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SCR cancels Sabarimala special trains due to poor occupancy

Hyderabad: The South Central Railway (SCR) which has announced special trains for pilgrims going to Sabarimala, on Thursday cancelled some of these services. In a press release issued here, the SCR said some of the Sabarimala special trains were cancelled due to poor occupancy. The Sabarimala special trains cancelled include Train No. 07167 Moula-Ali – Kottayam (January 24), Train No. 07168 Kottayam – Moula Ali (January 25), Train No. 07171 Moula Ali – Kollam (January 25), Train No. 07172 Kollam – Moula Ali (January 27), Train No. 07169 Kacheguda – Kottayam (January 26), Train No. 07170 Kottayam – Kacheguda (January 27), Train No. 07157 Narsapur – Kollam (January 27) Train No. 07158 Kollam – Narsapur (January 29), Train No. 07065 Hyderabad – Kottayam (January 28).

December feels like July in Hyderabad as city receives showers on Thursday

Hyderabad: It's December but the weather in Hyderabad feels like July! For the second consecutive day, people in Hyderabad experienced overcast conditions and rains, as if it was a monsoon season, along with chilly weather due to cold winds. The light drizzle, which was active throughout the day on Thursday, turned into proper rain by evening. Multiple locations in Hyderabad received light to moderate showers. Quthbullapur in Hyderabad received the maximum of 20.3 mm of rainfall, followed by 5.8 mm at Musheerabad, 5.5 mm at Shaikpet and Himayathnagar, 5.3 mm in Begum Bazar, Nampally and Charminar.

People should take advantage of Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana: PM



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Amravati : Prime Minister Narendra Modi has directed the Chief Secretaries of various state governments to ensure that the people use the Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana, which is being implemented across the country till 2026-27, in large numbers. In this regard, on Thursday, from Delhi, he held a video conference with the Chief Secretaries of various states on the progress of Metro Rail projects, construction of national highways, auction of mineral blocks, and implementation of Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana in various major cities across the country. Speaking on this occasion, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the Government of India approved the Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana on February 29, 2024 to increase the share of solar rooftop capacity and empower households to generate their own electricity. The scheme will be implemented across the country at a cost of Rs. 75,021 crore till the financial year 2026-27, he said. He said that the scheme will be implemented by the National Programme Implementation Agency (NPIA) at the

national level and State Implementation Agencies (SIAs) at the state level. The Prime Minister said that the distribution utilities (DISCOMs) or Power and Energy Departments, as the case may be) will be the State Implementation Agencies (SIAs) at the state and UT levels. He said that under this scheme, DISCOMs should take steps to promote rooftop solar in their respective areas. He directed that timely steps should be taken on many facilitating issues such as availability of net meters, timely inspection and commissioning of installations, vendor registration and management, inter-departmental convergence for solarizing. He said that awareness should be created among the people about this scheme and that it should be taken advantage of in large numbers. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has directed the government's chief secretaries. How does the Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana scheme work? It provides a subsidy of 60% of the solar unit cost for systems with a capacity of 2kW and 40% of the additional system cost for systems between 2 and 3kW capacity. The subsidy is capped at 3 kW capacity. At the current benchmark prices, this means a subsidy of Rs. 30,000 for a 1kW system, Rs. 60,000 for 2kW systems and Rs. 78,000 for systems of 3kW or more. First, the interested consumer has to register on the national portal. This has to be done by selecting the state and the electricity distribution company. The national portal helps households by providing relevant information like suitable system sizes, benefits calculator, vendor rating etc. The consumers can select the vendor for the roof top solar unit they want to install. Chief Secretary to the Government Neerabh Kumar Prasad participated virtually from Hyderabad in the video conference. Special Chief Secretary, Energy, K. Vijayanand, Principal Secretary, TR&B, Kanti Lal Dande, Secretary, Finance, Janaki, Commissioner, Mines, Praveen Kumar and others participated from the State Secretariat, Amaravati.

