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Swiggy annual food trends: Hyderabadis order staggering 1.57 crore biryanis in 2024!

Hyderabad: Biryani continues to reign supreme in the hearts of Hyderabadis! In the year 2024, Hyderabadis ordered a staggering 1.57 crore biryanis, the annual food trends report of Swiggy released on Tuesday, said. The annual food trend, 'How India Swiggy'd indicated that 34 biryanis were ordered every minute in Hyderabad. Chicken biryani was the most sought after with 97.21 lakh plates ordered, translating to 21 chicken biryanis every minute through the year. A Hyderabad food lover spent Rs 18,840 to order 60 biryanis on one go and first-time Swiggy users embraced the dish by ordering 4,46,000 chicken biryanis in the year, the report said.

Allu Arjun leaves Chikkadpally PS after over three and half hours of questioning



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

Hyderabad: After over three and half hours of questioning, Tollywood actor Allu Arjun left the Chikkadpally police station here on Tuesday. Allu Arjun who reached the police station at 11.05 am reportedly faced a volley of questions on incidents that led to stampede during screening of 'Pusha 2: The Rule' movie at Sandhya Theatre and death of 35-year-old woman Revathi, leaving her son injured. The actor, who was accompanied by his legal team, left the police station at 2.48 pm. Earlier in the day, the National Award winning actor arrived amidst heavy media attention. The actor was accompanied by his father Allu Arvind and father-in-law Chandrashekar Reddy. Meanwhile, Ashok Nagar has been heavily fortified with heavy police deployment at the police station. The roads leading for police station have also been barricaded, causing a lot of inconvenience to residents.

Allu Arjun's Bouncer Arrested in Sandhya Theatre Stampede Case

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

Hyderabad: A development has occurred in the ongoing investigation into the Sandhya Theatre stampede case. Chikkadpally police have arrested Allu Arjun's personal bouncer, Antony, in connection with the incident. Authorities suspect that Antony may have played a key role in triggering the chaos that led to the stampede. Allu Arjun, who had already been named as A11 in the case, was previously arrested and later released on interim bail. The case continues to unfold, with fresh developments emerging each day. On December 24, Allu Arjun appeared for questioning at the Chikkadpally Police Station after receiving notices from the police the previous day. The inquiry was conducted under the supervision of Central Zone DCP, with ACP Ramesh Kumar and CI Raju leading the investigation. Allu Arjun was questioned for nearly two and a half hours, with his lawyer Ashok Reddy present during the session. Once the inquiry and paperwork were completed, the actor was expected to leave the police station. The case remains under investigation, with further action likely depending on the outcomes of the ongoing proceedings.

KTR questions Congress government over farmer neglect, diversion tactics



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

Hyderabad: BRS working president KT Rama Rao launched a broadside at the Congress government, for abandoning farmers, leading to farm distress in Telangana. He criticised the government for failing to purchase paddy effectively, leaving farmers with unsold produce despite producing 1.53 crore metric tonnes during the Vaanakalam (rainy) season.

"Only 46 lakh metric tonnes were purchased, far short of expectations, after denying to procurement of coarse variety and imposing numerous conditions for purchasing fine variety paddy. The promised Rs 500 bonus per quintal was unmet, with only Rs 530 crore disbursed under stringent conditions," he said, in a series of posts on X on Tuesday.

Pointing out that due to the Congress government's failure to implement Rythu Bharosa and procure paddy, Rama Rao said the farmers were deprived Rs 26,000 crore. In sharp contrast, farmers had not only received Rythu Bandhu farm investment support, but also were assured for procuring their paddy directly from their fields.

The BRS working president also lambasted the government for its failures, listing issues such as power cuts, riots, lies, deceit, political vendetta, anarchy and administrative chaos. "What is left in Telangana except demolitions, debts, and diversions?" he asked, calling for immediate action to address farmers' grievances.

Revanth govt blazes new trails for welfare, devpt in Telangana

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

Hyderabad: A gain stall odds, Telangana state is witnessing a big change with the fulfillment of promises made to people. The people's government completed one year in office on December 7 and is moving forward to achieve many milestones in the second year of its governance. The youngest state of Telangana is standing as a role model for the country by adopting democratic governance. From the first day of assuming power, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has been busy conducting reviews and meetings to achieve inclusive development in all sectors.

The CM has adopted a new approach to propagate Telangana culture by introducing a new state song, Telangana Thalli statue and



new state emblem. In the midst of strong opposition from the opposition parties, the Chief Minister unveiled the Telangana Thalli statue with a new design officially on December 9. The new Telangana song penned by famous poet Andesi has emerged as a popular song. The removal of Kakatiya Kala Thoranam and Charminar from the state emblem of the Road Transport department gave enough indication that the

government will unveil a new emblem soon. On the development front, apart from implementing the Six Guarantees, the state government has introduced 160 innovative programmes in the last one year. The CM conveyed the ideas and has been overseeing their implementation on a daily basis, aiming for people's welfare and development of the state. The free bus travel introduced under "Maha Lakshmi" scheme has

proved to be a hit with girls and women of all age groups. The Chief Minister's efforts to transform Telangana as the Future State and Hyderabad as the Future City has yielded results in the first year itself. The State is attracting huge investments which help in generating more employment opportunities. The people's government fulfilled the aspirations of lakhs of unemployed people by filling up 55,143 government jobs in the first year. As a result, the unemployment rate in Telangana has decreased. The Labour Force Survey conducted by the Central Statistics department at the national level disclosed that the unemployment rate which was 22.9 per cent from July to September last year got reduced to 18.1 per cent from July to September this year.

Congress Working Committee's Belgavi meet to take up 'insult' to Ambedkar legacy

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

The Congress on Tuesday (December 24, 2024) alleged that just like how Prime Minister Narendra Modi bowed on the steps of the old Parliament building in 2014 only to abandon it in favour of a new building, this year he placed his head on the original Constitution so that a new one could be brought in. Stepping up its campaign against the BJP over Home Minister Amit Shah's remark that it had become a "fashion" to take Babasaheb Ambedkar's name, the Congress Working Committee (CWC), scheduled to meet in Karnataka's Belgavi (earlier Belgam) on December 26, is likely to take up the "insult" to Ambedkar's legacy.

The extended meeting of the CWC, being held to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's presidency of the Congress, will be called NavSatyagraha. Weaving in Ambedkar into the party's future course of politics, the party's public rally on December 27 has been named Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan. The party's move seems to be a counter to the BJP's allegation that it has historically insulted Ambedkar during his lifetime. Addressing a joint press conference along with All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary in-charge (communications) Jairam Ramesh and publicity department head Pawan Khera, AICC general secretary (organisation) K. C. Venugopal said the event at Belgavi would be a historic one.

"The CWC meeting will discuss an action plan and programme for the Indian National Congress for the next year and adopt two resolutions. The meeting will deliberate upon the critical challenges facing the nation under the BJP rule, including economic inequality, erosion of democracy and attack on Constitutional institutions," Mr. Venugopal said. Mr. Ramesh said that just as the Udaipur brainstorming conclave in 2022 led to the Bharat Jodo Yatra, the Belgavi meeting was also expected to come up with an action plan to protect the values of the Constitution.

"Ten years ago, when Narendra Modi ji became the

Amit Shah stresses on using technology, reviews implementation of new criminal laws



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

New Delhi: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday emphasised on the use of technology in crime control and called for a system with generation of alerts at pre-defined stages and timelines right from registration to disposal of the case for speedy investigation.

While chairing a review meeting on the implementation of three new criminal laws with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), he stressed the use of biometric technology to identify unclaimed bodies. The Union Home Minister said there is a need to regularly interact with senior police formations of State/UTs to monitor the progress of

the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) and Inter-Operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS) regularly and provide impetus to the project. He said that NCRB should create a data-rich platform to benefit the Investigation Officers and other stakeholders of the Criminal Justice System. He appreciated NCRB's efforts in the technical implementation of New Criminal Laws and the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS).

The Union Minister also reviewed the integration of CCTNS 2.0, NAFIS, Prisons, Courts, Prosecution and Forensics with ICJS 2.0 at the all-India level. Union Home Secretary, Director NCRB and several senior officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs, NCRB and NIC were present in the meeting.

During the discussions, he asked NCRB to facilitate the complete implementation of new criminal laws in ICJS 2.0, stressing on use of applications like eSakshya, Nyaya Shruti, eSign and eSummons in every state/UT. Elaborating on the need to have a generation of alerts right from registration to disposal of a case, he said alerts to investigation officers and senior officers as per pre-defined timelines would help expedite the investigation. He emphasised that a team of the Ministry of Home Affairs and NCRB should visit the States/Union Territories to increase the adoption of technical projects and assist them in all possible ways.

Groups job aspirant ends life in Hyderabad's Ashok Nagar

Hyderabad: A Groups job aspirant died by suicide allegedly over personal reasons at a hostel in Ashok Nagar here on Monday night. G Surekha, who recently appeared for the Group-II and III recruitment exams, allegedly had an argument with her fiancé on Monday evening. Following this, Surekha, a native of Kamareddy district, allegedly resorted to the extreme step and was found hanging in her room. On information, Chikkadpally police swung into action and shifted the body to Gandhi Hospital mortuary. According to family members, Surekha, after her engagement last month, came to Hyderabad to appear for the Group-II and III examinations.

PM Modi holds brain storming session with economists in run-up to Budget



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday held a meeting with eminent economists and sectoral experts to get their views and suggestions for the upcoming Budget for 2025-26. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the budget in the Lok Sabha on February 1, 2025. The Finance Minister was also present at the meeting which was attended by Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Suman Bery, Niti Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam, Chief Economic Advisor Anantha Nageswaran and eminent economists, including Surjit Bhalla and DK Joshi. The meeting comes in the backdrop of the government's plans to continue with big-ticket investments in infrastructure projects to spur growth and create more jobs in a slowing economy. The Centre has launched various welfare schemes for the poor including free foodgrains and providing housing for the poor sections in both rural and urban areas. The spike in inflation has eased in the last month as food inflation has slowed, allowing the RBI to cut the cash reserve ratio (CRR) for banks by 0.5 per cent from 4.5 per cent to 4 per cent. This is the first time since March 2020 that the CRR has been cut which will infuse Rs 1.16 lakh crore into the banking system and bring down market interest rates. The budget is now expected to give a fiscal stimulus to accelerate growth in the economy. India has retained its status as the fastest growing major economy in the world and the buoyancy in tax collections has helped to ensure stability with the fiscal deficit well under control. This will strengthen the government's hands in preparing the next budget. India's net direct tax collections, comprising corporate tax and personal income tax, shot up by a robust 15.4 per cent to Rs 12.1 lakh crore, from April 1 to November 10 during the current financial year, according to the latest figures released by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT). The Centre's fiscal deficit at the end of the first seven months (April-October) of the current financial year works out to 46.5 per cent of the full-year target, the official data released last month shows. This reflects a strong macroeconomic financial position with the government sticking to the fiscal consolidation path.

Over 60 NCC cadets hospitalised after suspected food poisoning at camp in Kerala

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

As many as 60 NCC cadets were hospitalised following a suspected case of food poisoning at a camp held at a college in Kerala, creating an anxious situation, officials said. The incident was reported on Monday during the 10-day Combined Annual Training Camp (CATC) organised by the 21 Kerala Battalion NCC at a college in Thrissur, starting December 21. The students who complained of food poisoning were taken to various hospitals and were discharged by Monday night, according to officials. The NCC has ordered a departmental-level inquiry into the incident, an official statement said. "In response to the physical discomfort reported by cadets at the NCC camp organised at Thrikakkara KMM College, an urgent inquiry has been ordered. The inquiry will be conducted by a committee led by Brigadier Suresh G, NCC Group Commander of Kollam," the statement read. The officiating Additional Director General of NCC has directed the Brigadier Suresh-led panel to submit its report, it added. The participants of the camp included students from schools and colleges under the 21 Kerala Battalion NCC, Ernakulam. Officials said the students first complained of discomfort around 7 pm after having dinner, with the number initially rising to 40 and later reaching 60. An NCC statement noted that two girl cadets initially reported physical discomfort, followed by 13 more cadets.

Heavy rain forecast for coastal Andhra Pradesh

Heavy rain is likely in coastal Andhra Pradesh over the next two days under the impact of the low-pressure area in the Bay of Bengal, meteorologists said. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), a well-marked low pressure area lay over Southwest and adjoining Westcentral Bay of Bengal. It is likely to reach the southwest Bay of Bengal near the north Tamil Nadu and south Andhra Pradesh coasts on Tuesday. There was no clarity on whether the low-pressure area would intensify or weaken in the coming hours. The coastal region was cloudy while cold winds were blowing. The IMD bulletin said light to moderate rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms, and lightning very likely at a few places with heavy rainfall at isolated places over coastal Andhra Pradesh during December 24-December 26 and Rayalaseema on December 24 and 25.

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Simplify GST

THE core belief behind the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) was simplification of the tax structure and ensuring better compliance. It defies logic why complexities continue to be the standard practice. The popcorn tax exemplifies the surfeit of irrational and unwarranted slabs across sectors. Salted popcorn attracts 5 per cent GST, pre-packaged and labelled varieties 12 per cent and the caramel option is a luxury at 18 per cent. Ahead of the 55th GST Council meeting, the attention was focused on the much-anticipated rate cut on health and life insurance premiums. The deferment came as a disappointment. A bigger one was the effort put in to clarify how much a consumer ought to pay on this and that popcorn bucket. On show was not only the sanction for misplaced priorities, but the lack of empathy for end-users and businesses.

When a former chief economic adviser terms the popcorn episode a national tragedy and a violation of the spirit of the 'Good and Simple Tax' that GST was meant to be, the voices concerns that need to be addressed urgently. The harsh criticism, cutting across ideological lines, indicates the frustration over the slow movement on rationalising GST slabs. It reflects both bureaucratic obduracy and political endorsement of a strategy that apparently hinges on over-taxation and intricacies. Nothing less than a systemic re-arrangement with regard to the imposition of GST would suffice. The citizen's wellbeing has to come first, not the wishlist of the government machinery to fill coffers any which way.

The data cited by the Opposition that reveals GST evasion of Rs 2.01 lakh crore in the 2023-24 financial year warrants scrutiny and course correction. Structural complexities only derail enforcement. Holding on to the status quo is a problem and not a solution.

