allegedly killed Unani practitioner Dr Javed Akhtar, days after one of the accused got into an argument with the victim over treatment charges. The trio, in the 15-17 age group, were apprehended. These are just a few instances that highlight how more and more youngsters are committing heinous crimes. In the last 10 years, an analysis by the Delhi Police has shown that juveniles involved in cases of murders, use of firearms, and quarrels have seen an upward trend while thefts and burglaries have gone down. Police say this is because teenagers in conflict with the law now hanker for fame, are influenced by social media and the lives of gangsters, and lack emotional regulation. Data with the police shows that between 2014 and 2024, the percentage of juveniles involved in murder cases has gone up — barring a slight dip in 2019 and 2020. Last year, 20.1% of juveniles were involved in murder cases; this year, the number stood at 26.7% up to October 31. Similarly, in cases of use of firearms from 2014 to 2024 (till Oct), just 1.3% of juveniles used firearms in 2014 — this has jumped to 16% this year. A police officer said this has been possible owing to easy



access to arms as well as porous inter-state borders. "People working with or associated with gangsters have access to firearms and they use teenagers as facilitators or as foot soldiers. They are well aware that the law will shield them and a record will not be maintained," the officer said. Data shows a similar pattern in cases of causing hurt and quarrels — from 3.9% juvenile involvement in 2014, it is 17.7% in 2024 (till Oct). However, in cases of theft and burglary, the involvement of juveniles has gone down. What was 7.6% a decade back is now 3.3%, data shows. Special CP (Crime) Devesh Chandra Srivastava said, "Earlier, involvement of juveniles in cases of theft and snatching was more because it was the easiest way to make money. Now, with the virtual world shaping up, likes, reels and shares determine popularity. The world of social media looks exciting and young teenagers are ready to be famous irrespective of what can bring them there — whether it's brandishing weapons or uploading videos of them threatening or killing someone." Inspiration from gangsters and their style of work is also an added factor, the Special CP added. Peer pressure, social inequality also factors. According to psychologists, it's important to understand the reason why juveniles commit such crimes.



## In FY24, 5 state-run cos did not have a woman independent director



Five state-run companies out of the top 100 firms in the country did not have a woman independent director on their board in the fiscal ended March 31, 2024, a survey showed. Of these five companies, four were public sector units (PSUs) and one was a public sector bank (PSB), according to the 5th Annual Survey on Corporate Governance by Excellence Enablers Pvt Ltd. The survey has used the annual reports, stock exchange, and website disclosures of NIFTY 100 companies as a base to look at parameters

that impact on, and manifest, the corporate governance standards of companies. The 100 companies include 15 PSUs, 12 banks, six PSBs, three insurance companies. In the fiscal ended March 2023, six companies (including three PSUs and one PSB) did not have a woman independent director on their boards. During the fiscal ended March 31, 2021, 21 companies (including 12 PSUs and three PSBs) did not have a woman, independent director. While the presence of a woman independent director on boards has been mandated, there is no similar provision for women executives graduating to board positions.

This can happen only if a sufficient number of competent women are identified and are provided with appropriate career progression in the organization. "It is equally important to focus on more women occupying positions of Chair/MD (managing director), as well as being on several Board committees, and chairing some of them," the survey said. As of March 31, 2023, and as of March 31, 2024, five companies, of which three companies were common, had women managing directors. During FY24, five companies had women's chairs. The survey showed that as of March 31, 2024, the average tenure of 1,051 directors was 6.16 years, with the longest tenure being 55.61 years.

## Dream Sports Foundation joins forces with MSSA to push school sports in Mumbai

MSSA 125 Years MSSA, founded in 1893, has a legacy of nurturing legendary athletes such as Dilip Vengsarkar, Sachin Tendulkar, Ajit Agarkar, and Yashasvi Jaiswal. In a bid to raise the standard of youths in sports, Dream Sports Foundation (DSF) has forged a five-year partnership with the Mumbai School Sports Association (MSSA). The collaboration is set to impact over 75,000 students, spans 20 sports, including Hockey, Football, Cricket, Athletics, Table Tennis, and Badminton, a statement by Dream Sports read. MSSA, founded in 1893, has a legacy of nurturing legendary athletes such as Dilip Vengsarkar, Sachin Tendulkar, Ajit Agarkar, and Yashasvi Jaiswal. Over the years, it has played a crucial role in shaping Mumbai's sporting culture. Through this partnership, DSF aims to continue its mission to improve the quality of school sports in alignment with the National Sports Policy 2024.

Bhavit Sheth, the Chief Operating Officer and Co-Founder of Dream Sports expressed his enthusiasm about the partnership, stating, "We're thrilled to partner with an association that is integral to Mumbai's grassroots sporting culture and has made the city proud. In line with our vision to Make Sports Better, we're excited to support young athletes and help unlock their potential while contributing to India's vision of becoming a sporting superpower." Rev. Fr Jude Rodrigues, President of MSSA, also welcomed the collaboration, highlighting its potential to strengthen Mumbai's sporting future and legacy. "This collaboration will help Mumbai athletes stay ahead of the curve while adhering to the foundation's vision and mission. This partnership marks the beginning of an exciting journey to add to Mumbai's illustrious sporting legacy," he said.

About Dream Sports Foundation: Dream Sports Foundation is the philanthropic arm of Dream Sports, India's leading sports technology company with brands such as Dream11, FanCode and DreamSetGo in its portfolio. DSF's vision is to make sports better by bridging the gaps in the sporting ecosystem. One of DSF's key sports initiatives is 'DreamGold', a long-term elite athlete development program that is proud to support athletes like Sreeja Akula and Nethra Kumaran. To support young, promising athletes, DSF has curated partnerships with the Mary Kom Regional Boxing



Foundation, Bhaichung Bhutia Football Schools, the Dilip Vengsarkar Foundation, and The Karnam Malleswari Foundation. In 2024, DSF also launched the Dream Sports Championship with a football edition for the U-17 age group. About MSSA: Founded in 1893, the Mumbai School Sports Association (MSSA) aims to promote fitness and discipline through active sports and games participation among thousands of school-going students in Mumbai. The association conducts championships across 20 sports, organizing 177 tournaments that engage approximately 75,000 students from 484 member schools. Established with a vision to inspire and elevate, MSSA has become a hub for athletes and sports enthusiasts alike. The foundation rests on its commitment to nurturing talent, fostering camaraderie, and promoting a healthy, inclusive sporting environment.