Revanth Reddy Announces Ban on Benefit Shows, Urges Tollywood to Prioritize Social Responsibility



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy has announced a ban on benefit shows in the Telugu film industry, stressing that the government will no longer permit such promotions due to concerns over public safety. The decision follows the tragic stampede incident at the Sandhya Theater during the premiere of Pushpa 2: The Rule, where a woman lost her life and her son was critically injured. The announcement came during a meeting held on Thursday at the Police Command and Control Room in Banjara Hills. The meeting was attended by a group of 36 industry leaders, including prominent figures such as producer Dil Raju, Allu Arvind, actors Nagarjuna and Venkatesh, filmmakers K. Raghavendra Rao, Trivikram, Harish Shankar, and others. Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, Minister for Cinematography Komatireddy Venkat Reddy, and senior officials including Home Secretary Ravi Gupta and Director General of Police Jitender also participated.

Dil Raju, who led the meeting on behalf of the Telangana State Film Development Corporation, confirmed that the discussions focused on various concerns in the film industry, particularly after the stampede tragedy. During the meeting, CM Revanth Reddy made it clear that benefit shows would no longer be allowed, stressing the importance of managing large crowds and ensuring safety during film promotions. The Chief Minister emphasized that celebrities are responsible for managing their fanbase and ensuring safety at events. He assured the film industry that the government would continue to support it, but only if the industry takes greater responsibility in maintaining law and order during promotions. Responding to the tragic incident, CM Revanth Reddy assured that the government would take all necessary measures to prevent such events in the future. He also called for stricter safety protocols at film-related events. The meeting also addressed other matters of importance. The Chief Minister urged the film industry to take an active role in promoting social causes such as drug prevention and women's safety. He also encouraged the industry to collaborate with the government in promoting Temple Tourism and Eco-Tourism in Telangana to boost the state's tourism sector. Furthermore, he emphasized the



need for the film industry to help attract investment to the state.

Film industry representatives shared their views on the future of Tollywood. Veteran filmmaker K. Raghavendra Rao expressed his support for the government's initiative and welcomed Dil Raju's appointment as Chairman of the Telangana State Film Development Corporation (TSFDC). He also suggested that Telangana should host an International Film Festival to raise the state's profile as a global film hub. Actor Nagarjuna proposed the creation of world-class studio facilities in Hyderabad, enabling the film industry to compete globally. He expressed his vision of making Hyderabad the cinema capital of the world with the government's support. Murali Mohan discussed the increasing competition in the film industry and the growing significance of promotions in this competitive environment. He also expressed sorrow over the Sandhya Theater incident and stressed the need for improved safety measures at events. Shyam Prasad, another leader in the industry, emphasized the need to elevate Hyderabad to the status of a premier international film destination. Daggubati Suresh Babu reflected on the film industry's shift from Chennai to Hyderabad with government assistance and stressed the importance of making the city a central hub for global streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon. Trivikram Srinivas acknowledged the contributions of influential figures like Marri Chenna Reddy and Akkineni Nageswara Rao in establishing Hyderabad as a prominent film city and highlighted their roles in the city's growth. At the conclusion of the meeting, both the government and the film industry leaders committed to working together on urgent issues while ensuring the continued development of Tollywood. Both parties agreed on the importance of prioritizing public safety and social responsibility to foster the sector's growth. To show the support for the family of the victim in the stampede incident, Allu Arjun, Mythri Movies, and director Sukumar donated Rs 2 crore to the family of Revati, who lost her life in the tragedy. Allu Arvind, the producer and father of Allu Arjun, personally presented the cheque to Dil Raju, who vowed to ensure the money would be used to secure the future of Revati's son, Sri Tej, who is still recovering from critical injuries.