Banned militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) sleeper cell was on recruitment drive in Bengal: Police

GNS News Agency, Dec 24
kolkata, ABTGaurav Sharma, IG STF, West Bengal, said, "There was an input and a well-coordinated joint operation in which Assam police needed our support. ABT were trying to set up sleeper cells in the country. They were recruiting youths in the country a day after the Special Task Force of Assam and West Bengal arrested two persons from Murshidabad, the West Bengal police on Friday said that the two have links with banned militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) and a "sleeper cell" was on a "recruitment drive" in West Bengal. ADG (South Bengal) Supratim Sarkar while speaking with mediapersons stated, "ABT was banned in 2013-2015 in Bangladesh, India, the UK, and the United States. They are known to have committed murders of bloggers between 2013-2015, robberies, and were setting up sleeper cells for terror activities in India. They were mainly recruiting from two places - Murshidabad and Alipurduar. They were planning terror activities in the Chicken's Neck, Siliguri corridor. A person called Farhan was the head of the sleeper cell." The police investigations have revealed that ABT was attempting to "identify youngsters using communal fissures and all the economic disparities and thus would pick up youths who are useful for their ideologies." To this end, the head of the ABT, along with his close associate Farhan, had sent a person named Saad Radi to India for recruitment purposes. Radi visited three states - West Bengal, Assam, and Kerala - during his recruitment drive, said police. Gaurav Sharma, IG STF, West Bengal, said, "There was an input and a well-coordinated joint operation in which Assam police needed our support. ABT were trying to set up sleeper cells in the country. They were recruiting youths in the country." Radi was subsequently arrested in an operation involving 17-18 continuous raids conducted simultaneously in Assam and was



apprehended in Kerala. Abbas Sheikh and Minarul Sheikh were arrested from Murshidabad's Hariharpara. The police recovered four mobile phones, a pen drive, Islamic religious books and fake documents from the two suspects. The Assam STF also arrested five persons from Assam and one from Kerala. "Manirul, a 48-year-old pump mechanic, was attempting to establish a small madrasa for 10-12 students. Abbas, 29, has a prior criminal record, having been arrested in a POCSSO and kidnapping case and released on bail after serving two years in jail," said Sharma. ADG Sarkar said that Abbas and Minarul, part of an eight-member group, arrested by the Bengal, Kerala and Assam police, were picked up by STF Assam in collaboration with West Bengal Police during a raid in Murshidabad. "We have recovered a 16GB pen drive, some literature, and fake identity cards from the two suspects, identified as Abbas and Minarul Sheikh. We suspect they were part of a sleeper module aiming to create instability in sensitive areas of south and north Bengal, as well as in the seven sister states of the Northeast. They were setting up bases in Murshidabad and Alipurduar districts, with plans to eliminate prominent Hindu leaders in the eastern and northeastern regions and carry out attacks similar to the 2015 hacking of a blogger in Bangladesh," he said. "A joint interrogation will be conducted, we are keen on to know their plans and actions in Bengal, on our side in the State as well as in our country. The way they had set up the cell, it's clear that they were trying to cause disruption in the country by doing terror activities. Specific targets were the Chicken's Neck, which is the Siliguri Corridor, so recruitment was one of the important parts of their activities, including the procurement of arms for the purpose. We are keen to unearth any more modules involved," Sharma further said. Sarkar also pointed out that Murshidabad had become a transit route for members of banned Bangladeshi outfits like Ansar-al-Islam.

HC to hear bail pleas in larger conspiracy case after vacation



GNS News Agency, Dec 24
delhiA Delhi sessions court had recently granted seven days' interim bail from December 28 to Khalid to attend his first cousin's wedding and meet his relatives. The Delhi High Court on Friday adjourned the hearing into the bail pleas of the accused in the 2020 Delhi riots larger conspiracy case after the public prosecutor stated that Additional Solicitor General S V Raju would argue the matter from the prosecution's side. With the prosecution's submission coming before the Delhi High Court went on vacation from December 25 to January 5, the hearing was adjourned to January 7 and 8.

Student activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, among others, have been accused of a pre-planned conspiracy to cause riots in Northeast Delhi between February 23 and February 25, 2020. The accused have been booked for offences under the Indian Penal Code, the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, the Arms Act, and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, and have been in jail for over four years now. A Delhi sessions court had recently granted seven days' interim bail from December 28 to Khalid to attend his first cousin's wedding and meet his

relatives. "I have received instructions that only Mr (S V) Raju (ASG) will argue this matter and as we all know Mr Raju is indisposed with his daughter's wedding," Special Public Prosecutor Amit Prasad informed the division bench of Justices Navin Chawla and Shalinder Kaur on Friday.

To this, Justice Chawla orally remarked, "How do we adjourn bail matters like this?... Last time also it was fully heard by a bench and released." Addressing the prosecution, Justice Chawla added, "...all we can accommodate till is, then 7th Jan...that doesn't mean 7th it will get adjourned." Meanwhile, the bench dismissed an appeal by Salim Malik, an accused in the case, wherein he challenged a trial court order. Malik had moved an application seeking interim bail before the Shahdara district court in Karkardooma on November 29. However, when taken up before the court of Additional Sessions Judge Sameer Bajpai on December 3, Malik had expressed that he wished to withdraw the interim bail plea, pending a decision on his regular bail plea. Upon verification of the medical prescription of Malik's wife - Malik was seeking interim bail citing her health - the prosecution had on December 6 informed the trial court that the "13 days of rest" prescribed on the prescription "was never advised". The prosecution had pressed the trial court that "appropriate action should be taken against the concerned person who has forged the medical prescription dated 24.11.2024 of the wife of the applicant/accused." The prosecution had further argued that "legal action should be taken by the court when the factum of forgery has come on record". The trial court, while permitting Malik to withdraw his interim bail application, had directed that a copy of the court's order be sent to the police commissioner "to look into the matter and to do the needful." Upholding the trial court's action, the division bench held, "If a forged document is submitted a court cannot shut its eyes," adding, "The trial court has rightly sent the document for further investigation."

TMC suspends two from teachers' cells for 'anti-party activities'



GNS News Agency, Dec 24
The Trinamool Congress on Friday suspended two leaders who were part of two of its teachers' cells for their involvement in "anti-party activities", party leader and state education minister Bratya Basu said. Manishankar Mondal was assistant president of the TMC's professor cell, WEBCUPA. The other suspended person, Pritam Halder, was a leader of the TMC's Madhyamik teachers' cell. Asked about the party's move, Mondal, hit out at Basu. "This decision is for not listening to him (Basu). It was (MP) Abhishek (Banerjee) who played an important role in the party's handling of the Sandeshkhali issue and he strongly countered the BJP allegations. I put up banners all over Kolkata in support of Abhishek. After this, Bratya Basu warned me in various ways. Then too, I was threatened with expulsion from the party," claimed Mondal. A senior TMC leader said, "... One can't do anything without the consent of the party leadership. These two leaders repeatedly did that. Thus, the party leadership decided to take action against the two leaders." ENS

Foggy morning in Delhi, mercury settles at 7.6 deg C



GNS News Agency, Dec 24
Delhiites woke up to a foggy morning on Saturday with the minimum temperature in the national capital settling at 7.6 degrees Celsius, a notch below the season's average, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). Delhi's air quality improved significantly. The Air Quality Index (AQI) came down to 392 in the 'very poor' category from 429 on Friday. Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data showed. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'. The weather officer has forecast mainly clear skies during the day and the maximum temperature is expected to settle at 23 degrees Celsius.

Banned militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) sleeper cell was on recruitment drive in Bengal: Police



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The police investigations have revealed that ABT was attempting to "identify youngsters using communal fissures and all the economic disparities and thus would pick up youths who are useful for their ideologies." To this end, the head of the ABT, along with his close associate Farhan, had sent a person named Saad Radi to India for recruitment purposes. Radi visited three states - West Bengal, Assam, and Kerala - during his recruitment drive, said police. Gaurav Sharma, IG STF, West Bengal, said, "There was an input and a well-coordinated joint operation in which

Assam police needed our support. ABT were trying to set up sleeper cells in the country. They were recruiting youths in the country." Radi was subsequently arrested in an operation involving 17-18 continuous raids conducted simultaneously in Assam and was apprehended in Kerala. Abbas Sheikh and Minarul Sheikh were arrested from Murshidabad's Hariharpara. The police recovered four mobile phones, a pen drive, Islamic religious books and fake documents from the two suspects. The Assam STF also arrested five persons from Assam and one from Kerala. "Manirul, a 48-year-old pump mechanic, was attempting to establish a small madrasa for 10-12 students. Abbas, 29, has a prior criminal record, having been arrested in a POCSSO and kidnapping case and released on bail after serving two years in jail," said Sharma.

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Bombay HC declares builder's arrest in housing fraud case 'illegal', orders his release

GNS News Agency, Dec 24
bombay hcThe high court noted that communication of grounds of arrest is intended to enable an accused to know what material is in the hand of the investigating officer to justify his arrest, among other aspects. The Bombay High Court last week held that city builder Lalit Tekchandani's arrest in a housing fraud case was "illegal" and "invalid" and ordered his release. The court observed that since the grounds of arrest were not communicated to the petitioner, the same violated his fundamental rights. A bench of Justices Bharati H Dangre and Manjusha A Deshpande passed the verdict in three writ pleas by Tekchandani, the director of Supreme Constructions, alleging illegal arrest in three FIRs. A copy of the verdict was made available on Thursday night. The Chembur police had first registered a cheating FIR against Tekchandani on January 15 on a complaint made by a homebuyer under provisions of the Indian Penal Code, the



Maharashtra Protection of Interest of Depositors (In Financial Establishments) Act and the Maharashtra Ownership Flats (Regulation of the Promotion of Construction, Sale, Management and Transfer) Act. Tekchandani was arrested on January 30 this year. Another FIR against Tekchandani was lodged at Talaja police station on January 15 this year and he was shown to be arrested on February 21. The third FIR was lodged on February 12 at CBD Belapur police station in Navi Mumbai and Tekchandani was shown to be arrested on April 12. Representing Tekchandani, advocates

Taraq Sayed, Mayur Shikhare, Ashwini Achari, Anish Pereira and Alisha Parekh argued that grounds of arrest were not informed to him in writing in case of all three FIRs and same was in gross violation of the mandate under Articles 22 (1) (No person shall be detained in custody without being informed grounds of the arrest) and 21 (fundamental right to life and liberty) of the Constitution. When the bench asked Public Prosecutor Hiten Venegaonkar if the grounds of arrest were communicated to the petitioner when he was arrested in the Talaja FIR, he submitted that the transfer warrant

3 'CBI officers' who duped Delhi couple of Rs 5 lakh arrested



The police also recovered five mobile phones, two debit cards, and froze Rs 2.11 lakh in bank accounts linked to the fraud.

GNS News Agency, Dec 24
The Delhi Police have arrested three Gurgaon residents who allegedly posed as CBI officers and duped a couple of Rs 5 lakh, claiming that their son was involved in a rape case. They also recovered five mobile phones, two debit cards, and froze Rs 2.11 lakh in bank accounts linked to the fraud. The accused identified as Satish Kumar Yadav, Sunil Kumar, and Shivam were arrested from Gurgaon's Sheelta Colony on December 17 based on the complaint from a woman, a resident of J-Block in C R Park, the police said. Ankit Chauhan, Deputy Commissioner of Police (South Delhi), said that the incident happened six months ago when the woman's husband had purportedly received a call from a man claiming to be a CBI Inspector who said their son was detained in a rape case and demanded Rs 5 lakh for his release.

"Anxious about their son's safety, the woman had transferred the amount from her husband's bank account. Later, when she contacted her son, she discovered he was safe and had not been detained," Chauhan said. The South Delhi Cyber Police registered a case on June 12 under sections 170, 419, 420, and 120-B of the IPC, and a team led by Inspector Arun Kumar Verma (Station House Officer, Cyber) under the supervision of ACP, Operations. "On analysing the mobile number from which the Whatsapp call was received, it was found that the call originated from out of the country," DCP Chauhan said. During further investigation, the police noted that the defrauded money was initially transferred to a bank account in the first beneficiary's name, and on the same day, the funds were moved to five different accounts in Bikaner and Jaipur. Through technical analysis and surveillance, the team zeroed in on the suspects, the police said. "During interrogation, they confessed to their involvement in the crime. Satish Yadav was responsible for managing mule accounts, receiving the defrauded money and transferring it to other accounts and withdrawing the amount from ATM to obscure the source. Sunil Kumar and Shivam were the beneficiaries of these accounts. Sunil used the stolen money to pay off his personal credit card bills, while Shivam withdrew the money through ATMs for his own use," said DCP Chauhan.

‘Frivolous’: Bombay HC imposes Rs 1 lakh cost on Lalit Modi for plea seeking BCCI pay Rs 10.65 crore penalty on his behalf



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

The Bombay High Court on Thursday imposed a Rs 1 lakh cost on former Indian Premier League (IPL) commissioner Lalit Modi for filing a “wholly misconceived” plea seeking direction to the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to pay or deposit on his behalf a Rs 10.65 crore penalty for violating the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA). A bench of Justices Mahesh S Sonak and Jitendra S Jain in its order observed that the plea was “frivolous” and required to be dismissed, with costs payable to Tata Memorial Hospital in the city.

The petitioner through advocate Mohit Goyal had

sought ex-parte direction from BCCI to pay to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) the penalty imposed on him by the adjudicating authority. He sought relief against the BCCI on the ground that the by-laws required the BCCI to indemnify the petitioner. In May 2018, probing alleged FEMA violations in transfer of Rs 243 crore out of India for hosting IPL’s 2009 edition in South Africa, the ED had imposed a total penalty of Rs 121.56 crore against Lalit Modi and others. While imposing the penalty, the adjudicating authority had held that the transfer of funds was in violation of RBI guidelines. Lalit Modi was asked to pay Rs 10.65 crore penalty along with Rs 82.66 crore by BCCI and Rs 11.53 crore by former BCCI president N Srinivasan, among others. The high court bench noted that in a Zee Telefilms case, the Supreme Court had held that BCCI was not a ‘state’ as per Article 12 of the Constitution, therefore the plea and the reliefs sought against it are not maintainable. “Though the above decision was delivered in 2005, this petition was instituted in 2018, pleading that the Supreme Court and this Court have consistently held that the BCCI is amenable to writ jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution of India. In matters of alleged indemnification of the petitioner in the context of penalties imposed upon the petitioner by the ED, there is no question of discharge of any public function, and therefore, for this purpose, no writ could be issued to the BCCI,” the high court observed while dismissing the present plea.

Amid heated exchange, Himachal Pradesh House passes Bill to amend land ceiling law

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

Himachal Pradesh CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu dismissed the demand of sending the Bill to the Select Committee for further consideration terming it an “opposition” to the amendment bill, which triggered resentment among opposition leaders. The Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly on Friday passed four bills, including the significant Himachal Pradesh Land Ceiling (Amendment) Bill, 2024, which allows religious, spiritual, and charitable organisations to transfer up to 30 acres or structures for religious and charitable purposes. The bill addresses a request from Radha Soami Satsang Beas (RSSB), a prominent religious and spiritual organisation, to transfer the Bhota Charitable Hospital to its sister organisation, Maharaja Jagat Singh Medical Relief Society (MJSMRS) in Hamirpur district. It was passed amid heated arguments between the ruling Congress and the opposition when BJP leaders demanded that the Himachal Pradesh Land Ceiling (Amendment) Bill, 2024, be sent to the Select Committee for further consideration. CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu dismissed the demand terming it an “opposition” to the amendment bill, which triggered resentment among opposition leaders. Leader of Opposition (LoP) Jai Ram Thakur urged Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania to expunge the word “opposition” used by the CM, claiming that the opposition is not against any religious or spiritual organisations. Defending his demand to refer the bill to a select committee, Thakur said, “We all have great respect for RSSB. However, this bill needs more scrutiny. While we acknowledge the government’s good intentions, we have strong apprehensions that the amended bill could be misused against the interests of Himachal Pradesh. Therefore, the bill should be sent to the select committee.” Reacting to Thakur’s statement, Sukhu said, “The opposition’s stance shows they are against spiritual and religious organisations. The amended bill incorporates safeguards to protect the interests of Himachal Pradesh.” He also accused certain BJP MLAs of instigating locals to protest, forcing RSSB to open the hospital last month. Revenue Minister Jagat Singh Negi also



defended the amendment bill while criticising the opposition. He said, “During the tenure of former CM Prem Kumar Dhumal, the government issued a notification benefiting RSSB without formal legislation. In contrast, we have introduced a robust amendment to Section 5 of the Himachal Pradesh Land Ceiling Act, 1972, allowing religious, social, and spiritual organisations to transfer the land only for charitable, spiritual, or religious purposes—and only once. This exemption can be used only once and no more.”

The Himachal Pradesh Ceiling on Land Holdings Act, 1972, was enacted during the tenure of first CM YS Parmar, to safeguard the interests of state residents after its formation on January 25, 1971. The Act aims to prevent land alienation from local residents and regulates the maximum amount of land that can be owned by an individual, family, or entity. When implemented, many individuals, including royal families from erstwhile princely estates, had to surrender surplus land to comply with the Act’s provisions. Since 1972, the Act has undergone multiple amendments to address the needs of residents, industry expansion, horticulture, and government bodies. In 2023, it was amended to grant equal property rights to daughters, allowing them to inherit an additional 150 bighas beyond inherited property. The Act currently consists of 28 sections.