## Markets decline in early trade amid foreign fund outflows; all eyes on US Fed interest rate decision

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty declined in initial trade on Wednesday amid foreign fund outflows and caution ahead of the US Fed interest rate decision. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex went down by 149.31 points to 80,535.14 in early trade. The NSE Nifty dipped 62.9 points to 24,273.10.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Tata Motors, Power Grid, Larsen & Toubro, Adani Ports, Maruti and NTPC were among the laggards. Reliance Industries, HCL Technologies, Tech Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever, Asian Paints and ITC were among the gainers. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 6,409.86 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. "The near-term market construct has turned weak with FIIs turning sellers on rallies. Yesterday's massive FII sell figure of Rs 6,410 crore in the cash market indicates that more selling is in store on market bounces. "The focus of global markets today will be the Fed decision expected tonight. A 25 bps rate cut is priced in by the market. So, the attention will be on the Fed commentary," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said. In Asian markets, Seoul,



Shanghai and Hong Kong traded higher while Tokyo quoted lower. Wall Street ended lower on Tuesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude went up 0.04 per cent to USD 73.22 a barrel. Falling for the second day in a row, the BSE benchmark tanked 1,064.12 points or 1.30 per cent to settle at 80,684.45 on Tuesday. The Nifty tumbled 332.25 points or 1.35 per cent to 24,336.

## Are rebels in Manipur using Starlink communication service? Elon Musk says no

SpaceX's billionaire founder Elon Musk has rejected claims that his satellite communication service Starlink was being used by rebels in violence-hit Manipur, after pictures shared by a unit of Indian security forces showed they had seized a device that contained Starlink's logo. Starlink's services are yet to be greenlit in India, and the company cannot legally allow communications in the country via its platform. On December 16, the Spear Corps of the Indian Army said it had carried out joint operations in the hill and valley regions in the districts of Churachandpur, Chandel, Imphal East and Kappokpi along with the state's police. During the operations "29 weapons comprising of snipers, automatic weapons, rifles, pistols, country made mortars, single barrel rifles, grenades, ammunition and war like stores" were recovered. The unit also shared a picture of a white device with Starlink's label on it as one of the recovered items. After people raised concerns that rebels in the violence-hit state were using Starlink to bypass internet restrictions in the state, Musk said, "This is false. Starlink satellite beams are turned off over India." This is false. Starlink satellite beams are turned off over India. India has not yet cleared an application by Starlink to offer satellite-based communication services in the country. It is understood that its application is pending security approvals from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

said that any decision on the launch of SpaceX's satellite internet service Starlink was contingent on recommendations from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), which is holding a consultation process. Therefore, the company cannot legally offer its services in India as of now. An availability map on Starlink's website, which shows the regions in which the service is available, says that Starlink is "pending regulatory approval" in India. It shows a similar message for Pakistan, and says that the service is "starting in 2025" in Bangladesh and Bhutan. Starlink is not available yet in Nepal and Myanmar. Starlink vs telcos: With India snubbing Reliance Jio's proposal to auction airwaves for satellite communication and favouring administrative allocation instead, the move is being seen as a big win for some of the company's biggest rivals, particularly billionaire Elon Musk's Starlink. The Telecommunications Act, 2023, has added spectrum for satellite communication in the list of administrative allocation. The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) had later asked the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) to come up with a methodology to assign the spectrum. With TRAI exploring pricing models for the service, Jio wrote to the regulator making a case for auction of satellite spectrum. Their essential argument is that administrative allocation may not be able to bring about a level playing field between satellite and terrestrial services. Musk, however, responded to the submissions, saying: ""

## Russia's clampdown on Tajik migrants raises economic and security risks

The 23-year-old from a small village in Tajikistan hoped to join his uncle and cousins working in construction in the Russian capital and save enough money to return home and find a bride. But Yusufi only saw Moscow from the airplane window. Held for six hours at Vnukovo airport, he said border authorities stamped his passport with a deportation order and put him on a plane back to the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, the next day. Reuters could not determine why he was denied entry. "I wanted to go to Russia to earn money," Mr. Yusufi said, standing by his family's cotton fields outside Hulbuk, a district capital some 15 miles (24 km) from the border with Afghanistan. "Now I don't know what to do."

Nearly nine months after Islamist militants from Tajikistan attacked the Crocus City Hall, a concert venue near Moscow, killing 145 people, migrant workers from Central Asia describe growing hostility towards them in Russia. More are being turned back at the border or deported as changes to the law make it easier to expel them, while a drop in the number of Tajiks leaving to work in Russia underlines how an economic model both countries have relied on is under strain. Reuters spoke with six Tajiks who lived in Russia or who aspired to do so to discover how their lives changed after the March 22 shootings, one of the deadliest militant attacks on Russian soil. Three, including Mr. Yusufi, said they had been eager to work in Russia but were turned away at the border. They expressed dissatisfaction with their situation back in Tajikistan, where they are working menial jobs and accumulating debts. The three in Russia said a rise in street harassment and frequent police raids were making life there more difficult for migrants, a concern also raised by rights advocates. The trend has economic and security implications for both nations.

Russia's roughly 6 million migrant workers play a crucial role in keeping its wartime economy afloat. Labour shortages are fuelling wage growth and high inflation, and Central Asian states, including Tajikistan—a landlocked, heavily agricultural country with a history of Islamist violence—supply the bulk of that workforce. President Vladimir Putin said in February that Russia needed 2.5 million more workers to grow its economy, pointing to shortages in construction and manufacturing, sectors traditionally favoured by migrants. At the same time, nationalist politicians emboldened by the war in Ukraine and militant violence are ratcheting up rhetoric against foreigners and pushing legislation that impacts the lives of migrants working in Russia or those wanting to do so. Impoverished Tajikistan, for whom the export of labour to Russia is an economic lifeline, has criticised the changes. "We cannot but be alarmed by the trend of widespread violation of the fundamental rights and freedoms of our citizens," Tajik Prime Minister Qohir Rasulzoda told a meeting of Russian and Tajik officials in October, using unusually blunt language. Regional analysts warn that the combination of joblessness at home and no longer being wanted in Russia could ignite domestic political unrest and leave migrant workers more susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups.