Tax deducted at source violates fundamental rights, says PIL in Supreme Court



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

New Delhi: A PIL filed in the Supreme Court on Thursday sought to scrap the TDS system calling it "arbitrary and irrational" and violative of various fundamental rights, including equality. The PIL challenged the tax deducted at source or TDS framework under the Income Tax Act, which mandates the deduction of tax at the time of payment by the payer and its deposit with the Income Tax Department. The deducted amount is adjusted against the payee's tax liability.

The plea filed by lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay through advocate Ashwani Dubey, made the Centre, Ministry of Law and Justice, Law Commission, and NITI Aayog as parties. It sought a direction to "declare the TDS system manifestly arbitrary, irrational and against Articles 14 (right

to equality), 19 (right to practice profession) and 21 (right to life and personal liberty) of the Constitution, hence void and inoperative". The plea further sought directions to the NITI Aayog to consider contentions raised in the plea and suggest necessary changes in TDS system. It said the Law Commission should examine the legality of the TDS system and prepare a report within three months.

The TDS system imposes significant administrative and financial burdens on taxpayers tasked with compliance which include managing complex rules, issuing TDS certificates, filing returns, and defending against penalties for inadvertent errors, argued the plea. Assessee often incur substantial expenses, ranging from salaries of compliance staff to professional fees for tax consultants, without receiving compensation, it said. The plea said the system violated Article 14 (equality before the law) by disproportionately burdening economically weaker sections and small earners who lack the capacity to navigate its technical requirements. Referring to Article 23, it said the imposition of tax collection duties on private citizens amounted to forced labour. The TDS system was stated to adversely affect individuals below the taxable income threshold, as tax was deducted at source irrespective of their liability. "The regulatory and procedural framework surrounding TDS is excessively technical, often requiring specialised legal and financial expertise, which most assessee lack. The result is an unjust shifting of sovereign responsibilities from the government to private citizens without adequate compensation, resources, or legal safeguards," it said.

Hyderabad-based NIN researcher gets patent to treat menopausal syndrome



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Hyderabad: The quest for a non-hormonal formulation that could potentially extend proper care for women suffering from menopausal syndrome, appears to have found a solution right here in Hyderabad, and that too through the ancient knowledge of Ayurveda. In a first of its kind, an Ayurvedic-based therapy for menopausal care, developed by the city-based researcher from National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), Dr Vandana Singh, has been granted a patent. Derived from ancient Sanskrit literature and based on the principles of Ayurveda, Dr Vandana has developed a non-hormonal formulation that could potentially extend proper care to women suffering from menopausal syndrome, a major public health issue that is expected to impact over 1.2 billion women worldwide by 2030.

At present, the traditional treatment to deal with menopausal syndrome is Hormonal Replacement Therapy (HRT), which is associated with adverse effects including vaginal bleeding, liver issues, and increases risk of breast cancer, heart disease and strokes. As a result of these inherent risks, the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) advised restrictions on long-term use of HRT. "Our Ayurvedic formulation does not have such adverse impact on health while dealing with menopausal syndrome. Our non-hormonal Ayurveda therapy features an indigenous grass as the key ingredient. The formulation follows all Ayurveda principles and helps with osteoporosis, fatty liver and metabolic syndrome," says Dr Vandana Singh. Mentored by Dr B Dinesh Kumar, former Scientist G and Head of Drug Division, during the development of the non-hormonal Ayurveda therapy, Dr Vandana says her research involved plant species identification, quality standards, proof of concept, regulatory compliance and prototype formulation.

This non-hormonal, safe and effective solution aims to enhance the quality of life of menopausal women. The work has already been recognized globally, including a shortlist for the Alice and Albert Netter prize 2023 by European Society of Gynecology. The study has already been published in scientific journals and acknowledged by peer review groups and professional societies," she says. Dr Vandana points out that the non-hormonal therapy also paves the way for future advancements in women's health research in Ayurveda.

CPI Secretary Narayana Calls for Reforms in Film Industry, Urges Government to Prioritize Social...