Rahul Gandhi attends wedding near Chandigarh

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

rahul gandhi, Chandigarh Gandhi had come to attend the wedding of Senior Advocate R S Cheema’s daughter at a resort in the Mohali district of Punjab on the outskirts of Chandigarh. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi Friday attended the wedding of a Senior Advocate’s daughter near here. Gandhi reached Chandigarh in the afternoon and was received by the party’s state unit president Harmohinder Singh Lucky. Accompanied by Lucky, the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha later reached the wedding venue on the outskirts of the city. Lucky told PTI later that Gandhi had come to attend the wedding of Senior Advocate R S Cheema’s daughter at a resort in the Mohali district of Punjab on the outskirts of Chandigarh.

“R S Cheema, a criminal lawyer and former advocate general of Punjab, has also represented Rahul ji. It was Cheema ji’s daughter’s wedding and he had come to attend that. After attending the wedding, Rahul ji returned to Delhi,” Lucky said. Lucky said former Haryana chief minister



Bhupinder Singh Hooda and senior Punjab Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa were present at the event. The lawyers fighting the case on behalf of Rahul Gandhi in Surat’s sessions court include Senior Advocate R S Cheema, advocate Tarranum Cheema, and Kirit Panwal. According to a report by ‘Bar and Bench,’ veteran advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi’s team is assisting as strategic advisor for this team.

Parent alleges son was injured and mentally harassed at school, child rights panel issues notice



The injury caused wrist dislocation in both hands, the parent alleged, adding that the school did not inform her about the incident immediately.

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has issued a notice to a government school in

East Delhi after a parent filed a complaint alleging that her 15-year-old son has faced injury and mental harassment at the hands of the NCPCR, in a notice issued on December 6, said the alleged behaviour violates Section 175 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015. The Deputy Director (Education), East Delhi, has been asked to investigate and file an action taken report within 10 days from the date of issue of the notice. The parent alleged in the complaint, “On December 2, my son left the school in a healthy condition at 7.45 am but came home early at 10.15 am... he was crying badly from pain. He told me... that a physical education teacher took his class to the ground but despite informing the teacher that he couldn’t play as he suffers from a cardiovascular disease, he was forced to race hand walking, along with five other students... the floor was made of bricks and my son lost his balance.” The injury caused wrist dislocation in both hands, the parent alleged, adding that the school did not inform her about the incident immediately. She also alleged that while anti-pollution curbs were in place, the school was carrying out outdoor activities. The mother further accused the school teachers, including the principal, of mentally harassing her when she approached the school.

Delhi’s air quality ‘severe’, rain likely after Christmas



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

Delhi remained the most polluted city in the country for the fifth day in a row on Friday, recording an air quality index (AQI) of 429, in the ‘severe’ category. Owing to improved wind speed, this was slightly better than the ‘severe plus’ AQI of 451 that the city had recorded According to the

India Meteorological Department (IMD), the wind speed on Friday was recorded between 8 and 12 kmph. It had remained below 8 kmph on Thursday. Meteorological conditions such as low wind speed and high humidity cause pollutants to linger in the atmosphere. The city recorded a minimum temperature of 7.5 degrees Celsius, 2.5 notches above the season’s average, the IMD said. The maximum temperature was a notch above normal at 23.3 degrees Celsius. The IMD forecast rain on December 26 and partly cloudy sky on December 23 and 24. Till Sunday, it forecast dense fog conditions, following which the same is likely to reduce. The minimum temperature is set to hover around 7 to 9 degrees Celsius and the maximum at 22 to 23 degrees Celsius for the next six days. The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune forecast the AQI to be in the ‘very poor’ category on Saturday, which is likely to worsen to ‘severe’ on Sunday. In its long-term forecast, it said the AQI is likely to fluctuate between ‘very poor’ and ‘poor’ after Sunday.

‘Hurting sentiments’: Delhi HC refuses to quash FIR lodged against DU professor over social media post

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

The Delhi High Court has refused to quash an FIR against a Hindu College faculty member booked for allegedly hurting religious sentiments. The court noted that offences that penalise deliberate and malicious attempts to outrage religious feelings “balances the right to free speech with the need to maintain social harmony”. The court of Justice Chandra Dhari Singh was hearing a petition by Ratan Lal, an assistant professor of history, who was booked after he had allegedly made claims on social media on May 14, 2022 of a Shivaling being discovered inside the Gyanvapi mosque. An FIR was filed on May 18 under IPC sections 153A (promoting enmity among various groups) and 295A (deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings) and subsequently, arrested on May 20 before being released on bail the next day. “...prima facie, the petitioner has created disturbance of the harmony of the society and this court has also found that the said tweet/post were made with the intention to hurt the sentiments of a large number of the society and no person being a professor, teacher, or an intellectual has the right to make such type of comments, tweets or posts as the freedom of speech and expression or any type of freedom is not absolute,” Justice Singh stated in the order dated December 17.

Seeking the quashing of the FIR, Lal had argued before the court that “neither any unrest” nor disturbance happened in the society due to his social media posts. He also pointed out that “being a historian and an intellectual per-



son, (he) had expressed his thoughts without any intent”. The prosecution, on the other hand, opposed his plea saying “there is a clear intent to hurt sentiments of the believers of Lord Shiva and the society at large”. The court, in its order, highlighted the petitioner’s responsibility as “a historian and an educator”. “An intellectual person is instrumental in guiding others and the society at large and thus, he should be more conscious while giving such type of statements in a public domain as the same carries weight and power to influence other people which, if made in a negative manner, such as in the instant case, might create unrest and disturb the peace of the society... Sections 153A and 295A of the IPC balances the right to free speech with the need to maintain social harmony as the freedom of speech and expression is not absolute,” the order read.

Delhi health dept sacks supervisor, ‘carelessness’ led to TB patient not getting essential drugs

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

The Delhi Health department has terminated the services of a DOTS Plus Supervisor on the ground that his alleged “carelessness” led to a Tuberculosis (TB) patient being deprived of essential medicines, an official said on Friday. This comes after The Indian Express on December 17 reported on the non-availability of TB medicine to Harshita Singh Chandel, a 16-year-old girl from the city. After Chandel filed a writ petition in the Delhi High Court on the erratic supply of TB drugs, the court had directed the state government to provide her with medication.

According to sources in the Union Health Ministry, drug-resistant TB (DRTB) regimen drugs are adequately available in all states and Union territories, including at the state drug store in Delhi. They added that adequate supplies of longer DRTB regimen drugs like Cap Cycloserine and Tab Linezolid are available for all patients currently on longer DRTB oral regimens in Delhi. Further, the ministry is in touch with states and UTs to ensure last mile delivery of the medicines, the sources said. This comes amid the Health department terminating the services of a senior DOTS Plus Supervisor posted at Babu Jagjivan Ram Memorial Hospital Chest Clinic under National Tuberculosis Elimination Program, National Health Mission. Harshita is undergoing treatment at the hospital.



According to an official from the health department, it came to the department’s notice that “Harshita, a school-going girl in North District was deprived of essential TB medicines due to the carelessness of a DOTS Plus Supervisor”. “Responding firmly, the department terminated the services of the supervisor within 24 hours, sending a strong message that such lapses will not be tolerated. Also, the girl was provided with all the prescribed medicines,” the official added. The Delhi government had on Tuesday formed a committee to look into gaps in the supply of TB medicines in the city.

‘Could be heard for miles’ – eyewitnesses recount ordeal after LPG tanker explosion on Jaipur highway

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

LPG tanker explosion, Jaipur highway LPG tanker explosion, Jaipur highway, Jaipur-Ajmer highway, Indian express news, current affairs According to officials, 30 people were wounded in the incident, six of whom are on ventilator support. It took the fire department over seven hours to get the fire completely under control.



At 5:45 am – 15 minutes after he dropped his nephew Harlal and another relative, Raju, at the Jaipur-Ajmer highway to board a truck to take them back home – Mohanlal (47) got a distressing call: there had been an explosion and that Harlal was nowhere to be found. The explosion occurred after the truck they were travelling in collided with an LPG tanker while it was taking a U-turn on the highway. According to officials, 14 people died and 40 vehicles were scorched in the accident. Within seconds, Mohanlal turned around his bike and shot straight to the spot. “It took me a good 15 minutes to find Harlal,” he

told The Indian Express at Sawai Man Singh Hospital in Jaipur, where both his nephew and Raju are currently being treated. According to officials, 28 people were wounded in the incident, four of whom are on ventilator support. It took the fire department over seven hours to get the fire completely under control. Jaipur accident The tanker carrying chemicals caught fire after collision with truck in front of Delhi Public School on the Jaipur-Ajmer Highway “It was dark when it happened and it was difficult to see what was happening. But later we came to know an LPG tanker had

collided with a truck,” said Manish Gupta, the Station House Officer of Bhankrota Police Station. “There were so many vehicles that by the time we brought one under control, the others had already caught on fire. All damaged vehicles have been cleared from the road but it hasn’t been opened to traffic. The route will be opened by 10 pm.” Eyewitnesses told The Indian Express that the explosion could be heard for miles. “Around 42 people were admitted to the hospital in the morning. Of these, 12 died. Some people were admitted to the hospital but they were eventually dis-

charged since their injuries were not grievous,” SMS Hospital Medical Superintendent Sushil Bhati said. Of those deceased, four were brought dead but were so badly burnt that they could not be identified, officials said. Most of the vehicles involved in the accident belonged to Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Haryana. Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma and Rajasthan Congress chief Govind Singh Dotasra visited the wounded at the two hospitals. In a post on X, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh for the deceased.

How bomb squads respond to threat calls and declare them hoax



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

bomb squadThe National Security Guard (NSG), teams of Delhi Police Special Cell, Delhi Fire Services and bomb disposal squad in Delhi's Old Seemapuri area of Shahdara. Another day and at least four schools in Delhi woke up to bomb threats, which later turned out to be hoaxes, the sixth such incident in 11 days. Barring an incident where a minor boy was apprehended for sending a bomb threat because he did not want to appear for an exam, none of the other hoax cases have been cracked so far.

The police have found it difficult to track down the culprits due to their usage of VPNs to keep their location and IP addresses hidden. Coupled with ProtonMail, an email service that provides end-to-end encryption, it becomes virtually impossible for the police authorities to track down the perpetrators. What's left for the Delhi Police to do is manually check each bomb threat and declare them as hoaxes. Naturally, the Bomb Disposal Squad (BDS) and BDT of the Delhi Police have been on their toes with a slew of hoax bomb threats being reported from schools across Delhi NCR. The movement from control rooms to district BDT units has been fast and frequent. For the Bomb Squad personnel, it all starts with the first call to the police control room on the dial of 112. "As soon as the control room gets information about a bomb threat...BDT inspectors in the concerned district are alerted within 60 seconds through wireless communication. Within five to 10 minutes of the

call, a seven-member BDT reaches the spot in an ROV (Remote Operation Vehicle)," a BDS officer said. The team, the officer said, consists of an inspector-level officer, two sub-inspectors, three head constables, a dog handler, and a dog to sniff out the explosive.

The team then starts the process to verify whether the call is a hoax or not. "Multiple devices are deployed to detect the presence of explosives. Non Linear Junction Detector (NLJD) and M-ION (Explosive Weapon Detector) are first used to see if any visible explosive is present. DSMD (Deep Search Metal Detectors) are used to search metal items. RTVS, a portable X-ray machine, is used to check for wires and switches inside closed items. Since bomb suits don't guarantee 100 per cent protection, robotic hands called Telescopic Manipulators are used to pick up suspicious items. These hands are 10-foot-long and are controlled by remotes," the BDS officer said. If no bombs are found, which has been the case with all bomb hoax calls in Delhi schools this year, the BDT declares the same.

If any suspicious or probable explosive is found, BDT calls the BDS team of the concerned range to swing into action. "As the BDS team arrives, BDT covers the explosive with a 'bomb blanket' to turn down the effect of a probable blast. These blankets are made of a special material that controls the spread of splinters," the officer explained. The officer added that BDS (Crime), the nodal agency, is in constant touch with the National Security Guard (NSG) and Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to work on the latest technology and state-of-the-art bomb defusal machinery. "From suits to safety equipment, guidelines are constantly revised by MHA (Ministry of Home Affairs) when it comes to machinery involved. We visit NSG labs to collaborate with them on more elaborate and efficient bomb disposal techniques," the officer said. However, in all cases so far this year, there has been no requirement to call the BDS on-site. Nonetheless, the fire brigades remain on standby nearby to ensure no fire hazards take place. According to police officers, the teams take around 30-45 minutes to check a building thoroughly. It may take more time if the building is larger or more complex in design.

Are we truly prepared for One Nation, One Election, asks Neerja Chowdhury

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

one nation, one electionVithal Mahadeo Tarkunde, hailed as the 'Father of the Civil Liberties Movement' in India, dedicated his life to defending democratic ideals and individual freedoms Neerja Chowdhury, contributing editor, The Indian Express, on Friday wondered if the country was ready for the proposed 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) policy. Chowdhury, who has covered Indian politics for over five decades, was delivering the Tarkunde Memorial Lecture on 'The Electoral Process and the Idea of One Nation One Election'.

Vithal Mahadeo Tarkunde, hailed as the 'Father of the Civil Liberties Movement' in India, dedicated his life to defending democratic ideals and individual freedoms. Chowdhury's association with Tarkunde, the founder president of PULC, began in the 70s when she worked with the civil rights organisation. Chowdhury began by reminiscing about her early days in journalism after the Emergency, when press freedom was restored, and the judiciary had regained independence. Drawing a parallel to those pivotal years, she said the "current moment, marked by deep divisions in Parliament and sweeping political proposals, calls for equal scrutiny". "The Constitution 129th Amendment Bill and the Union Territories Laws Amendment Bill, 2024, if passed, will synchronise Lok Sabha and state Assembly elections," Chowdhury said. "The Election Commission says it is ready... but let us not forget the scale: polls for 543 Lok Sabha constituencies, 28 state assemblies, and 8 Union territories, many requiring multi-phase polls. Are we truly prepared for this?" she asked.



The policy, Chowdhury noted, risks favoring popular national leaders, such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in both state and central elections. Moreover, she said, "If the national government loses its majority mid-term, calling for fresh elections, this could curtail the mandates of all state governments." Senior advocate Raju Ramchandran, speaking on the occasion, gave a brief overview of the life of Tarkunde. After completing his BSc in agriculture, Tarkunde had moved to London. He returned to India in 1933 and started his legal practice. He then joined the Congress Socialist Party and the Indian National Congress but left both to become a member of the Radical Democratic Party founded by M N Roy. The party was dissolved in 1948 and Tarkunde returned to legal practice. In 1957, he was appointed a judge of the Bombay HC. However, he stepped down at 60 and started practice in the Supreme Court. Tarkunde played a major role in probing the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and cases of human rights violations and was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1998.

Kejriwal and Sachdeva lock horns over Nadda remarks on Purvanchali community



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

Accusing the saffron party of conspiring to "strip Delhi's Purvanchali community of their dignity and voting rights", AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal Friday attacked BJP national president JP Nadda for allegedly making "offensive" remarks against the community in Parliament. Countering the attack, Delhi BJP president Virender Sachdeva said people from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Haryana had not forgotten that Kejriwal had repeatedly stated that Delhi's border hospitals and schools were "under heavy pressure from outsiders". Just two days ago, BJP President JP Nadda made deeply offensive remarks against the 'Purvanchali' community during a session in Parliament. He compared the Purvanchalis living in Delhi to 'Rohingya' infiltrators and 'Bangladeshis', and further stated that BJP workers were filling out forms to have their names removed from voter lists," Kejriwal alleged. After playing a purported

video in which Nadda could be seen speaking, Kejriwal added, "We strongly condemn this act and regard it as a well-planned conspiracy against an entire community. On one hand, BJP leaders brand Purvanchalis as 'Rohingyas' and Bangladeshis; on the other, they attempt to strip them of their citizenship." The AAP went on to allege that the BJP was "implementing its sinister plan to uproot the Purvanchali community" from the Capital, while it was working "tirelessly to give this community dignity and respect".