Security analysts say dozens of Tajiks have joined a branch of Islamic State based in Afghanistan, which shares a border with Tajikistan. The group known as Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K) claimed the Crocus City Hall attack. "Having a lot of young men on your territory without a job ... risks that there will be dissatisfaction," said Temur Umarov, a fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center in Berlin. Beyond exporting migrants to Russia, Dushanbe "doesn't have a Plan B," he added. Tajikistan's foreign ministry, Russia's Federal Migration Service and its economy ministry did not respond to questions for this article. The Kremlin declined to comment. Pressure on migrants' immigration is an emotive issue in many countries and has played a prominent role in politics from Europe to the United States. Patriarch Kirill, head of Russia's Orthodox Church and a close ally of Putin, has repeatedly stated that large numbers of migrants pose an existential threat to Russia and its traditional values. Migrants, Kirill said recently, come from a different "historical experience" and adhere to "a different civilisational code." Since the Crocus City Hall attack, Russian lawmakers have put forward a raft of measures to increase restrictions on foreign workers and make it easier to deport them. Several Russian regions, including Moscow, have banned foreigners from working in sectors such as medicine, education or social services. The lower house of parliament, the Duma, is also considering proposals to expand the list of deportable offences to include hoiganism and disobeying police.

Russia deported 50% more migrants in the first half of 2024 - about 100,000 in total - than the same period in 2023, according to Alexander Gorovoy, an interior ministry official overseeing migration policy. The number of immigra-



tion-related workplace inspections jumped over two and a half times this year, Gorovoy told Kommersant newspaper in September. Farukh, a 32-year-old Tajik who has lived in Russia since he was a teenager, said he has never felt more unsafe there. "Whether or not your papers are OK, they can detain you for two to three days for checks. Some people have had their passports taken away. Many people are being deported ... with no explanation given," he told Reuters, speaking on condition that only his first name was used for fear of reprisals. Since arriving in Russia in 2011, Farukh said he had made enough money working on construction sites to bring his wife and children to join him and had become a Russian citizen. But earlier this year, he sent his family back to Tajikistan out of concern for their safety. "If it wasn't for my debt problems, I would have already left Russia," Farukh said. Employers say they need more migrants, not fewer. A recent survey by Russian job site hh.ru showed 53% of surveyed companies did not have enough foreign workers. The construction and service industries in particular rely heavily on such workers. Russian unemployment is at a record low of 2.3%, with labour shortages exacerbated by mobilisation for the Ukraine war and the exodus of hundreds of thousands of people since the 2022 invasion.

In November, one of Russia's top bankers, VTB CEO Andrei Kostin, said that without migrants the Russian economy would not be able to breathe. "It's easy to kick them out, but someone is needed to work," Kostin said. Economic Consequences In Tajikistan, the economic consequences of the squeeze are already being felt.

Last year, remittances from workers abroad accounted for more than a third of its GDP. Average monthly wages in Tajikistan are about a quarter of what they are in Russia. This year, the World Bank forecast Tajik economic growth would slow to 6.5% from 8.3% in 2023, citing the expected drop in remittances as one factor. Roughly 392,000 people left Tajikistan to work abroad between January and June - 16% fewer than in the same period last year - Tajik Labour, Migration and Employment Minister Gulnora Hasanzoda told reporters. Almost all of its migrants go to Russia. Tajik officials and some security experts say they fear the worsening economic outlook in the country could prove fertile ground for extremists.

Tajik President Emomali Rahmon warned in March of a rise in terrorist attacks by Tajiks abroad, saying 24 nationals had carried out attacks in 10 countries over the last three years. Security analysts have linked Tajik ISIS-K militants to deadly attacks at home, as well as in Turkey, Iran, the United States and Europe. Riccardo Valle, director of research at the Khorasan Diary, a non-partisan centre that reports on militancy in the region, says it is "just a matter of time" before a larger-scale attack occurs on Tajik soil. The Crocus attacks were "a watershed moment for Tajik supporters of the Islamic State," he told Reuters. "They know now that they're capable of carrying out such attacks." This year, Tajikistan expanded a campaign in which thousands of officials have fanned out across the country to visit homes and teach about the danger of recruitment by militants, one of the biggest and most public initiatives of its kind. In Khatlon, a southern region bordering Afghanistan, state employees visited some 213,000 families between January and November - nearly all households - officials said this month. "The number of young people who have joined religious extremist groups in our province is very high," regional head Davlatlali Said told reporters in August, without providing further details.

Back on the family farm, which is in Khatlon, Yusufi is pondering what to do. He doesn't lack for work there, where he tends the livestock and vegetable garden. But his parents' home needs repairs, and he knows he will never make as much money doing odd jobs around the village as he could earn in Russia. He is considering signing up for the army. At least there he can earn a steady wage, he said.

"I'll serve a year and come back, and then I can think about getting married."

## Six reasons to start chewing guava leaves every day

Guava leaves, often overshadowed by the fruit itself, are a powerhouse of health benefits. Packed with antioxidants, vitamins, and anti-inflammatory properties, they have been a part of traditional medicine for centuries. As more people turn to natural remedies for better health, guava leaves have gained recognition for their therapeutic potential. But what makes them so effective, and how can incorporating them into your routine contribute to overall wellbeing?

Key nutrients or compounds in guava leaves Kanikka Malhotra, consultant dietician and certified diabetes educator, says, "Guava leaves are a rich source of many important vitamins and bioactive compounds that also determine their importance in nutrition. They are one of the richest sources of vitamin C (roughly 103 mg per 100 g), which is beneficial for immune function and skin health, and vitamin B, beneficial for energy metabolism and cognitive health." In addition to vitamins, guava leaves are a good source of minerals such as calcium, potassium, magnesium, and iron. These nutrients play a role in bone health and the functioning of the cardiovascular system. "The leaves are rich in polyphenolic compounds such as quercetin, catechin, and gallic acid, which are well-known for their strong antioxidant properties that mitigate oxidative stress and inflammation. Antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties of these compounds further typify guava leaves as a beneficial food for overall good health," says Malhotra. Guava leaves can lower bad cholesterol (LDL) while raising good cholesterol (HDL), thus promoting cardiovascular health and reducing heart disease risks. Guava leaves can lower bad cholesterol (LDL) while raising good cholesterol (HDL), thus promoting cardiovascular health and reducing heart disease risks. (Source: Freepik) Six benefits of chewing guava leaves every day Chewing guava leaves daily can provide numerous health benefits due to their rich nutrient profile and medicinal properties. Here are six key benefits as stated by Malhotra: Guava leaves possess antibacterial properties