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Hyderabad: CPI Secretary Narayana has raised concerns about the current state of the Telugu film industry and urged the government to take a more responsible stance in promoting films. He called for the support of films with meaningful social messages while discouraging those that glorify violence, vulgarity, and criminal activities. Narayana pointed out that films with strong social messages often face challenges at the box office, leading producers to hesitate in making such films. He mentioned that while some producers are investing large sums of money in high-budget films aimed at maximizing profits, this strategy often puts undue pressure on audiences due to inflated ticket prices and an over-reliance on government incentives. These films are sometimes promoted through road shows, which can create chaos and endanger public safety.

He questioned the government's continued support for films with harmful themes, such as crime and violence, while ignoring films that offer positive messages to society. He also criticized large-budget films that generate significant profits but fail to promote social responsibility and artistic integrity. Narayana raised concerns over the portrayal of illegal activities, such as the trafficking and sale of red sanders, in certain films. He condemned filmmakers for romanticizing such crimes, which could influence young audiences negatively.

The CPI leader also referred to "Pushpa" actress Rashmika Mandanna's recent statement, where she revealed that she was pressured by the producer to perform in a song. Narayana called for greater attention to such pressures on artists and stressed that they should not be ignored by the government. He urged the government to adopt

a more balanced approach in film promotion, supporting only those films that align with social responsibility and preserve the cultural values of Telugu society.

Narayana suggested that the government, producers, and filmmakers engage in discussions to ensure that decisions about which films to promote are based on their social and cultural relevance, rather than just commercial success. Narayana called for a united effort from the government, filmmakers, and the public to shape an industry that reflects the true spirit of Telugu culture and contributes positively to society. He stressed the need for accountability and responsible decision-making at all levels of governance and within the film industry.

Harish Rao, others visit former MP Manda Jagannatham at NIMS



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Hyderabad: Former Member of Parliament (MP) from Nagarkurnool, Manda Jagannatham has been admitted to Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS) with illness. The senior BRS leader is suffering from heart, lungs and kidney infection and is admitted in the Respiratory ICU.

On Thursday, senior BRS party leaders Harish Rao, Dayakar Rao, Lakshma Reddy, Srinivas Goud, former MLA Alla Venkateshwar Reddy and others visited NIMS and interacted with the care givers about the health condition of Manda Jagannatham

Indian Chronicle

English Daily

Give Manu her due

THE Indian contingent returned from the Paris Olympics with just six medals. Two of them were won by pistol shooter Manu Bhaker. For someone who accounted for one-third of the nation's medal tally, a recommendation for the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna — India's biggest sports award — should have been a foregone conclusion. However, things are never that simple when bureaucrats and politicians call the shots in the sporting arena. Manu's name is missing from the preliminary nominee list, which includes hockey captain Harmanpreet Singh, who led the Indian team to a second consecutive Olympic bronze, and para athlete Praveen Kumar, who won the gold in the men's high jump at the Paralympics. Harmanpreet and Praveen are worthy contenders, but Manu is undoubtedly worthier. There are reports that the Sports Ministry will soon come up with the final list, which is likely to include Manu, but the unsavoury speculation has laid bare the opacity of the award selection process. It shouldn't matter whether leading athletes have completed the formality of filing their nomination for the top honour. A standout performance ought to be enough to put them in contention. Their prospects must not be impacted by technicalities. Laudably, Manu has admitted her 'lapse' and stated that awards and recognition are not her goal. However, her father has bitterly remarked that there is no point winning medals for the country and then begging for recognition. Back in 2008, ace boxer MC Mary Kom had wondered why she was not being considered for the Khel Ratna despite having won the World Championship title four times in a row, even as Indian cricket captain MS Dhoni had got it after winning just one World Cup. Mary Kom finally received the honour in 2009, but her outburst had shown the Indian sports system in a poor light. A country aspiring to host the Olympics must ensure that its brightest sports stars are not bogged down or distracted by avoidable controversies.