"We urge every member of the Purvanchali community not to trust BJP workers. Do not show your voter card or share any details with them... In the coming days, AAP will take this issue to every household in Delhi. We will show Nadda's video to expose BJP's deliberate conspiracy against the Purvanchali community," he added. In response, Sachdeva raked up a video from June 6, 2020, saying Kejriwal had "made an issue" out of the "pressure from Bihar residents on Delhi's healthcare services" and imposed a ban on treatment for outsiders in Delhi's hospitals which was revoked after "strong opposition from the BJP". "Whether it is the Purvanchali community or any other, everyone knows that the corruption in Kejriwal's Yamuna cleaning project is the reason why people from Purvanchal can't perform their traditional Chhath Puja by the riverside in Delhi," he alleged. "Today Arvind Kejriwal is trying to show himself as a supporter of Purvanchalis... but they have not forgotten his statement of September 30, 2019, when he said, 'Biharis come to Delhi with a 500-rupee ticket, get 5 lakh worth of free treatment, and leave'" he alleged.

SC upholds the Allahabad HC order ending toll collection on Delhi-Noida Direct flyway

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

toll collectionThe origin of the flyway dates back to April 1992, when Noida and the Delhi administration entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with IL&FS, intending to construct the bridge. The Supreme Court on Friday upheld the Allahabad High Court order ending toll collection by Noida Toll Bridge Company Limited (NTBCL) on the DND (Delhi-Noida Direct) flyway connecting Delhi to Noida.

Dismissing the appeal filed by NTBCL against the HC's October 26, 2016 order, a bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan said, "NTBCL has recovered the project costs and substantial profits, eliminating any justification for the continued imposition or collection of user fees or tolls." It added there is no infirmity in the HC judgment and that it found no reason to interfere with it. The SC further said that the contract awarded to NTBCL through the concession agreement by state authorities and New Okhla Industrial Development Authority (NOIDA) was "unfair, unjust and inconsistent with Constitutional norms". It added that NOIDA "exceeded its authority by delegating the power to levy fees or impose tolls to NTBCL, rendering such delegation invalid". The origin of the flyway dates back to April 1992, when Noida and the Delhi administration entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with IL&FS, intending to construct the bridge. The concession agreement was executed on November 12, 1997, designating NOIDA and IL&FS — which constructed the flyway — as the "sponsors" and NTBCL as the "concessionaire".

The HC ruling came on a plea filed by the Federation of Noida Resident Welfare Association, which claims to espouse the cause of NOIDA residents, particularly civic issues. The association had moved the HC nearly 15 years



after the execution of the concession agreement. It sought a direction to discontinue toll charges from those who used the DND flyway, saying NTBCL had already recovered the project costs.

Agreeing with the HC's findings, the SC said that "no person or entity can be allowed to make an undue and unjust profit from public property, at the cost of the public at large." It referred to the findings of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) audit report, which said: "...the annual toll income of NTBCL during 2001-2016 was Rs 892.51 crore. NTBCL has been making profits for the last 11 years... has no accumulated losses as of 31.03.2016; has paid dividends of Rs 243.07 crore till 31.03.2016 to its shareholders and repaid all its debt with interest. NTBCL had thus, by 31.03.2016, recovered the project costs, the maintenance costs, and a significant profit on its initial investment." The order said that "an exhaustive reading of the CAG report highlights the extent to which the public has been defrauded..." This, it added, "could not have been done but for the collusion of then officers of the two state governments and of NOIDA..."

Bengal rising due to investment in human capital: Principal adviser to Chief Minister

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

THE WEST Bengal government is focusing on human capital and the state is the pivot, Amit Mitra, principal adviser to the Chief Minister and the finance department, said on Friday. Addressing the Rising Asia-BBC&I Summit, Mitra said Kolkata is considered the "number one science city" in the country. Kolkata has an environment and a strong educational foundation that produces a large number of students, he said. "In 2020, we had 33,000 engineering seats. We added 11,000 seats in the past four years and today, the number of state government engineering colleges here is nine." Bengal is rising because we are focusing on human capital, he pointed out. "The number of industrial training institutes is 298 and 47,280 students study here. There are 184 polytechnics, 38,000 intakes, and over two lakh study in vocational training institutes in Bengal," said Mitra. He said that West Bengal has 62 medical and health science colleges, 35 medical colleges and 4,553 MBBS seats in Government institutions and 5,600 in private institutions. Today 10,000 medical seats in West Bengal are part of the human capital.

Mitra added, "On one hand, we have government schemes such as Laxmi Bhandar and Kanyashree, parallelly there has been investment in capital expenditure. Bengal is walking on its own two feet, investing in human capital, putting cash in the hands of people to create excess demand..." All major IT companies are here in Bengal now. Bengal is the cement hub of India, all nine cement companies are in Bengal. Railways manufacturing hub,



three major giants in railway manufacturing all in Bengal. Any Metro... equipment is all being manufactured here. Leather hub is here." Mitra pointed out that Bengal is now looking into shale gas. "Now we are looking into shale gas, we have it below the coal belt... Policies are happening. We are looking at a natural gas pipeline..." According to Mitra, there is a "policy difference" between the Centre and West Bengal. "The national policy consisted of cutting corporate taxes for investments. Did it happen? No. Wrong policy, massive inequality. But Bengal is looking at human capital, the bottom-up policy while the Centre is following the top-down policy, leading to massive unemployment." "In Bengal, we have 905 new primary schools, 6,069 mupper primary schools, 747 secondary schools, 2,096 high schools, 52 government colleges, 543 private colleges, 38 polytechnics, 19 state-aided universities and 11 new private universities," said Mitra.

Delhi BJP gets over 1 lakh suggestions for poll manifesto

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

The Delhi BJP has received more than one lakh suggestions for its manifesto for the upcoming Assembly elections. South Delhi MP and convener of the BJP's manifesto committee for the polls, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, said the manifesto would be a "symbol of public aspirations" even as efforts are underway to seek more suggestions over the weekend.

"More than one lakh suggestions have been received so far. Now, on December 21-22, more suggestions will be collected from the public by sending a large number of vans to all city markets," he added. "Facilities of free water, electricity and bus travel will continue (after the elections) and these will be implemented in a better way so that the public can get real benefit," he said. Bidhuri said that while the party had received more than 3,200 suggestions via email, more

than 36,000 had come its way on WhatsApp till Thursday. Besides, mobile 'Sankalp Patra' vans sent to all 70 Assembly constituencies had generated almost 67,000 suggestions and while over 3,500 have been received through direct meetings held with members of various communities. "A total of 1,04,322 suggestions have been received so far, which is proof of huge public participation... We have gone among the public and understood their issues after a detailed three-week-long public discussion," said Bidhuri. Among the suggestions received so far, the former Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly said, most are regarding problems of sewer water, electricity bills, pollution, education and health. "The election manifesto committee will now prepare the manifesto on the basis of the suggestions and submit the same to the party leadership," said Bidhuri.

Delhi Assembly polls: AAP replaces Naresh Yadav from Mehrauli



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

The AAP on Friday dropped its Mehrauli candidate Naresh Yadav, convicted last month in the 2016 Quran desecration case, and fielded Mahender Chaudhary in his place for the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls. Chaudhary's wife Rekha Chaudhary is the councillor from Mehrauli. Yadav, the sitting MLA from Mehrauli, was convicted by a Punjab court with two-year sentence in the 2016 Quran desecration case. Earlier in the day, Yadav said in a post on X that he met AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal to inform him about his decision not to contest the polls till he is acquitted by the court in the case against him. "Today, after meeting Arvindji, I told him that till the court clears my case, I will not be able to do anything for the party. I will not contest elections until I am honorably acquitted. I am completely innocent and the allegations leveled against me are politically motivated and false. That is why I have requested them to free me from contesting elections," he added. In 2012, Chaudhary had contested the municipal corporation polls but lost. In 2020, he had contested the Assembly polls on a Congress ticket from Mehrauli and bagged the third spot with 6.04% vote share. Taking on Kejriwal, Delhi BJP chief Virender Sachdeva said, "Kejriwal did not change his party's candidate from Mehrauli due to the sacrilege case, but because... of the new candidate's financial power. Naresh Yadav was sentenced on November 30, 2024... Despite this, Arvind Kejriwal had given him a ticket to contest elections from Mehrauli for the third time last week." He claimed that Kejriwal might change 13 more candidates. "There is common talk in Delhi's media that Arvind Kejriwal might change the tickets of some of the 13 MLAs he has given tickets to for the fourth time... He is just waiting for an offer with good

financial backing." On June 24, 2016, torn pages of the Quran were found scattered on a road in Malerkotla in Punjab. This led to violence and burning of vehicles by an angry mob. Four persons, including Yadav, were arrested in the case.

4 schools receive hoax bomb threat



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

In the sixth incident in 11 days, four schools in Delhi received a bomb threat via email in the early hours of Friday. According to Delhi Fire Services, DPS Dwarka sounded the alarm around 5 am, followed by three other schools alerting the authorities at 8 am, 8:39 am and 9:48 am. "In the wee hours of December 20, PCR calls and information regarding bomb threats in schools were received at Dwarka North and Jaffarpur Kalan police stations. In response, local police, PCRs, and fire-brigade reached the schools. The school staff apprised that they had received emails each from unknown sources regarding the bomb threat. School premises were checked by local police and BDTs (bomb disposal teams). After checking, nothing suspicious was found and it was all a hoax," said DCP Dwarka, Ankit Kumar Singh. More than 100 Delhi schools have received bomb threats via email in the past two weeks, with all of them being declared hoaxes. In the past eight months, Delhi has witnessed a slew of bomb threats sent to hospitals, schools and the airport, disrupting their daily functioning.

Bangladesh Police arrests one person for vandalising Hindu idols



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

People take part in a protest march demanding protections for Hindus and other minority groups after the expulsion of premier Sheikh Hasina, in Dhaka. Police in Bangladesh arrested one person for vandalising Hindu idols in the Shakuair area on Saturday (December 21, 2024) morning, officials said.

"We have arrested one person early today for vandalising Hindu idols in the Shakuair area," said Abul Khair, Officer in Charge (OC) of Haluaghat Police Station under northern Mymensingh district. Speaking to ANI over the phone, Khair informed that the accused is a 37-year-old male, named Azharul. He will be produced in court today. "The arrested person's name is Azharul (37). We will produce him to the court today," he told ANI.

According to the police, the miscreants vandalised the heads of two idols of an under-construction temple in the Shakuair area. "Miscreants on Thursday night broke the heads of two idols under construction at a temple in the Shakuair area," OC said, without elaborating. Meanwhile,

MoS External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh in a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha, relating to violence in Bangladesh, informed that the 2, 200 cases of violence against Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh till October of this year. "2,200 cases of violence against Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh were reported till 8th December 2024 and 112 cases in Pakistan were reported till October 2024," he replied. He added that the Government of India has taken "serious" note of these incidents and expressed its concern to the Bangladesh government. "Government has taken serious note of these incidents and shared its concerns with the Government of Bangladesh. India expects that the Government of Bangladesh will take all necessary measures to ensure the safety and welfare of Hindus and other minorities," he stated. Notably, Bangladesh is currently facing a tumultuous period following a student-led movement that led to the ousting of Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The movement was sparked by a series of violent incidents, including attacks on Hindus and other minorities, as well as the demolition of Hindu temples.

The situation in Bangladesh began to escalate in June 2024, when students from various universities in Dhaka united to demand reforms to the country's quota system for government jobs led to the ouster of Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. After weeks of protests and violence that led to over 600 deaths. Hasina fled to India, and an interim government led by Yunus took charge. Following this, Chinmoy Krishna Das, also a former priest of ISKCON, was arrested by police from Dhaka Airport on November 25 on a charge of sedition in Bangladesh, sparking protests worldwide. Bangladesh also reported several attacks on Hindus and other minorities after Muhammad Yunus took charge of the interim government.

Ukrainian strike with U.S.-supplied missiles kills 6 in Kursk, says Russian official

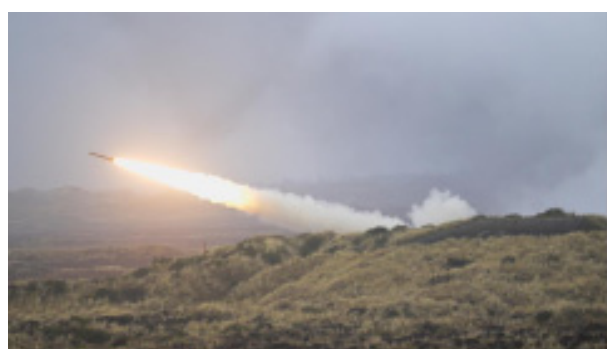
GNS News Agency, Dec 24

A Ukrainian attack on Friday (December 20, 2024) on a town in Russia's Kursk border region using U.S.-supplied missiles killed six people, including a child, a senior local official said. The attack came hours after Ukrainian authorities said a Russian ballistic missile strike on Kyiv killed at least one person and wounded 13. Moscow claimed the Kyiv strike was in response to a Ukrainian strike on Russian soil using American-made weapons earlier this week. Ten other people in the Kursk town of Rylsk, including a 13-year-old, were hospitalized after Friday's strike with HIMARS missiles, Kursk acting Gov. Alexander Khinshtein said. He provided no further details. Russia is trying to push back a Ukrainian incursion into Kursk that was launched in early August, but Ukraine's troops are dug in. The truck-mounted HIMARS launchers fire GPS-guided missiles capable of hitting targets up to 80 kilometers (50 miles) away. The mobile launchers are hard for the enemy to spot and can quickly change position after firing to escape airstrikes. President Joe Biden last month authorized Ukraine to use U.S.-supplied missiles to strike deeper inside Russia, easing limitations on the longer-range weapons. The move was a response to Russia deploying thousands of North Korean troops to reinforce its war effort, officials said.

Shortly before sunrise on Friday, at least three loud blasts were heard in Kyiv. Ukraine's air force said it intercepted five Iskander short-range ballistic missiles fired at the city. The attack knocked out heating to 630 residential buildings, 16 medical facilities and 30 schools and kindergartens, the city administration said. Falling missile debris caused damage and sparked fires in three districts. "We ask citizens to immediately respond to reports of ballistic attack threats, because there is very little time to find shelter," the air force said. During the nearly three years since the war began, Russia has regularly bombed civilian areas of Ukraine, often in an attempt to cripple the power grid and unnerve Ukrainians. Ukraine, struggling to hold back Russia's bigger army on the front line, has attempted to strike Russian infrastructure supporting the country's war effort.

The falling debris in Kyiv caused damage to around two dozen high-rise office buildings in the city center as well as the landmark Catholic Church of St. Nicholas and the Kyiv National Linguistic University. What may have been the blast wave from an intercepted low-flying missile also blew out windows and caused other damage at six embassies, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said.