and high fibre content, which promote gut health, relieve constipation, and enhance overall digestion. These leaves help stabilise blood glucose levels, making them beneficial for individuals with diabetes or those at risk, by preventing significant spikes in blood sugar after meals. Guava leaves strengthen the immune system, helping the body fight infections and diseases more effectively with its high antioxidants and vitamin C levels. Guava leaves can lower bad cholesterol (LDL) while raising good cholesterol (HDL), thus promoting cardiovascular health and reducing heart disease risks. The antioxidants in guava leaves may help neutralise free radicals, potentially reducing the risk of cancer by preventing cellular damage. Guava leaves have been shown to alleviate menstrual cramps more effectively than some conventional painkillers, providing natural relief for women experiencing dysmenorrhea. Precautions Before integrating guava leaves into your daily diet, it is important to consider several precautions. Malhotra notes, "First, moderation is essential. Because guava leaves contain a lot of fibre, eating too many of them can cause digestive problems including bloating, gas, or diarrhoea. It is best to begin with modest dosages and raise them gradually as tolerated. Guava leaves can also cause allergic reactions in certain people, especially in those who are sensitive to tropical fruits."

## Rashmika Mandanna lauds Animal director Sandeep Reddy Vanga and Pushpa 2 director Sukumar: 'They don't look at women as creatures who need help'



a powerful light. Recently, while talking to Siddharth Kannan, Rashmika explained how both Sandeep Reddy Vanga and Sukumar project women in a strong way.

Talking about working with them, Rashmika said, "What I have seen in Sandeep Reddy Vanga and Sukumar sir is their utmost respect towards a woman. They don't look at women as creatures who need help, they think that women are powerful. It comes through their craft, you see Geetanjali or Srivalli, both of these characters know that Ranvijay or Pushpa are killing 200 people out there, but still, they have the guts to stand up against them when they make a mistake. Voicing that up takes courage, Vanga and Sukumar think that a woman standing up against a man who can kill 200 people is possible because of their respect towards women."

Rashmika further explained, "If you go to the depth of it you will see the love and respect they have for women, that's how I was seeing it and portrayed it. That just came across through my character, because I have also done characters where I needed help, I needed to be saved, I will do those characters also. But these characters show a woman through a director's eyes, so it's an honour to be directed by them." Rashmika Mandanna also discussed if she can now count Allu Arjun, Ranbir Kapoor, and Vijay Deverakonda as friends. Responding to this, the actress explained, "One thing I have learned in life is, that everyone has their battles to fight, so don't be another battle for them to fight with. I don't want to be a battle in their life, but rather a good experience. When I work with my co-stars, I know that I will always have their back, and be their friend. And any of my co-stars today, if I pick up the phone and say I need them I know they got my back. That's the kind of relationship I have with them."

Rashmika Mandanna's latest film Pushpa 2: The Rule is amongst the highest grossers in Indian cinema. While the actress has also been dwelling on the film's success, she holds director Sukumar in high regard for her portrayal of Srivalli in the film. While Rashmika has played characters who have untold strength and resilience, she feels honored to have worked with directors who see women in such

## When Shah Rukh Khan lost a bet to Atlee over which Jawan character will be 'mass': 'He said girls like me, Azad will be...'

Actor Shah Rukh Khan, who went on a hiatus for nearly five years after 2018 film Zero, made the entire waiting period worth it for his fans with his two powerful films, Pathaan and Jawan. While, Pathaan collected a total of Rs 1055 crore post its release in 2023, his film Jawan went a step ahead and collected Rs 1160 crore during its run in the second half of the year. In Jawan, Shah Rukh Khan played double role—father Vikram Rathore and son Azad. In a recent interview, Atlee revealed he had a bet with the superstar about which of his characters from Jawan will be the mass hero. While Atlee claimed Vikram Rathore will become people's favourite, Shah Rukh Khan believed his girl fans will be fond of his younger character Azad.

Atlee told Pinkvilla, "When I was discussing Jawan with Shah Rukh Khan, I told him, 'Sir, you wait and watch, Vikram Rathore is going to become a mass character.' He just looked at me and said, 'No, sir. Girls like me, Azad will be the mass hero.' We both bet on it. Soon after he watched the film, he turned to me and said, 'Boss, you were right.' Shah Rukh Khan's Vikram Rathore sported a salt and pepper look. The character entered in the second half of the movie and became an instant hit with the actor's fans as it was the first time when he sported such look. In an



earlier interview, Shah Rukh Khan had shared how with films like Jawan and Dunki he did age-honest roles. "I am 58 now, and I feel I should do age-centric roles now. Jawan was more like a commercial, 'in-your-face' kind of character.

## Laapataa Ladies out of Oscars 2025 race, Aamir Khan Productions reacts: 'This is not the end...'

Hours after Laapataa Ladies was not shortlisted for the Academy Awards, the makers of the film, Aamir Khan Productions, shared a statement, expressing disappointment. In a long statement, the production house also expressed their gratefulness to FFI jury for considering them. In a statement they wrote, "Laapataa Ladies (Lost Ladies) did not make it to the Academy Awards shortlist this year, and we are of course disappointed, but equally we are immensely grateful for the incredible support and belief we've received throughout this journey." They added, "We at Aamir Khan Productions, Jio Studios and Kindling Productions extend our gratitude to the Academy members and the FFI jury for considering our film. To be included in this prestigious process alongside some of the finest films from across the world is an honor in itself. Our heartfelt thanks to all the audiences around the world who have expressed their love and support for our film." The team also congratulated the other 15 films that were shortlisted. The Academy Awards shared the shortlisted films in 10 categories on Wednesday. In the International Feature Film, the organisation announced films from Brazil – I'm Still Here, Canada – Universal Language, Czech Republic – Waves, Denmark – The Girl with the Needle, France – Emilia Pérez, Germany – The Seed of the Sacred Fig, Iceland – Touch, Ireland – Kneecap, Italy – Vermiglio, Latvia – Flow, Norway – Armand, Palestine – From Ground Zero, Senegal – Dahomey, Thailand – How to Make Millions before Grandma Dies, United Kingdom – Santosh. The only hope for India in this year's Oscars lies in Guneet Monga's Live Action Short Film, Anuja. Concluding their note, AKP wrote, "For us, this is not the end but a step forward. We remain committed to bringing more powerful stories to life and sharing them with the



world." Laapataa Ladies, promotes as Lost Ladies for the Oscars, is directed by Aamir Khan's ex-wife, Kiran Rao. The film marked the return of Kiran Rao as a director for the second time after over a decade. The nominations for Oscars 2025 will be announced on January 17. The nominations voting will begin on January 8 and conclude on January 12. The 97th Oscars will be held on Sunday, March 2, 2025, at the Dolby Theatre at Ovation Hollywood.