JU convocation illegal, follow rules for students' interests: Bengal GUV to VC



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose on Monday wrote to Jadavpur University's interim vice chancellor Bhaskar Gupta, dubbing its December 24 convocation "illegal", and directed the varsity authorities to follow all the rules and regulations to secure the future of students, a Raj Bhavan official said.

Bose, who is also the chancellor of the state-run university, said in the letter that since the process of appointment of regular VC is underway, the convocation would be best left to the new incumbent. "The convocation convened on December 24 has flouted several rules and laws and is illegal. The unlawful actions of the VC could lead to unnecessary litigations affecting the validity of the degrees given, thereby affecting the interests of the student community. The chancellor is very worried about the fate of the innumerable students of Jadavpur University," the Raj Bhavan official told PTI, quoting the letter. The convocation of Jadavpur University was fixed on December 24, following an executive meeting held on December 17.

According to the Jadavpur University Act, 1981, the annual convocation of the varsity "can be held on December 24 or any other date as may be fixed by the Executive Council with the approval of the chancellor", the official claimed. "It is noted that an Executive Council meeting was hurriedly convened on December 17 proposing the date of holding the convocation on December 24, which can be construed as undue haste to cover up a lapse," the letter mentioned. Bose had earlier observed that the decision by the Jadavpur University's interim vice chancellor to hold the convocation on December 24 "without informing" his office was "unauthorised". Bose issued a show cause notice to Gupta and summoned him to the Raj Bhavan for an explanation in the matter.

"Moreover, it is seen that the court of the university has been bypassed. The court has the legal authority to take a decision about the convocation. The court has to be convened with sufficient notice," the letter said. "This lapse has led to unauthorised expenditure in regard to the convocation since in your letter dated December 18, you have admitted that all logistic arrangements with huge financial involvement are completed, which is unlawful as much as the approval of the competent authorities as legally provided have not been obtained," said the letter to the interim VC. The governor in the letter said that the explanation submitted by the vice chancellor was "unacceptable".

After alleged terrorist Javed Ahmed Munshi's arrest, West Bengal STF looks for Sundarbans-Bangladesh waterway route 'frequented' by him

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

A special task force of West Bengal is looking into the waterway route that was allegedly routinely taken by a suspected terrorist of the banned Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen (TuM), Javed Ahmed Munshi, from West Bengal to Bangladesh. On Monday, in a joint raid carried out by the Jammu and Kashmir police and the Special Task Force (STF) of West Bengal, Munshi was arrested, and two mobiles and a handwritten note with several numbers on it were seized, sources said. According to police sources, Munshi had arrived in the Canning area a few days before his arrest, allegedly planning to infiltrate into Bangladesh under instructions from TuM operatives who were allegedly his handlers.

According to sources, Munshi allegedly used to take

BJP's Sunil Jakhar urges Dallewali to end fast, says other farmer leaders and politicians should also do so



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Punjab BJP president Sunil Jakhar has urged Samyukt Kisan Morcha (non-political) leader Jagjit Singh Dallewali to end his hunger strike, which entered its 28th day on Monday. He accused other farmer leaders and politicians of furthering their personal interests, adding that such a protest in a border state can have "serious implications". "For the past 10 days, many leaders have met Dallewali at the Khanauri border and got their pictures clicked as well. However, no one is urging him to end his fast. Neither the farmer union leaders who are part of this protest nor the ones who are not part of it are urging him to end his fast. His life is important...rather every life is important. His fast has served the purpose of getting his demands heard. The Supreme Court itself has intervened and said that they are worried about the life of Dallewali," Jakhar told reporters at his Panchkula office.

The BJP leader said the Supreme Court had stated that farmers can directly address their concerns to the court, noting that he could not recall a previous instance where the apex court acknowledged a hunger strike. Jakhar said the parliamentary standing committee had submitted a report on the farmers' demand for legally guaranteed minimum support prices (MSP), suggesting that Dallewali should now end his fast. He urged all farmer union leaders to come to Khanauri and collectively appeal to the SKM leader to end his hunger strike. "Even I appeal to Dallewali that his life is important and he should therefore end his fast," he added.