About five hours later, air raid sirens rang out again. Valeriia Dubova, a 32-year-old photographer, took cover with many others in a crowded subway station. She said



that in the morning attack, she sheltered at home and could feel the walls shaking. Outside, fire engines and ambulances raced down city streets, she said. "You could see that many buildings, high-rises, were damaged, with glass shards on the ground, far from the explosion epicenter," she said. The Russian Defense Ministry said that the strike was in response to a Ukrainian missile attack on Russia's Rostov border region two days earlier. That attack used six American-made Army Tactical Missile System, known as ATACMS, missiles and four Storm Shadow air-launched missiles provided by the United Kingdom, it said. That day, Ukraine claimed to have targeted a Rostov oil refinery as part of its campaign to strike Russian infrastructure supporting the country's war effort. The use of Western-supplied weapons to strike Russia has angered the Kremlin. Ukraine fired several American-supplied longer-range missiles into Russia for the first time on Nov. 19 after Washington eased restrictions on their use. That development prompted Russia to use a new hypersonic missile, called Oreshnik, for the first time. Russian President Vladimir Putin suggested that the missile could be used to target government buildings in Kyiv, though there have been no reports of an Oreshnik being used for a second time. Answering the Ukrainian attack on Rostov on Wednesday, the Russian Defense Ministry said that the military carried out a group strike with "high-precision, long-range weapons" on the command center of Ukraine's military intelligence agency and another location where it said Ukraine's Neptune missile systems are designed and produced. The attack also targeted Ukrainian ground-based cruise missile systems and U.S.-made Patriot air defense systems, the Russian Defense Ministry said. "The objectives of the strike have been achieved. All objects are hit," the ministry said in a Telegram post. Its claims could not immediately be verified. In other Russian attacks on civilian areas of Ukraine, six people, including a 15-year-old girl, were injured by missiles in Kryvyi Rih, regional authorities said. It was the second straight night of attacks in Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hometown.

Major reshuffle as Trudeau faces party pressure, Trump attacks

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Friday (December 20, 2024) shook up his cabinet, changing one-third of his team as political turmoil threatens his leadership and tensions erupt with incoming U.S. president Donald Trump. The reshuffle came at the end of a chaotic week in Ottawa spurred by the surprise resignation of Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland following disagreement with her boss over Mr. Trump's threats to impose sweeping tariffs on Canadian imports. Her exit, after nearly a decade at Mr. Trudeau's side, marked the first open dissent against the prime minister from within his cabinet and has emboldened critics. Since then, Mr. Trudeau has hunkered down with advisors as he reportedly contemplates his own political future amid calls for him to step down ahead of elections scheduled for October 2025 but expected much sooner. In Friday's reset, eight new ministers were appointed to replace those in the 35-member cabinet who have signaled they will not seek reelection, and to relieve others of their double or triple duties in government. Four current ministers were also given new responsibilities. Ms. Freeland, who also quit her role as finance minister, has said she would seek re-election next year. Behind in the polls Mr. Trudeau's childhood friend and ally Dominic LeBlanc was already sworn in as the new finance minister hours after Freeland quit. He also took over the reins from her on negotiating with the incoming Trump administration. Several cabinet recruits, as they headed into the swearing-in ceremony Friday, declared their confidence in Mr. Trudeau. But part of his caucus has urged him to resign, worried that voter fatigue with his leadership will hamstring the Liberals in the next election. Mr. Trudeau swept to power in 2015 and led the



Liberals to two more ballot box victories in 2019 and 2021. But he now trails by 20 points his main rival, Conservative Pierre Poilievre, in public opinion polls. And his Liberals lost four by-elections this year. Compounding those woes, Mr. Trudeau faces the possibility that Mr. Trump in January will slap 25 percent tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico, accusing both of allowing the United States to be flooded with illicit drugs, namely fentanyl, and undocumented migrants. More than 75 percent of Canadian exports go to the United States and nearly two million Canadian jobs depend on trade. In her resignation letter, Ms. Freeland warned this could lead to a "tariff war" with the United States and urged Ottawa to keep its "fiscal powder dry" while rebuking Trudeau's spendthrift policies. Mr. Trudeau last month traveled to Florida to meet with Mr. Trump at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida in a bid to head off a trade war. Mr. Trump called the talks over dinner "very productive." But since then the president-elect has also landed humiliating blows against Mr. Trudeau on social media, repeatedly calling him "governor" of Canada and declaring that the United States' northern neighbor becoming the 51st US state is a "great idea."

U.S. House approves funding bill and sends to Senate hours before government shutdown deadline



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

Hours to go before a midnight government shutdown, the House approved a new plan late Friday (December 20, 2024) from Speaker Mike Johnson that would temporarily fund federal operations and disaster aid, but drops President-elect Donald Trump's demands for a debt limit increase into the new year. Johnson insisted Congress would "meet our obligations" and not allow federal operations to shutter ahead of the Christmas holiday season. But the day's outcome was uncertain after Trump doubled down on his insistence that a debt ceiling increase be included in any deal — if not, he said in an early morning post, let the closures "start now." The bill was approved 366-34, and now goes to the Senate, for expected quick passage. "We will not have a government shutdown," Johnson said ahead of the vote.

It was the third attempt from Johnson, the beleaguered House speaker, to achieve one of the basic requirements of the federal government — keeping it open. And it raised stark questions about whether Johnson will be able to keep his job, in the face of angry GOP colleagues, and work alongside Trump and billionaire ally Elon Musk, who have called the legislative plays this time. Trump's last-minute demand was almost an impossible ask, and Johnson had almost no choice but to work around his pressure for a debt ceiling increase. The speaker knew there wouldn't be enough support within the GOP majority to pass any funding package, since many Republicans prefer to slash federal government and certainly wouldn't allow more debt.

Instead, the Republicans, who will have full control of the White House, House and Senate next year, with big plans for tax cuts and other priorities, are showing they must routinely rely on Democrats for the votes needed to keep up with the routine operations of governing. "So is this a Republican bill or a Democrat bill?" scoffed Musk on social media ahead of the vote. The new 118-page package would fund the government at current levels through March and adds \$100 billion in disaster aid and \$10 billion in agricultural assistance to farmers. Gone is Trump's demand to lift the debt ceiling, which GOP leaders told lawmakers would be debated as part of their tax and border packages in the new year. Republicans made a so-called handshake agreement to raise the debt limit at that time while also cutting \$2.5 trillion in spending over 10 years. It's essentially the same deal that flopped the night before in a spectacular setback — opposed by most Democrats and some of the most conservative Republicans — minus Trump's debt ceiling demand. Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries was in contact with Johnson, but Democrats were cool to the latest effort after the Republican speaker reneged on their original bipartisan compromise. "Welcome back to the MAGA swamp," Jeffries posted. Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the top Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, said it looked like Musk, an unelected official and the wealthiest man in the world, was calling the shots for Trump and the Republicans.

"Who is in charge?" she asked during the debate. Still, most Democrats approved the bill's passage. Trump, who has not yet been sworn into office, is showing the power

At least 2 dead and 60 injured after car drives into German Christmas market in suspected attack



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

A car plowed into a busy outdoor Christmas market in the eastern German city of Magdeburg on Friday (December 20, 2024), killing at least two people and injuring at least 60 others in what authorities believe was an attack. The driver was arrested shortly after the car barreled into the market at around 7 p.m., when it was teeming with holiday shoppers looking forward to the weekend. Verified bystander footage distributed by the German news agency dpa showed the suspect's arrest on a walkway in the middle of the road. A nearby police officer pointing a handgun at the man shouted at him as he lay prone. Other officers soon arrived to take the man into custody. The two people confirmed dead were an adult and a toddler, but officials said additional deaths couldn't be ruled out because 15 people had been seriously injured. The violence shocked the city, bringing its Mayor to the verge of tears and marring a festive event that's part of a centuries-old German tradition. It also prompted several other German towns to cancel their weekend Christmas markets as a precaution and out of solidarity with Magdeburg's loss. The suspect is a 50-year-old Saudi doctor who moved to Germany in 2006, Tamara Zieschang, the interior minister for the state of Saxony-Anhalt, said at a news conference. "He has been practicing medicine in Bernburg, about 23 miles (36 kilometers) south of Magdeburg," she said.

"As things stand, he is a lone perpetrator, so that as far as we know there is no further danger to the city," Saxony-Anhalt's governor, Reiner Haseloff, told reporters. "Every human life that has fallen victim to this attack is a terrible tragedy and one human life too many." The suspected attack in Magdeburg, a city of about 240,000 people west of Berlin that Saxony-Anhalt's capital, came eight years after an Islamic extremist drove a truck into crowded Christmas market in Berlin, killing 13 people and injuring many others. The attacker was killed days later in a shootout in Italy. Christmas markets are a huge part of German culture as an annual holiday tradition cherished since the Middle Ages and successfully exported to much of the Western world. In Berlin alone, more than 100 markets opened late last month and brought the smells of mulled wine, roasted

but also the limits of his sway with Congress, as he intervenes and orchestrates affairs from Mar-a-Lago alongside Musk, who is heading up the incoming administration's new Department of Government Efficiency. "If there is going to be a shutdown of government, let it begin now," Trump posted early in the morning on social media. Trump does not fear government shutdowns the way Johnson and the lawmakers see federal closures as political losers that harm the livelihoods of Americans. The incoming Trump administration vows to slash the federal budget and fire thousands of employees. Trump himself sparked the longest government shutdown in history in his first term at the White House, the monthlong closures over the 2018-19 Christmas holiday and New Year period. More importantly for the president-elect was his demand for pushing the thorny debt ceiling debate off the table before he returns to the White House. The federal debt limit expires Jan. 1, and Trump doesn't want the first months of his new administration saddled with tough negotiations in Congress to lift the nation's borrowing capacity. It gives Democrats, who will be in the minority next year, leverage.

"Congress must get rid of, or extend out to, perhaps, 2029, the ridiculous Debt Ceiling," Trump posted — increasing his demand for a now five-year debt limit increase. "Without this, we should never make a deal." Johnson had tried at first to appease Trump's demands, but ultimately had to work around them. Trump and Musk unleashed their opposition — and social media army — on the original plan Johnson presented, which was a 1,500-page bipartisan compromise he struck with Democrats that included the disaster aid for hard hit states, but did not address the debt ceiling situation. A Trump-backed second plan, Thursday's slimmed-down 116-page bill with his preferred two-year debt limit increase into 2027, failed in a monumental defeat, rejected by most Democrats as an unserious effort — but also by conservative Republicans who refuse to pile on the nation's red ink.

On Friday morning, Vice President-elect JD Vance and Trump's pick to be incoming Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Russ Vought, arrived early at the speaker's office at the Capitol, where a group of holdouts from the headline House Freedom Caucus were meeting with Johnson. Later, during the lunchtime meeting of House Republicans in the Capitol basement, Johnson asked for a show of hands as they determined the path forward, Republican Rep. Ralph Norman said. Government workers have already been told to prepare for a federal shutdown which would send millions of employees — and members of the military — into the holiday season without paychecks. President Joe Biden, in his final weeks in office, has played a less public role in the debate, drawing criticism from Trump and Republicans who are trying to shift the blame for any shutdown on him. Biden has been in discussions with Schumer and Jeffries, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Friday. But, she said: "Republicans blew up this deal. They did, and they need to fix this." Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called the original agreement "the quickest, simplest, and easiest way we can make sure the government stays open while delivering critical emergency aid to the American people." The speaker's election is the first vote of the new Congress, which convenes Jan. 3, and Johnson will need the support of almost every single House Republican from his razor-thin majority to ensure he can keep the gavel. Democrats will vote for Jeffries. As the speaker twisted in Washington, his peril was on display. At Turning Point USA's conservative AmericaFest confab, Trump ally Steve Bannon stirred thousands of activists late Thursday with a withering takedown of the Louisiana Republican. "Clearly, Johnson is not up to the task. He's gotta go," Bannon said, drawing cheers. He smiled and cocked his head at the response, adding: "President Trump? These are your people."

almonds and bratwurst to the capital. Other markets abound across the country. German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said late last month that there were no concrete indications of a danger to Christmas markets this year, but that it was wise to be vigilant. Hours after Friday's (December 20, 2024) suspected attack, the ring of sirens clashed with the market's festive ornaments, stars and leafy garlands.

The attack reverberated beyond Magdeburg. After a soccer match Friday (December 20, 2024) evening between Bayern Munich and Leipzig, Bayern CEO Jan-Christian Dreesen asked fans at the club's stadium to observe a minute of silence. Magdeburg resident Dorin Steffen told German news agency dpa that she was at a concert in a nearby church when she heard the sirens. The cacophony was so loud "you had to assume that something terrible had happened."

She called the attack "a dark day" for the city. "We are shaking," Steffen said. "Full of sympathy for the relatives, also in the hope that nothing has happened to our relatives, friends and acquaintances." Haseloff called it a catastrophe for the city, state and country, adding that flags will be lowered to half-staff in Saxony-Anhalt and that the federal government planned to do the same. "It is really one of the worst things one can imagine, particularly in connection with what a Christmas market should bring," the governor said. Chancellor Olaf Scholz posted on X: "My thoughts are with the victims and their relatives. We stand beside them and beside the people of Magdeburg." Magdeburg Mayor Simone Borris, who was on the verge of tears, said officials plan to arrange a memorial at the city's cathedral on Saturday (December 21, 2024). The attack reverberated beyond Magdeburg. After a soccer match Friday (December 20, 2024) evening between Bayern Munich and Leipzig, Bayern CEO Jan-Christian Dreesen asked fans at the club's stadium to observe a minute of silence.

Mild earthquake jolts Nepal, no damage or loss of lives reported

New Delhi: A mild earthquake, measuring 4.8 on the Richter scale, struck Nepal in the early hours of Saturday, as confirmed by the National Centre for Seismology (NCS). The tremor, which occurred at 3:59 am Indian Standard Time (IST), was registered at a depth of 10 kilometres beneath the Earth's surface. According to NCS, the earthquake's epicentre was pinpointed at Latitude 29.17° N and Longitude 81.59° E, a region known for its susceptibility to seismic activity. So far, there have been no reports of casualties or significant structural damage. Local authorities, however, remain on alert and are closely monitoring the situation.

Pegasus ruling in the US could have reverberations in India



the NSO Group also claimed that the allegations of snooping were false and misleading. "The report... is full of wrong assumptions and uncorroborated theories that raise serious doubts about the reliability and interests of the sources. It seems like the 'unidentified sources' have supplied information that has no factual basis and are far from reality," the NSO Group had said in a statement. A Supreme Court-ordered enquiry after allegations in India that Pegasus was used on citizens, several petitions were filed in the Supreme Court seeking an inquiry into the charges.

In 2021, the Supreme Court had formed a committee of technical experts to look into allegations of unauthorised surveillance using the Pegasus software. In August 2022, the committee of technical experts found no conclusive evidence on use of the spyware in phones examined by it but noted that the Central Government "had not cooperated" with the panel. The report is sealed and has not been released publicly since. "As the report is submitted to the Supreme Court, it will not be proper to offer any comments," retired judge Justice R V Raveendran, who was supervising the probe panel, had told The Indian Express earlier. Face-off in states Even as the Central Government's involvement in using Pegasus on Indian citizens remained suspect, the spyware became a hotly discussed issue in at least two states — West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. In 2021, the West Bengal government set up a Commission of Inquiry into the alleged surveillance of phones using Pegasus. It was set up to enquire into and report on inter alia the reported interception and the possession, storage and use of such information collected through such interception, in the hands of State actors and non-State actors." However, the Commission's work was cut short as the Supreme Court stayed its proceedings. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had later claimed that the West Bengal government had received an offer to purchase the Pegasus spyware, with the NSO Group ready to provide its spyware to the state police for Rs 25 crore around four-five years ago.

In Andhra Pradesh, the alleged use of Pegasus became a political issue between the YSRCP and TDP. In 2022, the state's Assembly passed a resolution to set up a committee to find out if the previous Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government had bought and used Pegasus, following Banerjee's statements that West Bengal had been offered Pegasus. YSRCP, then in power in the state, alleged that TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu may have previously purchased the Pegasus spyware to keep tabs on rival political leaders including Chief Minister at the time Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy. In 2024, when the TDP regained control of the state after winning the Assembly election, Chandrababu Naidu sought a report from the Director General of Police (DGP) on whether Pegasus was used to tap the phones belonging to him and his son N Lokesh Naidu by the Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy regime. Lokesh Naidu told The Indian Express that him and Naidu were targeted twice and that they received alerts on their mobile phones. "I have been targeted twice, once during my Yuva Galam yatra in March 2023 and once this April during campaigning. We both received the alerts from Apple. We suspect that Pegasus was used by the Jagan government to tap our phones," Lokesh said.