## Shahid Kapoor and Vishal Bhardwaj to collaborate again, film set to release in December 2025

Sajid Nadiadwala. Image- Bollywood Prime The producer is gearing up for an exciting year ahead. Actor Shahid Kapoor and filmmaker Vishal Bhardwaj are all set to collaborate again for an action thriller, it was announced Wednesday. The film will be produced by Sajid Nadiadwala and will release next year. The reunion of Shahid Kapoor and Vishal Bhardwaj is particularly exciting, as their previous collaborations have yielded critically acclaimed films such as Haider and Kaminye that blend strong narratives with compelling performances.

The untitled film, which features an impressive cast including Triptii Dimri, Nana Patekar, and Randeep Hooda, is expected to be a commercial entertainer. Scheduled for release on December 5, 2025, the shooting set to begin on January 6.



## Sameer Wankhede addresses Aryan Khan case, calls Shah Rukh's Jawan dialogues 'cheap, third rate': 'Smallest case of my career'



The month October in 2021 was one of the toughest phase for superstar Shah Rukh Khan after his son Aryan Khan was detained as part of an investigation into an alleged international drugs racket. The star kid spent about 25 days at the Mumbai Central Prison and was denied bail four times until he was granted one on 28 October, 2021. In May, 2022, he was cleared of all charges. While Shah Rukh and Aryan, constantly made headlines, another person who stayed in the limelight was Sameer Wankhede. He was the Zonal Director of the Narcotics Control Bureau at the time of investigation.

He was accused of alleged financial and procedural irregularities. Now, the IRS officer has opened up about the incident, refusing to give any importance to the case or the people involved in it. In a conversation with Gaurav Thakur, Sameer reacted to the accusations that he only targets

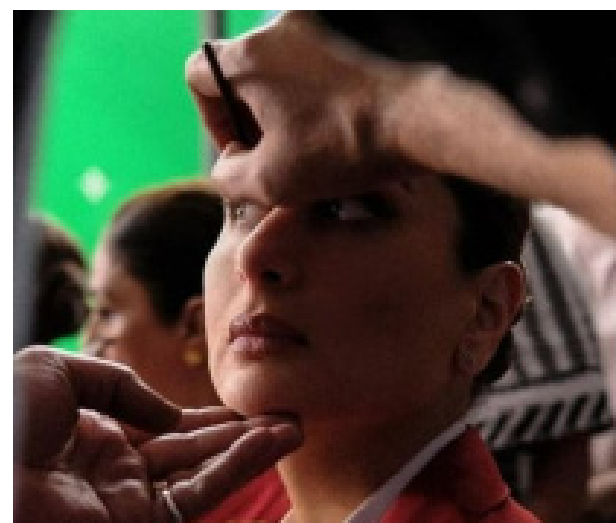
celebrities. He said, "I don't believe in the word 'celebrity', both personally and professionally. People see me as someone, who only gets hold of so-called celebrities, but they are not the only people I have handled. There are other 3400 cases that I have dealt with, those don't make it to the limelight because those people don't have face value or the charm to become headlines. I only did my duty. It's not my fault if people write headlines around certain people."

Speaking about the Shah Rukh Khan case, Sameer disagreed that it was the elephant in the room. He said, "I don't agree that it is the 'elephant in the room', I would rather think it as one of the smallest cases of my career—a micro-organism in the room. I don't want to give it so much importance, or waste my time talking about it. The matter is currently in the court and I don't want to comment on it. I just want to say, neither am I scared of anything, nor am I hiding anything. The only reason I avoid talking about it is because I have given an affidavit in the court that I will not speak about the case. There is a lot to share and talk, but there is a code of conduct, due to which I can't discuss. Once the court will pass its verdict, I will surely speak about it in detail." After the incident in 2021 and clean chit to Aryan Khan in 2022, Shah Rukh Khan starred in two big movies in 2023, Pathaan and Jawan. A dialogue from the latter became a headline in itself. It was speculated that it was a dig at the officer. The dialogue was: "Bete ko hath lagane se pehle, baap se baat kar (Before touching the son, deal with the father)". During the investigation, there were also reports of certain chats of SRK leaking online where he was allegedly requesting to quash the case against his son. To this, Sameer quickly responded, "I don't want to take names and make them famous. As far as the leaked chats are concerned, I will repeat myself that I am not allowed to comment on it. Whatever dialogue is seemingly used against me... with the words, baap, beta, they sound extremely cheap and third rated. We don't use such words in a cultured society. These are simply roadside dialogues. I don't expect myself to give importance to such things and react."

## 'Women actors can become aroused if a male hair stylist touches their neck': Nikkhil Advani reveals bizarre Bollywood logic

Filmmaker Nikkhil Advani shared an anecdote about the ingrained misogyny of the film industry, and said that there is a reason why women are hired as makeup artists on films, but not in the hair department. He also revealed that while tabulating the budgets for a recent project, he was shocked to learn that there are only nine jobs out of around 170 that are deemed fit for women. Nikkhil appeared alongside several of his peers on the O Womaniya panel, spearheaded by Prime Video, Film Companion Studios, and Ormax Media. Nikkhil said that he was studying budget-related documents for a project recently, and was shocked at the discoveries that he made. "In your line items, there are 169 line items, above the line and below the line. Do you know how many are considered relevant jobs for women? Take a guess. Nine. Nine are relevant jobs for women. Everything else is considered unsuitable for women," he said.