"People should stop doing politics over his hunger strike and focus on how to end his hunger strike. I heard that SKM (non-political) is going to hold a candle march on Tuesday evening. Why a candle march for an alive person? Are the politicians visiting Khanauri to derive political mileage? And to the farmer union leaders, is this a struggle of one upmanship to satisfy their own ego?" Jakhar said. Jakhar said, "A few days ago SKM leaders met at Kisan Bhawan, Chandigarh, in which I heard that Joginder Singh Ugrahan, president of BKU Ugrahan, spoke about the differences between the two forums protesting at the Shambhu and Khanauri borders over their style of protest. I appeal to farmer union leaders Balbir Singh Rajewal, Joginder Singh Ugrahan, Sarwan Singh Pandher and all

others to unite irrespective of their ideological differences and urge Dallewali to end his hunger strike." Jakhar said that irreversible damage could occur if Dallewali continues his protest. Asked why he has not visited Khanauri, Jakhar said, "If Pandher and other leaders have no objection to me visiting Khanauri, I will be more than willing to appeal to Dallewali genuinely. I don't want anyone at the morcha to create a scene if BJP leaders are coming to meet him. However, still, if Dallewali is listening to my voice, it is my appeal to him to end his hunger strike as his life is very important." "Serious implications"

"The Supreme Court has already indicated that Punjab is a border state and this hunger strike can have serious implications. Already we saw that between November 23 and December 23, eight grenade attacks happened in Amritsar, Gurdaspur. On Monday, three people involved in this were killed in an encounter in Pilibhit. These series of events are already telling us that ISI is trying to create disturbance in Punjab," Jakhar said. "Let's all make sincere efforts in ending the fast of Dallewali. His demands have reached the highest level now. Punjab can't be left at the whims and fancies of the state government or at the mercy of the ISI. Punjab has already seen dark days in the past. My appeal to the CM (Bhagwant Mann) is that it is high time he became the advocate for farmers again...as he had announced in February. But I have heard that he is going to Australia. Your state is in emergency conditions and you are going to Australia? Asked about the demand for a legal guarantee of MSP, the BJP leader said, "As a farmer and a politician, I myself have reservations about this demand. This is not beneficial for Punjab's farmers. Ten months ago I asked farmers which crop they wanted to grow instead of wheat and paddy. Till date, they have not come out with an answer." "The Punjab CM can ask Haryana CM Nayab Singh Saini how had notified MSP for 24 crops. Why can't the Punjab CM do the same, as he often says there is no dearth of funds in the state?" Jakhar said he had also taken up the farmers' demand at the highest level in the central government irrespective of his reservations about the call for legally guaranteed MSP. Kisan Mazdoor Morcha leader's reaction

Sharply reacting to Jakhar's statements, Sarwan Singh Pandher, coordinator of the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha and the SKM (non-political) said it was the BJP who was politicising Dallewali's hunger strike. He suggested the state BJP leadership urge Prime Minister Narendra Modi to consider the farmers' demands. "It is high time that the Punjab BJP took our demands to Delhi. There is a need to deflate the egos of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. One BJP minister (Union minister of state Ravneet Singh Bittu) called us Taliban and another said that 700 girls went missing from the villages near Delhi borders where farmers' protest was going on in 2020-21. So ask your own party members what they think about us and why do they try to defame us? It is high time that the BJP leadership undertook a 'Dilli Chal' to urge the PM to end his stubbornness and listen to the farmers. This will be a real effort to make Dallewali end his fast," Pandher said.