New game in town: Opinion trading sees surge in users, funding — under the radar

Will India take three wickets against Australia at the end of six overs? Will Bitcoin breach the \$110,000 mark today? Will the Congress contest 30 or more seats in the Delhi Assembly elections in 2025? You can bet real money on the outcome of these and many more questions. Welcome to the world of opinion trading: platforms which allow users to wager on the outcome of future events. The sector is growing exponentially, raking in funding and an estimated 5 crore users, but it seems to have largely gone under the radar in India, unscrutinised.

Parochially, opinion trading platforms appear to be betting platforms — and some in government also have this view. But, investors and founders argue that there is a big element of skill that goes into making money on such platforms. Whether it's a game of skill or of chance, stakeholders in the larger online gaming sector in India are privately calling for a clear Central law to deal with opinion trading platforms, has learnt. The sector in India has companies like Gurugram-based Probo and MPL Opinion. While the former offers questions on a varied set of sectors like sports, elections and cryptocurrency, the latter only deals with questions related to cricket matches. These platforms have received more than Rs 4,200 crore in funding so far from over 35 investors which include Sequoia Capital (PeakXV), Elevation Capital, Accel Partners, Soma Capital and Y Combinator. India currently does not have a law which can directly deal with opinion trading platforms like Probo and MPL Opinion — though in foreign markets like United States and Australia, where this industry is more mature, governments have decided to treat the wagers as securities, thereby putting the responsibility of regulation on the stock market regulator. To give a sense of the pace of growth in India, as per industry estimates, these platforms have registered transaction volumes of over Rs 50,000 crore a year with a user base of more than 5 crore people. Collective revenues for firms in the sector are projected to be over Rs 1,000 crore for the financial year 2024-25.

Skill or chance?

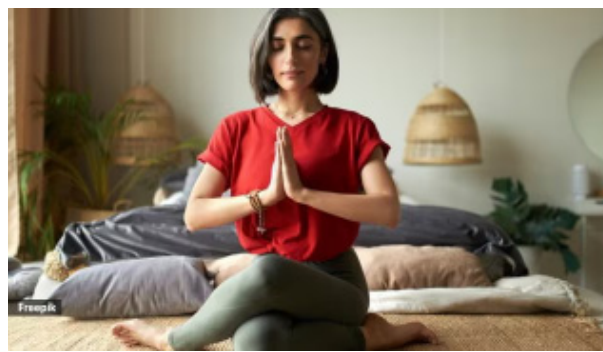
In India, the fundamental legal lens through which online games are seen is whether they are a game of chance or game of skill. In games of chance, no person can have a competitive advantage over another because the result purely depends on luck. In games of skill, though, there could be some amount of preparation that could allow someone to be in a better position to make a prediction. While many believe this underlying lens itself could be problematic, given that many games of skill could also involve an element of luck or chance, this is currently the legal understanding in India. In effect, games of chance are bad and games of skill are alright. So naturally, it is in any online gaming platform's interest to claim that their platform involves a great degree of skill. Sachin Gupta, co-founder of Probo, told The Indian Express: "We have created templates for questions and calculated their skill scores, to ensure they are skill based. Where the element of chance outweighs skill, we do not allow such questions to be published on the app." "There is an internal skill auditing team, which assesses every question over a period of events to determine a skill score, which is based on the definition of skill based games laid down by the Supreme Court — the level of dexterity, knowledge, alertness required," he said. But not everyone shares that view. "Wagering on the probability of an outcome is betting in our opinion, and opinion trading platforms generally follow that model," a senior government official said. The IT Ministry, in its rules for online gam-



ing released last year, had said that permissible online real money gaming does not include "wagering on any outcome". A gaming industry executive said, "opinion trading platforms allow users to gamble with real money by simply choosing 'Yes' or 'No' on arbitrary events happening in the future, with odds changing every second. These platforms are definitely betting platforms and involve no skill". Legal lacunae Lawyers working with these firms have advised them to stay away from certain sectors to avoid coming under greater regulatory scrutiny. "For instance, one clear no go area is the stock market, or any questions related to the Indian stock market, since there is a fear that it could get the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) involved," a lawyer, who has worked with opinion trading companies, said, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

Another lawyer said that while at first glance opinion trading platforms can seem like betting platforms, as it allows wagering on events, there are some fundamental differences. "For instance, there is no house on such platforms, and they do not have any control over the events they are asking questions about. When there is a house, there is of course a perverse incentive to rig the system," the lawyer said. Google has allowed some opinion trading apps such as MPL Opinion on its Play Store, but has prohibited apps like Probo. These games are, however, available on Apple's App Store. Incidentally, Google had allowed some fantasy sports and rummy apps on its Play Store as part of a pilot project in 2022. This pilot is currently the subject of a Competition Commission of India investigation for alleged market distortion. Generally, these apps, including opinion trading apps, acquire users through digital ads on platforms like Google and Meta's Facebook and Instagram. Global experience The opinion trading sector is regulated across countries like the US, UK and Australia. In the US, Kalshi, the company that started the opinions trading segment — and from which Probo gets a lot of its inspiration from — is regulated by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC), one of the country's two main stock market regulators. Although, it is worth noting that a similar prediction app called Polymarket has come under the scrutiny of the US Department of Justice allegedly accepting trades from US-based users. The company is not registered with the CFTC and as a result, can not legally allow US-based users to wager on the platform. In India, however, there is currently no direct regulator for the sector and it is yet to pique the interest of regulators like SEBI. So effectively, at the central level, there is no dedicated law that sets the guardrails for such platforms, and there is very little in terms of regulatory protection that is available to their users. The IT Ministry had come up with amendments to Information Technology Rules to regulate online gaming platforms, which could have had a bearing on firms like Probo.

432 Hz vs 417 Hz: Frequency you should meditate on for a calming experience



The benefits of meditation — from improving focus and productivity to grounding oneself and decluttering the mind — have been preached far and wide by experts and wellness enthusiasts. On this World Meditation Day, indianexpress.com decided to take a deep dive into the science of sound healing to explore which frequency — 432 Hz or 417 Hz — offers the most calming experience to meditate on. "Our body is a bundle of vibrations or sound waves—a fact scientifically proven by Albert Einstein in the 19th century. Everything in the universe, including us, is derived from one universal vibration, the 'Om,' which resonates at a frequency upwards of 700 Hz. At our highest state of being, we align with this universal vibration of oneness and bliss," said Rashoo Sachdeva, a three dimensional leadership coach and sound healer.

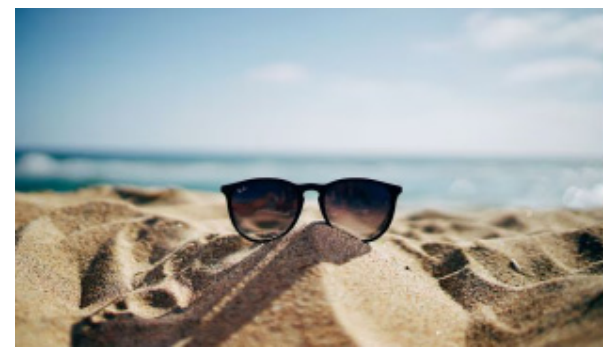
However, Sachdeva shared that situations in life often disrupt our natural vibrations, causing us to experience

emotions like guilt, grief, and fear, which resonate at frequencies as low as 50 Hz. Listening to higher frequencies can rewire the brain, gradually stimulating emotions associated with higher vibrations such as love, joy, and peace—typically above 400 Hz. "Our reality gets determined by our predominant vibration and can be shifted or re-calibrated through the principle of resonance," she said. By listening to music and sounds that carry a particular frequency your internal vibration starts getting attuned upwards or downwards. Music can lead to grief or joy, it can heal or hurt, she said.

According to Sachdeva, "acceptance" begins at a frequency of 400 Hz — particularly 417 Hz clears us of any negative emotions and 432 Hz creates a calming and relaxing effect. However, when asked which one works better, she revealed that the impact varies from person to person, depending on his or her present state. meditate By tuning into the right frequencies, you can elevate your inner vibrations and create a more balanced, serene reality for yourself. (Source: File) Tips for using healing frequencies

Sachdeva stressed the importance of sourcing healing music from credible sources to ensure its effectiveness. "Use these frequencies consciously to develop awareness of how they influence your emotions and vibrations," she said. She also warned against listening to such frequencies while engaging in activities like driving, walking, or running. "External vibrations can distract or overstimulate, so it's best to reserve them for meditation or relaxation sessions," Sachdeva said. By tuning into the right frequencies, you can elevate your inner vibrations and create a more balanced, serene reality for yourself.

Sunglasses don't just look good — they're good for you too. Here's how to choose the right pair



Australians are exposed to some of the highest levels of solar ultraviolet (UV) radiation in the world. While we tend to focus on avoiding UV damage to our skin, it's important to remember our eyes as well. Last summer, only six in ten Australians who spent time outside during peak UV exposure times said they wore sunglasses. But sunglasses are much more than a fashion statement. Here's why they're important for our eye health (and our skin) — and some tips on how to choose a pair that works.

What is UV radiation?

UV radiation is a type of energy produced by sources like the sun. There are three types: UVA, UVB, UVC. UVA and UVB are responsible for the sun-related damage to our skin and eyes. UV can be direct, scattered or reflected, bouncing off surfaces such as water, sand and snow. But unlike the other types of energy the sun makes (visible light and infrared radiation), we can't see or feel UV radiation. This is why we can't rely on clear skies or hot temperatures to work out if UV levels are high. Instead, we use the UV Index, a scale from low (1–2) to extreme (11+). Official guidelines recommend sun protection when the UV index is 3 or higher. This includes protecting our eyes.

How does UV light affect our eyes?

Excessive UV radiation can have both short and long-term effects on our eyes and surrounding skin. In the short term, you might become sensitive to light or develop photokeratitis, sometimes known as "snow blindness". Photokeratitis is like a sunburn to the cornea (the clear, dome-shaped part at the front of the eye that lets light in) and makes the eyes sore, red and sensitive to light. Photokeratitis usually resolves with rest from light and eyedrops. But the long-term effects of chronic UV exposure can be more severe. It can lead to a fleshy growth on the eye called a pterygium, also known as "surfer's eye". This growth can obstruct vision if it grows over the cornea, requiring surgical removal. Excessive UV exposure can also speed up the development of cataracts (where the lens inside the eye becomes cloudy and blurs the vision) or lead to skin cancers on the eye and eyelid. Excessive UV exposure can be particularly harmful to children as the lens in

their eyes aren't able to filter UV light as well as adults — so it's important for children to wear sunglasses too.

What about the skin?

UV radiation can also accelerate skin ageing. It breaks down proteins in the skin which keep it elastic, such as elastin and collagen, and can trigger low-grade inflammation. Without sunglasses, we also tend to squint more to try and reduce the amount of light entering our eyes. These repeated movements can contribute to the development of wrinkles and "crow's feet" around the eyes.

What sunglasses should I choose?

In Australia and New Zealand, every pair of spectacles with tinted lenses must be labelled to show the category of protection they offer. They are regulated by Australian/New Zealand Standards. There are five categories for lenses: Categories 0–1 are "fashion spectacles". They look like sunglasses but in fact offer little or no UV protection. Category 2 provide a medium level of sun glare reduction and good UV protection. Category 3 provide a high level of sun glare reduction and good UV protection. Category 4 lenses are very dark and only recommended for use in extreme levels of glare, such as mountaineering, or at sea. These lenses are too dark to be used for driving.

What else should I know?

Good sunglasses don't have to be expensive. The category of protection is more important than the price tag — so always check the label to see how well they block UV radiation. Sunglasses that fit close to eyes, with good wrap around the face, provide the best protection in reducing both direct and reflected UV radiation. Lenses can also be polarised, blocking any light waves coming from a horizontal direction. This reduces glare from reflective surfaces while increasing contrast — especially useful for water activities such as fishing. Some sunglasses may also use the term "eye protection factor" (EPF). The EPF rating is based on how well a pair of sunglasses can protect your eyes from UVA and UVB based on the lenses and frame design. Look for an EPF of 9 or 10. The label "UV400" is also useful, as it means the lenses block almost 100% of UV. Protecting your eyes year-round Sunlight can also be beneficial to our eyes. For example, morning sunlight can help us reset our body clocks and promote proper eye development in children to prevent shortsightedness. It is also important for the body's production of vitamin D. But moderation is key. The safest way to get the benefits of sunlight during summer is a few minutes of mid-morning or mid-afternoon sunlight. In late autumn and winter when the UV index is below 3, spending time outdoors during midday is beneficial. As we're exposed to UV radiation all year round, sunglasses are a good idea in any season. In summer, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and sunscreen, and limiting outdoor time during peak UV exposure, will also help protect your eyes and skin.

Experts reveal what happens when you sleep with your head elevated

How we position ourselves during sleep can significantly impact our health and comfort. While many naturally prefer sleeping with their heads slightly raised, understanding the science behind this position reveals benefits and potential drawbacks. "When the head is raised during sleep, gravity helps reduce pressure in the blood vessels in the head and neck areas," explains Dr Chandril Chugh, senior neurologist and director of Dr Good Deed Clinic. However, he cautions that "if the angle is too steep, it might limit blood flow, causing discomfort or stiffness."

This position could be particularly beneficial for those battling acid reflux or respiratory issues. Dr Palleti Siva Karthik Reddy, consultant physician at Koshys Hospital, notes, "Gravity plays a crucial role here, as elevating the head prevents stomach acid from flowing back into the esophagus, reducing the risk of nighttime heartburn and discomfort." Research published in The American Journal of Gastroenterology supports this, he says, showing significant decreases in acid reflux symptoms during sleep with head elevation.

But what about our spine? "When the head is slightly elevated at a proper angle, typically between 15-30 degrees, it can help maintain a neutral spine," says Dr Chugh. However, both experts highlight that incorrect elevation can lead to problems. Dr Reddy warns that "sleeping with the head too high or at an awkward angle can lead to misalignment of the cervical spine, causing strain on the neck muscles and upper back." The impact on sleep quality varies among individuals. This position can be a game-changer for some, particularly those with breathing difficulties. "By improving airflow, this position can prevent frequent awakenings and allow the individual to achieve deeper sleep stages," Dr Reddy explains. However, Dr Chugh adds, "if the elevation is not set properly, it may cause tension or discomfort, af-



fecting how deeply you sleep." For those battling acid reflux or respiratory issues, this position could be particularly beneficial. This position could be particularly beneficial for those battling acid reflux or respiratory issues.

Dr Chugh advises caution for "people with certain neck or back issues where an elevated position causes more strain." Dr Reddy adds, "individuals with hypotension may experience worsened symptoms due to reduced blood flow to the brain." Finding the right balance is critical. "Using an adjustable bed or a pillow that supports the neck's natural curvature can help distribute weight evenly and prevent pressure points," suggests Dr Reddy. Both experts stress the importance of consulting healthcare providers to determine the most suitable sleep position for specific health needs. As with many aspects of health, what works for one person may not work for another.

'Shah Rukh Khan's fellow stars would call him hakla behind his back': Abhijeet Bhattacharya says SRK hasn't had a single memorable song after they fell apart



hug me, I wasn't expecting an apology, but he could come and say, 'chal yaar... (come on mate...)', we'll play together again. But people chose to (ignore me)," he said, his voice tinged with a sense of longing.

Abhijeet's association with Shah Rukh dates back to the actor's early days, and he fondly remembers singing for him when he was young. "I sang for him when he was very young. My voice is still very young," he said, emphasising the special bond they shared through music. However, their personal relationship was never close, and they rarely met outside of professional commitments. "We never met too often even before. We would meet on the day of music lunch or during celebrations. Now, no, we don't meet. We were never friends. I am a musician, I go to the studio and return home. I don't meet people and party like filmy log," Abhijeet explained.