When a co-panelist pointed out that women are now being hired in departments other than hair, makeup and wardrobe, Nikkhil raised his hand and said, "I have a great hair-makeup story." He continued, "I'll tell you why there is a hair didi and a makeup dada. Because when a man touches (the back of a woman's neck) there are sexual things that are aroused. That's why there is a hair dada and a makeup didi. The union did not allow this!" When co-panelist Richa Chadha expressed shock and asked Nikkhil to explain, he continued, "You will not be aroused if a woman touches your hair! That's the logic. I was like, 'What?' When we started working with Mickey Contractor, we had to get



him to hire a woman. But suppose there was someone from the union there, the hair didi had to stand quickly." Nikkhil said that "there are more intelligent people" working in the streaming industry than there are in the theatrical industry. "This is a blanket statement. There are more interesting filmmakers, storytellers, writers, and they are thinking about things other than just the box office... This is just tokenism, that there are 15% women on crews..."

## Radhika Apte talks about her 'shocking' pregnancy, says she struggled to embrace how she looked: 'Never seen myself put on so much weight'

Radhika Apte, who keeps her private life away from the limelight, surprised many when she walked the BFI London Film Festival red carpet, flaunting her baby bump. Her pictures in a black gown from the film festival surfaced all over the internet as she had not ever officially announced her pregnancy. Now, the actress has shared a series of photos from her pregnancy days.

The actress, who posed for Vogue, shared details about her unexpected pregnancy and how she didn't enjoy the entire process, as it was a tough journey. Talking about her pregnancy, Radhika said, "I started telling people the very next day. It's such a stupid story, really. I don't want to make it public, but let's just say it's funny how it happened—it wasn't an accident, but we also weren't trying. And it still came as a shock." Like many new moms, Radhika too had her doubts and didn't like the way she looked. "I did this photo shoot a week before giving birth. Truth is, I struggled to embrace how I looked at the time. I had never seen myself put on so much weight. My body was swollen, I had shooting pains in my pelvis, and the lack of sleep had skewed my perspective on everything. Now, not even two weeks into motherhood, my body looks different again."

The actress, however, has finally accepted the change in her body. "There are new challenges, new discoveries, and a different perspective has set in. I look at these photos with much kinder eyes and feel bad for being so hard on myself. Now, I can see only beauty in these changes, and I know I will cherish these photos forever." Explaining why her pregnancy came as a shock to her, Radhika shared, "I think it's easier when people know whether they want a child or not. In our case, neither of us wanted kids, but there was this one per cent curiosity about what it would be like. Then, when this happened, we wondered whether to even go ahead."

Speaking about going through tough experiences, Radhika said, "Most women I know have had tough pregnancies, and honestly, it's like menopause or your period—those hormones are no joke. But while we openly talk about how awful periods and menopause are, pregnancy gets this



whole glow treatment. Sure, giving birth is amazing, but no one talks about the tough parts, and I find that absurd." Radhika plans to stay in London until February before moving back to India to resume work. Previously, speaking to Times of India, Radhika shared how people often ignore the hard part, attaching pregnancy to sacredness. She said, "Pregnancy is very hard, and bodies constantly go through very big changes."

Calling her journey hard, Radhika shared that it was extremely hard to prepare herself psychologically and physically. Speaking about her first trimester, Radhika revealed, she had terrible bloating, constipation, nausea, while she was also shooting at 40 degrees for three months straight. "I was having a meltdown all the time." Radhika shared she wanted punch people who advised her to stay happy because she was having a child. "I am telling you that I am suffering, and you are telling me to be happy." Radhika recently shared a photo of her newborn on her Instagram. The actress is yet to reveal the gender of her child.

## How Ashwin remained a committed cricketer and a team man till his sudden and surprising exit



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

R Ashwin stood at the end of the corridor outside the press conference room after the rain-impacted third Test had ended in a draw. Captain Rohit Sharma was walking just ahead of him, gesturing to the waiting journalists. "Sab pata chalega abhi, milega! The Indian captain would say that with a laugh, perhaps in reference to the buzz in the press box and social media about the possible retirement of a "big player".

Behind Rohit, Ashwin seemed to be calming himself before his big announcement. He took a deep breath, composed himself and entered the press conference room. Just a short while back, he had been enveloped with an emotional hug by Virat Kohli. Ashwin would remarkably try his best to shrug-off the emotions as he sat next to Rohit in front of cameras. He was also being witty. Then the penny dropped when he said "this is my last day ... I had a lot of fun. I must say I've created a lot of memories alongside Rohit and several of my other teammates, even though I've lost some of them over the last few years. We are the last bunch of the OGs." He added that he won't be taking questions as he was too emotional now to handle that load. Rohit would talk about how he first knew about Ashwin's mind space when he landed in Perth on the third day of that first Test. On the first day of that Test, just before lunch break when the Indian top order was wobbling, Ashwin had already hit the indoor nets, bowling away. Over the next couple of days, it became a regular occurrence. On a couple of times, there was not even a support staff with him, as he kept whirring away at the nets. Thud, thud ... one would hear the sounds of his spiked shoes walking down a stairway and enter the indoor nets space. All along then, as Rohit would reveal on Wednesday, he had been contemplating retirement. Still, there was a burning desire to work on his craft. He might be celebrated for his cerebral art but Ashwin is an emotional cricketer. He once revealed to this newspaper about how a stray remark by his father about his trait to speak his mind "screwing him in his career", made him retreat to a room and weep.

Unable to handle the flood of emotions, he would eventually get counseling from a therapist. Of late, he said that he is in a "happy space" and trying to gather as many "moments to remember" rather than stress a lot about little stuff. That happy space, or at least some sort of peace, would pop up now and then in Australia. On the fourth day's play when Ravindra Jadeja, the man who replaced him in this

Brisbane Test, was about to enter the tunnel through to the dressing room, Ashwin lunged across from the dug-out that's in the outside space, to pat him on the back and give him a wholesome smile. On the final morning, Ashwin and Australia's Nathan Lyon chatted for a long while a short distance away from the pitch. Two celebrated off spinners, two men with more than thousand Test wickets between them – at 537, Ashwin has four more than Lyon – would have a nice animated discussion. Ashwin then walked across towards the warm-up area where Jasprit Bumrah patted his back. In Adelaide, where Rohit Sharma told him he would play, he sweated a lot in the nets again. On the day before the game at the nets, he had a long chat with Gautam Gambhir and the way he then went to bat, all purpose and intensity, made it feel that he was going to play the next day. People who know him closely say how he acquired information about Adelaide pitch of recent vintage, and watched highlights of those first-class games. On the morning of the game, he was seen pressing the pitch with his fingers, walking along the length of the pitch. Later in the day, he was seen testing the direction of the breeze, letting tufts of grass fly, an act that Jasprit Bumrah, another perfectionist, too does on nearly every match day. In that game, Ashwin ran in almost solely front-on, loaded up just up to the shoulder. This was different from his other approach of taking it further back or higher, and use the breeze to keep drifting the ball into the left-handers and away from the right-handed batsmen. He got the wicket of Mitch Marsh with one such delivery. A sign of a bowler who had sussed out what to do on a pitch not responsive to spin, and how to make use of the breeze instead to do his job.