Despite the distance between them, Abhijeet is eager to patch up with Shah Rukh, citing their musical chemistry as the reason. "Why wouldn't I want to patch up? We are made for each other, our voice... We are like husband and wife. Husband and wife fight, and they'll have to patch up, isn't it? It is not out of obligation but it is for the good. We will create something good," he said, his enthusiasm palpable. When asked about his previous statement that Shah Rukh was a star only until he sang songs for him, Abhijeet clarified that he was misunderstood. "No... But you remind me any song of his from recent times which you remember. After me, Udit (Narayan) and (Kumar) Shanu sang for him new music directors made songs for him with new singers, do you have any of those at the top of your mind? The new songs are not at par with Kuch Kuch Hota Hai, Darr..." he said, highlighting the impact of their collaboration on Shah Rukh's career. Abhijeet also revealed that Shah Rukh's contemporaries never considered him a star, often referring to him as "hakla" (stammerer) instead. He even mimicked how they would tease him about singing for Shah Rukh. "There were a few stars who told me, 'hakle ke liye gaa raha hai na tu (You are singing for the stammerer)?' I was like why are they feeling jealous, I got the award for my singing. After that experience I lost interest (in playback singing for the stars) and started focusing on my shows and concerts. Even today I am very happy doing that," Abhijeet said, his voice laced with a sense of satisfaction. As Abhijeet looks back on his journey, it's clear that his feelings for Shah Rukh are complex, a mix of hurt, longing, and admiration. Despite their differences, he remains hopeful that they can rekindle their musical magic, creating something special for their fans.

It's been 17 long years since Abhijeet Bhattacharya last sang for Shah Rukh Khan, and the veteran singer's emotions still run deep. "I didn't say it in anger. I never abused him, there are so many people who did, some named their dog after him, his contemporaries. Then Farah Khan's husband (Shirish Kunder) insulted him, they all then hugged it out. My problem is that I was expressing my pain," Abhijeet revealed on Shubhankar Mishra's podcast, highlighting the hurt he felt during their public fallout.

Abhijeet Bhattacharya has lent his voice to some of Shah Rukh Khan's most iconic songs. Some of his notable contributions include 'Tumne Jo Maine Dekha' from Main Hoon Na, 'Tauba Tumhare Ishare' from Chalthe Chalthe, 'Chand Taare' from Yes Boss, 'I Am The Best from Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani, 'Zara Sa Jhoom Loon Mein' from Dilwale Dulhania Le Jaayege and many more. These songs have become an integral part of Bollywood's musical heritage, cementing Abhijeet's status as one of Shah Rukh Khan's go-to playback singers during the 1990s. Abhijeet said that Shah Rukh could have reached out to him, not necessarily to apologise, but to extend an olive branch. "Being a senior, age-wise, he could come and

Katrina Kaif reveals her mother-in-law prepares 'homemade hair oil' for her; reveals husband Vicky Kaushal's green flag trait

Actor Katrina Kaif has often opened up about her bond with husband Vicky Kaushal, and her mother-in-law Veena Kaushal. She is often spotted spending quality time with her, and they recently paid a visit to the Shirdi temple. Katrina is also a successful businesswoman with her own cosmetics line. However, the secret behind her gorgeous hair is actually her mother-in-law's homemade hair oil. In a recent interview with The Week, Katrina revealed that she doesn't like wearing makeup at home, while her hair-care routine is taken care of by Vicky's mother. She shared, "I'm equally passionate about skincare, because I have very sensitive skin. I enjoy fun routines, like the gua sha. I know I'm late to the party, but I've just started using it and it's amazing. My mother-in-law also makes me this hair oil with onion, amla, avocado and two-three other ingredients. Home remedies are incredibly powerful too."

Lovingly called 'Kitto' by her in-laws, she is also blessed with an absolute green flag of a husband. In the same conversation, Katrina revealed that he doesn't fight with her for counter space in their bathroom. She laughed and said, "He's very adjusting and understanding." This is not the first time that Katrina has praised her in-laws. On The Kapil Sharma Show in 2022, she had revealed that Veena Kaushal cooks sweet potatoes for her, keeping in mind her special diets. "Initially Mummy ji used to urge me to have a lot to have parathas, and since I'm on a diet I couldn't have them.



So I used to just have a bite. And, now that we have almost completed a year of our marriage, mummy ji now prepares sweet potatoes for me. My in-laws call me Kitto with love," she said. She further added, "The most important thing that happened is the way Vicky is with his family, Sunny, his mom and dad, is so incredible. At some point, even if you find certain things about the way he would be in the beginning of our relationship are little bit restrictive, the one thought that always occurred to me was — if this is the kind of respect, loyalty and the importance he gives to his family, this is the same respect, importance he is going to give to his family when he is married."

'So what if Akshay Kumar reads his lines off a board?' Nana Patekar defends his Welcome co-star, compares his tricks to Marlon Brando

Nana Patekar and Akshay Kumar are among the best-known stars in the Indian film industry. While Nana is known for his naturalistic acting style, Akshay is known for his broad comedy and daredevil stunts. The two stars have worked together in the popular Welcome franchise, with the first film releasing in 2007 and the sequel in 2015. Nana recently shared his experience of working with the Khiladi Kumar and defended his process of reading his lines off a board.

Nana, who is currently promoting his film Vanvaas, defended his Welcome co-star. He said in an interview with The Lallantop, "Everybody has their own style and preferences. For me, I don't look at the screen, for him, he needs a board to read. But, how is it a problem? At the end of the day, it is difficult to read and emote at the same time. It is something I can't do, and he is a great



actor." To justify his statement, Nana cited the example of Hollywood veteran Marlon Brando. He said, "In the film Last Tango in Paris, Marlon Brando was shooting for an intimate scene, for which he couldn't remember his lines. What he did was,

he wrote his lines on the back of his co-star and read it aloud. Today, it is regarded as one of the best scenes of all time. People say, 'What chemistry he had, the way he was looking into his co-star's eyes...' In reality, he was only reading. It's all

about ones style and preference." Currently, Akshay Kumar is shooting for the third installment of Welcome sans Nana. The film will feature Disha Patani, Raveena Tandon, Sanjay Dutt, Jacqueline Fernandez, Suniel Shetty, Anil Kapoor, Lara Dutta,

Mandira Bedi would 'cry every day' because of how she was treated by 'disrespectful' cricket legends during 2003 World Cup



Mandira Bedi, who started out as an actor in the 1990s, pivoted to television in the 2000s. She was appointed as a presenter during the cricket World Cup in 2003. However, the experience was anything but pleasant for her, at least for the first few days. Mandira opened up about the challenges she faced in an interaction with Kareena Kapoor Khan on an episode of her show, What Women Want. Revealing how she faced sexist treatment by cricket legends, she shared, "Now, there is space for a woman in cricket or sports telecasts everywhere. But when you are the first one to do it, people look at you with a magnifying glass. They scrutinise you, they have comments about you, and they tell you that you don't belong there. 'What the hell is she doing? Why is she discussing cricket?'"

She continued, "But, the channel got me on board to ask the questions (on the common person's mind). They wanted to get new viewers, and that's what they got me on board for. It was a hard one to begin with, because there was very little acceptance. When you are sitting on a panel and talking to legends, it's another different language. It's one thing when you are sitting on the couch and watching a cricket match while discussing it, but with the cameras on you here, you have to speak their language."

Mandira revealed that she used to cry everyday after the live telecast. "In the first one week, I had so much ex-

cess baggage in my head. I was so worried and nervous. When the red light of the camera comes on, I'd be tongue tied. I also didn't believe that I belonged there. I just wanted to be accepted and be a part of the furniture. I just wanted them to be okay with me being around. People should just accept me, love me, and want me around," she said. "One week went by with absolute hesitation, fumbles and mistakes. At the end of every show, I would put my head down and cry. The legends on either sides of me, I would ask them questions and they just stared at me. They turned to the camera and answered whatever the hell they wanted to answer, nothing connected to my question, because my question was probably not relevant or important enough for them. It was very unnerving. I felt disrespected," Mandira further added. However, things changed when she gained her confidence back after the channel's intervention. "At the end of the first week, there was an intervention and the channel called me and said, 'We have chosen you amongst a thousand women, we believe you belong there. You are not an analyst, expert or a commentator, you are a presenter. Go out there and have fun, show them your personality'. That intervention was really helpful, it was a turning point for me. I flipped a switch that day," she expressed. The actor continued, "I went back with the confidence that whatever I ask is not off the table, I am going to continue to ask him. I asked the legend number one, 'What do you think of the XYZ cricketer?' He stared at me and answered something else on camera as usual. I said again, 'But sir, you didn't answer my question'. It was live TV, what can one do? Eventually, I was getting my answers and people were accepting and respecting me." It was actually Kareena Kapoor Khan's father-in-law and Saif Ali Khan's dad Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi who treated her with utmost respect. She told Kareena, "When people ask me what was the best compliment you got when you did that World Cup back in 2003. It was your father-in-law. He came down for the semi finals and finals. He was so respectful, kind and sweet. When he met me for the first time, he shook my hand and said, 'So you are the Mandira Bedi everyone is talking about'. That made me feel so good and special."

What made Govinda go from being the 'greatest star on screen' to nowhere to be seen?

Govinda started his illustrious career in 1986 with a string of hits. According to a BBC online poll at the turn of the century, he was ranked among the greatest stars of all time, alongside Amitabh Bachchan, Laurence Olivier, and Alec Guinness. He was a fashion trendsetter even before the likes of Ranveer Singh burst onto the scene. From wearing a purple-pink kurta in Bade Miyan Chote Miyan and whacky printed shirts in several of his films, his style wasn't limited to his outfits. The actor also knew how to turn heads with his choice of accessories—chunky belts and dope watches. Not one to shy away from experimentation, he confidently embraced colours like yellow, violet, and red, setting trends that defined an era. In addition to his fashion, Govinda broke the norms with his roles, often pushing boundaries with his comedic delivery. A prime example is his portrayal of a woman in Aunty No. 1 (1998). Whether it was action, dance, or comedy, Govinda brought effortless charisma to every performance. His popularity reached such heights that during the filming of Hum (1991) with Amitabh Bachchan and Rajinikanth, fans reportedly flocked to the set to meet Govinda, ignoring the other two megastars.

In an interview with Movie magazine, Amitabh Bachchan recalled, "I was shooting with Govinda for Hum when a group of young kids came up to me and one of the boys asked for an autograph. Govinda was standing next to me. There was a young, cute girl who gave me a slap and said, 'Woh nahi, yeh. Govinda ka autograph lo.' (Not him. Take Govinda's autograph.)" In an era dominated by stars like Sunny Deol, Jackie Shroff, Anil Kapoor, Sanjay Dutt, Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Aamir Khan, Suniel Shetty, Ajay Devgn, and Akshay Kumar, Govinda carved his niche with a parallel industry of comic entertainers. Films like Shola Aur Shabnam, Coolie No. 1, Hero No. 1, Saajan Chale Sasural, Dulhe Raja, and Haseena Maheja became cult classics. His success continued into the 2000s, with hits like Hadh Kardi Aapne, Jodi No. 1, and Kyo Kili... Main Juth Nahin Bolta. However, by the mid-2000s, his career faced a decline, and his efforts to reclaim his stardom fell



short.

Govinda's growing fame was accompanied by a reputation for tardiness. Industry veterans like Anees Bazmee, Vasu Bhagnani, and David Dhawan have openly discussed his habit of arriving late on set or skipping shoots altogether. In a chat with YouTuber Ronak Kotecha, producer Vasu Bhagnani shared an incident from the shoot of Hero No 1, where the actor kept about 75 crew members waiting in Switzerland for three long days. A worried Bhagnani made a call to Govinda. He said, "I called him and asked, 'If you are not going to come, then we will come back.' He got upset and said I am coming." However, he added that after his arrival, Govinda was incredibly efficient, shooting about 70 percent of the song in just a day. In his debut year, 1986, Govinda starred in about five movies. In the following year, he starred in six films. In 1988, Govinda starred in 10 films. As the years passed, the number of movies he starred in per year increased, the highest being fourteen in 1989.

In the '90s, the actor did several films with director David Dhawan, most of which went on to become big hits. Their collaboration started with the 1993 film Aankhen, and just like that the actor-director duo went on to make 18 films together. Some of these films were produced by Pahlaj Nihalani, who believed after a point, working with Govinda became very risky. In an interview with YouTube channel Friday Talks, the producer said, "He gradually became more and more superstitious. He was always a little

gullible. He would say that the chandelier is about to fall on set, and ask everyone to move aside. Then he would predict that Kader Khan was going to drown. He would instruct people to change their clothes based on his superstitions. He would refuse to do certain things on certain days. All of this, combined with his tardiness and gullibility, led to his downfall."

The producer also shared that there was always an uncertainty working with him. "He would sign dozens of B-grade and C-grade movies without a second thought. He'd be working on five or six movies at the same time, nobody would know where he is. He'd be late constantly. He would lie. He said that he was doing it for money, and I told him that this is a dangerous way of thinking." Govinda's failure to adapt to changing times further hindered his prospects. The rise of multiplexes in the 2000s saw audiences gravitating towards more nuanced cinema like Dil Chahta Hai. In contrast, Govinda continued with formulaic comedies such as Raja Bhaiya and Khullam Khulla Pyaar Karen, which failed to resonate with viewers. As contemporaries reinvented themselves with fitness, diverse roles, and new genres, Govinda remained unchanged. While occasional hits like Bhagam Bhag and Partner brought fleeting success, they couldn't revive his stardom. As the years passed, the roles dried up; he hasn't featured in any film post his 2019 project Rangeela Raja, which, too, was a massive flop. During the heights of his stardom, Govinda also turned down offers to appear in landmark

films such as Taal and Devdas, because he didn't want to do character roles. In an interview with Film Companion, Govinda said, "When I had turned down Devdas, I also refused Taal the same time. Both the characters went to become iconic hits but I was on top of my game at that point and I didn't know if people would accept me in a character role."

He added, "I thought to myself that I'd keep reminding myself that I was playing Chunnial in the movie. And I would as multiple questions that could upset the makers. I like to get into the skin of the characters and understand the situations around them, they make my characters memorable. If nothing else, the audience at least would know I have played my part honestly. I would not want anyone to suspect my honesty towards my work." However, later in his career, he did take up side roles in films like Kill Dill and Happy Ending. While Kill Dill received mixed reviews, Happy Ending bagged Govinda Stardust Award for Best Supporting Actor. Yet, neither of these films helped him revive his lost stardom. As his film career witnessed the lows, the actor ventured into politics. He became the Member of Parliament from the Indian National Congress. However, that too didn't work in the actor's favour. Now, Govinda is set to make a comeback with three movies. In his appearance on The Great Indian Kapil Show, Govinda shared, "It's been a long wait. After Aa Gaya Hero, I didn't have the opportunity to make another movie. I have three films.

India-Pakistan at neutral venue like a mouth-watering meal without salt, El Clasico in US



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

After many rounds of high-level bilateral discussions, India and Pakistan have finally given up on the highly popular and immensely profitable idea of 'home' and 'away' cricket. Starting with the ICC Champions Trophy early next year, till 2028 at least, the mother of all sporting rivalries will now be played out at neutral venues. At least for now, the door has been shut for good. The two bickering neighbours wouldn't invite each other to their homes but in a mutual decision, that gives a strong whiff of hypocrisy, would readily play ball on foreign soil.

So the expats can watch this storied rivalry unfold from the stands, the well-heeled fans from the two nations can take flights to these foreign destinations but the masses, the most interested stakeholders, can say goodbye to their dream of watching India-Pakistan live. With UAE expected to be the destination for future India-Pakistan games, cricket in the region has rewinded to the 1980s and the Sharjah days. It is back to the days of migrant workers in the stands, Bollywood in boxes and, maybe, desert storms on the field. Mouth-watering yes, but a sumptuous meal minus the salt. India vs Pakistan ICC events will be held in hybrid model. India vs Pakistan ICC events will be held in neutral venues until 2028. (PTI) Though this is an ICC decision, it has been dictated by the stand taken by the top political offices in India and Pakistan. Cricket officials have repeatedly insisted that they are merely following instructions of their governments. For years now, the travel plans of Indian and Pakistani cricketers have depended on the geopolitics of the region and governments of the day. These decisions were being taken on a tournament-by-tournament basis. So last year, India refused to cross the border for the Asia Cup though Pakistan did for the subsequent World Cup.

The ICC, kicking the can down the road for years, has finally taken a long-term stand. This is the end of ambiguity, speculation and a lot more. This also means that for the next few years, cricket's status as a diplomatic tool has been taken away. The game would no longer be the thermometer to check the thaw between the two nations with a history of wars and violent attacks. Unlike in 2004, when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the Prime Minister, cricket teams wouldn't have to play the role of the messengers of peace who had to win games as well as hearts. T20 World Cup: Jasprit Bumrah vs Pakistan India's Jasprit Bumrah celebrates the dismissal of Pakistan's captain Babar Azam

during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup cricket match between India and Pakistan at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium in Westbury, New York, Sunday, June 9, 2024. (AP/PTI) Once that tour party of 2004, led by Sourav Ganguly, would cross the border, there would be reciprocity. Even Pervez Musharraf was cracking jokes. BCCI old hand Ratnakar Shetty, the manager on that historic tour, gives great details of evenings in Pakistan when Musharraf hosted the teams for tea. "He was in a jovial mood as he interacted with the players of both sides and cracked jokes, some at the expense of the Pakistani team. He described the lavish spread of food, which was rich in ghee, as 'weapons of mass destruction'," wrote Shetty.

Times change Now cricket has been liberated, India and Pakistan wouldn't be using it as a political ice-breaker. That comes with collateral damage too. By doing away with 'home and away', India and Pakistan are diluting their cricket. The 2022 T20 World Cup's India-Pakistan game at the MCG, the world's biggest cricket stadium then, was a sea of blue. The atmosphere was riveting but it still can't match the intensity of the game between the two countries at the Narendra Modi stadium, the new biggest stadium. Had India allowed Pakistan fans to travel, like Pakistan did for Indians on the 2004 tour, it could well have set a record for the most electric cricket game ever.

Games at neutral grounds don't have the feel of a derby. Manchester United and Manchester City set pulses racing if they play at Old Trafford or Etihad, not in China or Hong Kong. India vs Pakistan in Dubai is as unimpressive as El Clasico played in the US. Kuldeep Yadav Ahmedabad: India's Kuldeep Yadav with teammates celebrates the wicket after a successful review for an LBW of Pakistan's Saud Shakeel during the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 match between India and Pakistan, at Narendra Modi Stadium, in Ahmedabad, Saturday, Oct. 14, 2023.

The decision also puts an asterisk on the careers of every present-day India cricketer. Virat Kohli hasn't played a Test against Pakistan and has never travelled there as a senior cricketer. If there's any country in the world that gives Kohli the same love as India, it is Pakistan. Before the ICC decision on the Champions Trophy was made public, former Pakistan captain Azhar Ali had imagined the scene at a stadium in his country for an India-Pakistan game. "The stands would be green but there would be enough support for Kohli as it would be for Pakistan players," he told this paper. Another past player Rashid Latif compares Kohli to Dilip Kumar, Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan, superstars popular on both sides of the border. India not going to Pakistan also would give Indian cricket fans of a certain vintage a sense of despondence. Those who were stunned into silence in the stands when Shoaib Akhtar bowled Rahul Dravid and Sachin Tendulkar off successive deliveries at Kolkata in 1999 would have wanted to watch Jasprit Bumrah running in at Lahore in the Champions Trophy match against Pakistan. Oh, they would have given anything to see Bumrah send Babar Azam's stumps flying at the Gaddafi Stadium. That would be a story, that would have set things up for several sequels, that would be proper revenge for Eden Gardens, 25 years later.

How Smriti Mandhana and Richa Ghosh put to sword West Indies' attack for a famous series win



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

With the series on the line, Smriti Mandhana and Richa Ghosh put on a high-intent show in Navi Mumbai with blistering half-centuries. It was a record-breaking night for India in Navi Mumbai on Thursday night as they beat West Indies by 60 runs in the T20I series decider. First, Mandhana broke the record for the most 50-plus scores in women's T20Is. Once she was dismissed, Ghosh came in and smashed an 18-ball half-century, the joint-fastest ever in this format. And those two knocks powered India to 217/4, their highest-ever total in women's T20Is. Hayley Matthews won the toss for a third straight time and had no hesitation to bowl first, given the dew factor at the DY Patil Stadium makes it a chase-friendly venue. The first over from Chinelle Henry saw the ball move around significantly and she picked up the wicket of Uma Chetry too, who was out for a duck. India paid the price for not being able to start well in the 2nd match of the series but stand-in captain Mandhana quickly found the feet.

Mandhana got going with a boundary in the second over through the offside but her onslaught truly began in the third. First, she took on Chinelle Henry, hitting three successive fours. She then followed that up with 4, 6, 4, 4 after getting back on strike in Deandra Dottin's over, scoring seven boundaries on the trot. It was a dream start for Mandhana and India. At the other end, Jemimah Rodrigues took her time to get set but helped India finish the powerplay strongly (61/1) with three fours in Karishma Ramharack's over. The pleasing aspect of India's batting was also how it wasn't just a Mandhana show. Once Rodrigues fell for a busy 39, newcomer Raghvi Bist didn't waste any time to get going, smashing her first international six off the 6th ball she faced. Mandhana added another feather to her cap in what has been a good year for her personally. Her third consecutive half century of the series was the 30th in her career and it took her past New Zealand legend Suzie Bates, who has 28 half-centuries and one century in the format. The left-hander got to the landmark with a four over midwicket, scoring a 27-ball half century. Her first century in this format looked imminent until she got out rather softly by lofting Dottin to the fielder at mid off.

But in came Ghosh in the 15th over, and continuing the trend up until then, didn't take long to fire. She smashed the first ball for a straight six off Dottin, followed that up with a square cut for four and it set the tone for what was to follow. However, West Indies did give her a big reprieve in the next over, with Dottin and Henry getting in each other's way at deep midwicket and it proved to be rather costly. Ghosh could have actually set the outright record for the

fastest 50 but failed to connect properly with a short ball when on 44 off 16. But off the first ball of the last over, she reached the record-equalling milestone with a six over midwicket. And once she fell, Sajana Sajeewan came in to hit a first-ball boundary to take India to their best total in this format. "First ball or last ball, if it is in my slot, I want to go for the big shots," Ghosh said after the match. The target of 218 was going to be daunting but WI showed last year they can achieve it, when they pulled off a win in Australia. A lot depended on Matthews and Dottin, and India were able to dismiss both of them in the 20s after getting starts. "The way Raghvi batted was impressive, she came out with a lot of intent," Mandhana said. "Playing just a second match and hitting 4th or 5th ball for a six... I think I would have not been able to do that when I was playing my second match. Then I think the way Richa took that responsibility was superb. Even in the last match I think her innings was really amazing but we could not appreciate it because we could not win the match. But today, I was just telling her I don't know what did she eat today." The win marked a T20I series victory at home for the first time in 5 years for India. As Mandhana said, it was something that spurred the team on. "When I saw that stat, it is not something which reflects on what kind of cricket we've played so that's what the chat was in the morning... that today we have an opportunity to change that, so really happy that you know we've got this series win."

Arrest warrant issued against former cricketer Robin Uthappa

Bengaluru: The Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) functioning under the Ministry of Labour and Employment of the Government of India has written a letter to the Bengaluru Police seeking assistance in issuing an arrest warrant against former Indian cricketer Robin Uthappa, sources confirmed on Saturday.

Regional PF Commissioner-II and Recovery Officer, RO KR Puram Shadakshara Gopala Reddy has made the written request to the Inspector of Pulikeshi Nagar police station in Bengaluru in this regard. The PF Commissioner Reddy has stated that Robin Uthappa is the Director of the M/s Centaurus Lifestyle Brands Pvt Ltd company located in Indiranagar of Bengaluru. The company has failed to remit the damages under Section 7A, 14B and 7 Q of the EPF and MP Act, 1952 to the tune of Rs 23.36 lakh. Addressing the police Reddy further requested, "You are therefore, kindly requested to execute the enclosed arrest warrant of arrest of Robin Uthappa. In this regard, it is to inform that the Employees Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 is a social welfare legislation established especially for the poor section of society who are working for meagre salaries and will have nothing to fall back upon, except the provident fund contributions on their retirement and on other occasions," the PF Commissioner stated. "Due to non-remittances of dues this office is unable to settle the Provident Fund accounts of the poor workers. In view of the above, you are kindly requested to execute the enclosed warrant of arrest through the inspector under whose jurisdiction Robin Uthappa resides," he requested.

Sachin Tendulkar praises young girl's 'smooth, effortless' bowling; Zaheer Khan echoes admiration



GNS News Agency, Dec 24

Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar has lauded a young girl's "smooth and effortless" bowling action, likening it to former India pacer Zaheer Khan, who too praised her technique in a social media exchange that created a lot of buzz. On Friday, Tendulkar shared a video on 'X' featuring the young girl, Sushila Meena, delivering a ball with an extraordinarily fluid left-arm pace bowling action, reminiscent of Zaheer's signature style. Tendulkar also tagged his long-time India teammate Zaheer in his video, which was in slow motion. "Smooth, effortless, and lovely to watch! Sushila Meena's bowling action has shades of you, @ImZaheer. Do you see it too?" the Indian batting legend said in his

post. Responding to the post, Zaheer said: "You're spot on with that, and I couldn't agree more. Her action is so smooth and impressive—she's showing a lot of promise already!" The barefooted Sushila, a Class 5 student from Rajasthan, showcased her natural flair and passion for the game, with her action, including a signature jump before delivery, bearing striking similarities to Zaheer's bowling style. The video highlights the immense raw talent emerging from rural India, underscoring the country's potential in nurturing future cricket stars. The interaction between Tendulkar and Zaheer has drawn widespread attention on social media, garnering lakhs of views and an outpouring of appreciation for the young bowler.

14 years after meeting Rafael Nadal, Next Gen star Joao Fonseca recreates photo with Spaniard

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Joao Fonseca was four years old when he first met Rafael Nadal, even taking a photo with him along with his mother. Fourteen years later, the next-gen star recreated the photo with the Spanish legend, who recently retired. Fonseca, 18, is hailed as one of the rising stars in world tennis with the Brazilian rising to his career-best ranking of 145. He entered the semifinals of the Next Gen ATP Finals in Jeddah on Friday and will take on Luca Van Assche on Saturday for a place in the final.

However, it was his off-court meeting with Nadal that grabbed the limelight. Fonseca met Nadal and was engaged in a long conversation in the players' lounge with the former world number 1. Later, he posted photos of the two meetings — the first 14 years ago and the second on Friday — on his social media page. Fonseca met Nadal with the Spaniard when he was in Rio de Janeiro for a tournament. "Rafa is a legend," Fonseca told the ATP. "I'm a Roger fan, but I also love Rafa. My coach is a Rafa fan. My phone unlock



screen is Rafa with a sentence. It has been a pleasure to meet him. Eleven titles in a season is just insane. I will try to do the same." The Spanish legend, who retired after a historic 22-year career at last month's Davis Cup Finals, is spending three days at the 20-and-under event.

Three Saudi clubs express interest in signing Manchester United's fallen star Marcus Rashford



Man Utd look to cash-in on Marcus Rashford in the transfer window next month (Reuters) Man Utd look to cash-in on Marcus Rashford in the transfer window next month Karim Benzema's Al Ittihad and Roberto Firmino's Al Ahli have reportedly expressed an interest in signing Manchester United's fallen star Marcus Rashford, the British media reported. Al Qadsiah, too, have shown interest in the England forward, making it a three-way race between the Saudi Premier League sides to sign Rashford, whose exit from Manchester United looks imminent. Rashford did not feature in the squad for back-to-back games this week, with new manager Ruben Amorim hinting that the player needed to do better in training before returning to the team. Later, Rashford said in an interview he is 'seeking a new challenge', signalling that he is ready to end his two-decade-long association with Manchester United.

TalkSport revealed that while 'Al Ittihad have been interested in the past and Al Qadsiah are monitoring his situation, Al Ahli currently hold the most concrete interest'. The website added that Al Ahli are considering parting ways with captain Firmino, who is in talks with Turkish club Fenerbahce. The move could pave the way for Rashford to sign for Al Ahli, given that the clubs would have to first 'offload

or de-register a foreign player first to comply with Saudi Pro League registration rules', TalkSport reported. Rashford was scouted by Manchester United when he was seven and has stayed with the club ever since. He made his first-team debut aged 18, scoring twice in a 3-2 win over Arsenal. Now 27, he told journalist Henry Winter in an interview that he was 'ready for a new challenge'. "For me, personally, I think I'm ready for a new challenge and the next steps," Rashford said. "When I leave it's going to be 'no hard feelings'. You're not going to have any negative comments from me about Manchester United."

Viswanathan Anand's prediction on Gukesh facing Arjun Erigaisi in next World Chess Championship

GNS News Agency, Dec 24

From left to right Indian chess masters Vedit Gujarathi, D Gukesh, Viswanathan Anand, R. Praggnandhaa, Arjun Erigaisi and P Harikrishna (Express photo by Partha Paul) From left to right Indian chess masters Vedit Gujarathi, D Gukesh, Viswanathan Anand, R. Praggnandhaa, Arjun Erigaisi and P Harikrishna After Gukesh's historical World Chess Championship win in Singapore, there has been plenty of chatter about who will take on the 18-year-old in the 2026 World Championship, with Arjun Erigaisi being one of the names being touted. Arjun Erigaisi has been in red-hot form over the past year and has made a home in the top 5 rankings. So it was no surprise that this question came up when Viswanathan Anand hosted an Ask Me Anything (AMA) on Reddit on Friday. "There is a 5-10% chance of it to happen," answered India's first grandmaster. A popular narrative in chess — fanned by former world champion Garry Kasparov and world no 3 Hikaru Nakamura — is that the current generation of Indian prodigies like Gukesh, Praggnandhaa and Arjun Erigaisi are "Vishy's children" or "Vishy's army". When asked about this in the AMA, Viswanathan Anand said: "They are following their dreams! Yes, they are playing players I played several players and still occasionally, but come on, too creative an

interpretation." The fans want to see Viswanathan Anand back and competing for titles, which prompted a fan to ask if there would be a possibility of him competing in FIDE world rapid/blitz championship in future, to which he simply replied "maybe one year I will feel like it" Here is a look at few of the best responses from Anand at the AMA:

Q: Vishy, who's the nicest chess player you've met?

Anand: I like several, but probably people who lose to me feel very nice. Q: What's the best prank you've played on someone? And also, what's the best prank someone has done on you? Anand: (Dibyendu) Barua and me once called our team captain at an Olympiad and told him the Indian ambassador was waiting for him downstairs while pretending to call from reception. Best prank is too strong, but that I remember. Q: Have you ever sledged an opponent? Anand: The problem is if I did something like sledging that I would feel worse afterwards and anyway I know I feel much better. Q: Nihal is not participating in the World Rapid and Blitz 2024 due to visa issues. Could you please help him out? Your influence can definitely speed up the process. Thank you, Anand: You overestimate my influence. It's a pity, but I am sure he is very motivated for the new year watching all his junior colleagues