Couple of days before the Brisbane Test, his last day at the outdoor nets, he bowled a bit and didn't bat. Gambhir came across for a long chat, and Ashwin padded up to bat. Gambhir gave him throw downs, and the bowling coach, former South African fast bowler Morkel fired several balls that kicked up chest and face-high at Ashwin from 17 yards. Ashwin hopped to pat them down, his last cricketing activity as an India player. As he left the media room after his announcement to retire, Rohit was asked why this decision was taken in the middle of the series and he said some empty words about how Ashwin's decision should be respected. That may be so, but with two Tests still left, and particularly when the final game is in Sydney where conditions can at times even allow two spinners or at least provide the scope for the best spinner in the squad to play, this has been an odd decision. Particularly when the best spinner in the Indian squad, not just by reputation but even in how all three of them have bowled thus far in these three Test matches, is R Ashwin. His decision and management's inability to convince him to rethink does give an odd whiff to the entire episode. On the final day of the Brisbane Test, sometime in the late afternoon when India were trying to avoid the follow-on, Yashasvi Jaiswal stood just outside the dugout with a ball, mimicking Ashwin's bowling action. Ashwin smiled, asked for the ball, and kept going through his bowling action without releasing the ball. For a long while, his eyes were fixed on the action in the middle, but the right arm that has won innumerable games for India kept ripping out imaginary off breaks.

## Ravichandran Ashwin's greatest feat: Being a consistent match-winner in Test cricket

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

India's premier off-spinner R Ashwin on Wednesday surprised the cricketing world by announcing his retirement with immediate effect in the middle of the Test series against Australia. (PTI) India's premier off-spinner R Ashwin on Wednesday surprised the cricketing world by announcing his retirement with immediate effect in the middle of the Test series against Australia. In the grand lineage of India's spinners, Ravichandran Ashwin would inhabit a rarified space, a space unto himself. There have been wizards and magicians, artists and artisans, but few explored the craft with the fervour of a scientist, driven by an unflinching passion to locate its deepest meaning. So much so that it seemed Ashwin bowled not so much to pick wickets as to reach one step closer to understanding the soul of spin bowling, a dutiful pilgrimage.

The outcome of the spiritual quest was exemplary. He nabbed 537 wickets in Tests, only behind Anil Kumble as his country's highest wicket-taker, with the most player of the series awards in Tests, with the second most five-wicket hauls in an innings. The average (24) and strike rate (50) are the finest by any Indian spinner of any era, the numbers clearly asserting that he was one of India's greatest match-winners in the longest format. Not to discount the six hundreds and 14 half-centuries sprinkled with glorious cover drives, but Ashwin the match-winning spinner towers above the all the other accompanying faces of his. Ravichandran Ashwin announced his international retirement in Brisbane. Ravichandran Ashwin announced his international retirement in Brisbane on Wednesday.

He was arguably the most complete off-spinner India has produced, one who combined classicism with neo-classicism, one who blended old-fashioned virtues



with post-modern devilry. He stood in the past, yet leapt and embraced the future. His bowling enthralled the connoisseurs — he produced delightful drift, conjured dramatic drop and coaxed immense side-spin, but he also flicked the ball with his index finger, reverse flicked the ball too, experimented with his action and release points, bowled seam-up and the occasional leg-break. He unpeeled the different layers of spin-bowling, he dishevelled the different plans of batsmen.

He bowled to the best and removed the best — Kane Williamson, Joe Root and Steve Smith. He was a left-hander's unflinching kryptonite. Among his bunnies were Ben Stokes (12), David Warner (11), Alastair Cook (9) and famously ejected Kumar Sangakkara four times in the space of 23 balls in the Sri Lankan's farewell series. He was a nod to every variety of the spinner India had produced. He was as classical as the fabled quartet, as studious as Anil Kumble and as sprightly as Harbhajan Singh. There was magic, artistry, grit and artisanship. But at the heart of it was a quest to find the deepest meaning and purpose of spin bowling.

happens. "So, there's no way we want to take that chance. Unless we are not 100%, 200% sure, we are not going to take any risk," he added.

The 34-year-old Shami, who last played for India in the ODI World Cup final in November 2023, was forced into the long layoff due to an ankle injury that needed surgery. Just before his much-anticipated comeback against New Zealand, he developed swelling in the knee, delaying his return. Rohit said the door remains open for Shami if he is completely fit. "Like I said in the last press conference, the door is open. If those guys at the NCA feel that he is okay to go and recover and play, we'll be happy to have him," said Rohit. Last week a BCCI official had told PTI that Shami himself feels he is not ready to take the rigours of red ball cricket right now. "The swelling seems to come and go.



## Harbhajan Singh on R Ashwin's retirement: 'It was bit surprising'



With a total of 537 wickets in Test matches for India, Ravichandran Ashwin stands only second in the most wickets list for India in Test cricket only behind Indian legend Anil Kumble with 619 wickets. As the 38-year-old announced his retirement from international cricket after the third Test in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, former Indian spinner Harbhajan Singh too was present at the Gabba. Singh, who is fourth in the most wickets list for India in Test cricket with 417 wickets, showered his praise on Ashwin post the end of the Test match at Brisbane. "Well obviously, it was a bit of surprising news for me that suddenly Ravichandran Ashwin retires not only from Test cricket but from across the formats. I think a big news. Of course, a big news, of course a top bowler. A legend who has done well for India.

And taken many wickets for India. Won a lot of games for India. I got to wish him all the luck for his new chapter, whatever he will do, he will do his best. So wish him all the luck," Harbhajan told Star Sports.

Congratulations @ashwinravi99 on a phenomenal cricket career. Your ambition as a test cricketer was admirable. Well done for being the flag bearer of Indian spin for more than a decade. Be very proud of your achievements and hopefully see you more often now. During his 13-year-old Test career, which started against West Indies at Delhi in 2011, Ashwin picked up 537 wickets at an average of 24 and at a strike rate of 50.7. Ashwin stands as the seventh-highest wicket taker in Test match history and is currently the highest wicket-taking off-spinner in Tests. Australian off-spinner Nathan Lyon stands as the eighth-highest wicket taker in Test match history currently with a total of 533 wickets and is expected to cross Ashwin's tally. The Australian off-spinner termed Ashwin as 'the best spinner of our era'. "Shocked. I think Ashwin has been someone who we all looked up to in bowling. While this fellow here (Pointing to Harbhajan) Bowling off-breaks. He has been incredible for our craft. And he has been able to do that all around the world. So bit of shock news. But all I can say is thank you to Ravi for what he has brought to the game of cricket. He has been a fierce competitor. Someone whom I loved competing against. He has been arguably the best spinner of our era," Lyon told Star Sports.

## Gautam Gambhir's tribute to retiring R Ashwin: 'Generation of players will become bowlers because of you'



GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Ravichandran Ashwin called time on his career on Wednesday after the third India vs Australia Test at the Gabba ended in a draw, thanks to better conditions in Brisbane. Ashwin made the announcement after the third Test at Gabba ended in a draw with rain and bad light making play impossible. The five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy is now level at 1-1. After the brief announcement, tributes poured in for the spinner, including from Virat Kohli

and Rohit Sharma. India coach Gautam Gambhir paid rich tribute to Ashwin on X. "The privilege of seeing you grow from a young bowler to a legend of modern cricket is something that I wouldn't trade for the world! I know that generations of bowlers to come will say that I became a bowler because of Ashwin! You will be missed brother," wrote Gambhir. Ashwin who made his Test debut in November 2011, sat next to Rohit Sharma at the post-match press conference and said: "This will be my last year as an Indian cricketer in all formats. I do feel there's a bit of months left in me as a cricketer, but I would like to expose and probably showcase that in club-level cricket, but this will be the last day." Rohit said Ashwin was a "very witty guy, funny guy". "Whenever we had crises, we looked up to Ash and he was there to deliver for us. He has been a great servant, he probably hasn't left any stone unturned." Ashwin's career stats read: 537 wickets in Tests, which put him only behind Anil Kumble as his country's highest wicket-taker. Ashwin had the most player of the series awards in Tests and the second most five-wicket hauls in an innings. His average (24) and strike rate (50) are the finest by any Indian spinner of any era. He also posted six hundreds and 14 half-centuries.

## What made Ravichandran Ashwin retire in the middle of the Border-Gavaskar series?

The decision from Ravichandran Ashwin to announce retirement may have come out of the blue, but it was a move that had been long coming. The talk first surfaced during the last Border-Gavaskar Trophy at home in 2023, but when another showdown came calling, Ashwin seems to have made up his mind particularly because of his knee that has been causing trouble of late.

It is understood that even before Ashwin boarded the flight to Australia for the Test series he informed his family that he is contemplating retirement from international cricket. While no decision was made then, he was told by his family to think it through and Ashwin is learnt to have informed that he would take a call after how it goes in Australia. And on Tuesday night, he informed his family that December 18 would be his last day in international cricket. As skipper Rohit Sharma said when he landed in Perth, Ashwin had a long conversation about quitting before playing the second Test at Adelaide. He was also in contention to play the Brisbane Test, but Ravindra Jadeja was preferred. It is understood that at the Gabba, Ashwin informed each player separately about his decision to quit in the middle of the series, which was received with shock. Though Ashwin stood a chance of playing at Melbourne and Sydney, the decision also seems to have been taken keeping in mind where the team is headed at the moment. Jadeja had a good outing at Brisbane and in Washington Sundar, India have another off-spinner who seems ready to take over from Ashwin, although he is entirely different.



Couple of years left in him at 38, when the Test season began with the home series against Bangladesh — where he picked up the Man of the Series award — Ashwin still seemed to have at least a couple of years left in him. But with India not having any immediate red-ball commitments and not being a sure starter overseas and his knee continuing to trouble, Ashwin decided to call it a day a good 18 months after considering retirement for the first time. Ashwin is scheduled to return home on Thursday and as he revealed there is a strong chance he would still play in domestic tournaments. In the past he has revealed that winning the Ranji Trophy is a dream waiting to be fulfilled and with Tamil Nadu still in the hunt for play-offs, there is a chance he could don the whites. If not the IPL, where he would rejoin the Chennai Super Kings, could well turn out to be the grand farewell.

## Border-Gavaskar Trophy: Rohit Sharma says 'high time somebody at NCA gave update' on Mohammed Shami's fitness

GNS News Agency, Dec 20

Mohammed Shami Bengal Bengal's Mohammed Shami during the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy 2024-25 quarterfinal match between Baroda and Bengal, in Bengaluru, Karnataka, Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024. Baroda won the match by 41 runs. Days after claiming that Mohammed Shami had a 'swelling in his knee' and the team management wanted to be 'very careful' with his return, India captain Rohit Sharma said it is 'high time somebody at the NCA (National Cricket Academy) gave an update on the pacer. After the third Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy ended in a draw, leaving the series finely poised at 1-1 heading into the last two matches, Rohit was asked if Shami would fly down for the Melbourne and Sydney Tests. He replied: "I think it's high time somebody at the NCA gave an update on Shami. That's where he is rehabbing. Those guys need to give us an update." Shami had recently travelled to Bengaluru for a fitness test. After the Adelaide Test, Rohit had said: "We are just monitoring him because while playing Syed Mushtaq Ali, he got some swelling in his knee, which hampers his preparation to come and play a Test match. We want to be very careful, we don't want to bring him here, he pulls up sore or something happens." Earlier



this month, sources had told The Indian Express that the Board of Control for Cricket in India is awaiting NCA's nod to fly the pacer to Australia for the remainder of the series. The senior selection committee, officials said, was awaiting the latest fitness test results from NCA for his inclusion in the Test squad. It is understood that Shami's clothing and visa are ready and once declared fit, he will fly to Australia at the earliest. Shami, who last featured in a Test during India's World Test Championship final defeat to Australia in June 2023,