CBI court holds 3 former Punjab cops guilty in 32-year-old fake encounter case



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

A special Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) court on Monday found three former Punjab Police officers guilty in a 32-year-old fake encounter case involving the murder of two men. The court will pronounce the quantum of the sentence on Tuesday. Special CBI Judge Rakesh Gupta held former assistant superintendent of police (ASP) Gurbachan Singh guilty under sections 302 (murder), 364 (kidnapping), 343 (wrongful confinement of three or more days) and 218 (public servant framing incorrect record or writing with intent to save person from punishment) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), former inspector Resham Singh under section 302 and 120-B (criminal conspiracy) and 218 and sub inspector Hans Raj under sections 120-B and 218 of the IPC. The case was investigated by the CBI following the orders issued by the Supreme Court on November 15, 1995. After registering the case, the CBI, on November 21, 1996, recorded the statement of Pritam Singh, a resident of Tarn Taran. Pritam Singh reported the abduction of his son Jagdeep Singh Makhan on November 18, 1992, by a police party led by Gurbachan Singh, who was then the station house officer (SHO) of Tarn Taran.

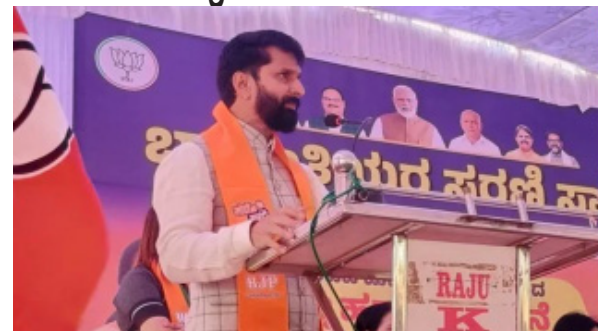
On February 27, 1997, the CBI registered a case against Gurbachan Singh and others under Sections 364, 302, and 34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) of the IPC. After completion of the investigation, it presented a chargesheet against Gurbachan Singh, Resham Singh, Hans Raj and Arjun Singh, all police

officers of Tarn Taran (city) police station. The chargesheet said Jagdeep Singh Makhan was abducted by a police party headed by Gurbachan Singh after killing his mother-in-law Sawinder Kaur. Similarly, another man, Gurnam Singh Pali, was abducted by Gurbachan Singh and other police officers on November 21, 1992, from his home. Both were subsequently killed on November 30, 1992, by a police party headed by Gurbachan Singh. Their bodies were cremated as "unknown and unclaimed". What the police FIR said

The FIR filed by the police in the deaths of Jagdeep Singh and Gurnam Singh Pali said that on November 30, 1992, SHO Gurbachan Singh and other police officers were patrolling in the morning when they observed a young man moving suspiciously near Noor Di Adda in Tarn Taran. When questioned, the man identified himself as Gurnam Singh Pali. During the interrogation, he admitted to being involved in throwing a hand grenade at the provision store of one Darshan Singh, located on the railway road in Tarn Taran.

Gurnam Singh was taken for the recovery of arms and ammunition reportedly concealed in Behla Orchard. During this operation, militants inside the orchard fired on the police party, prompting the police to retaliate in self-defence. In the ensuing chaos, Gurnam Singh Pali attempted to escape by running in the direction of the incoming bullets but was killed in the crossfire. Additionally, the FIR said that while searching the orchard, the body of a deceased militant, later identified as Jagdeep Singh Makhan, was also recovered. Both bodies were cremated as "unclaimed" at the cremation ground in Tarn Taran. During the trial of the fake encounter case, Arjun Singh passed away in December 2021, and the proceedings against him were terminated. As many as 46 witnesses were cited by the CBI in this case, and 24 of them provided testimony during the trial. As many as 18 witnesses, including the complainant Pritam Singh, passed away during the trial. Also, the sanctioning authority, Rajesh Chhabra, also expired during the proceedings. As a result, Capt Narinder Singh, the then special secretary (home) in the Department of Home Affairs and Justice, was examined as a replacement for prosecution witness No. 24

Karnataka Minister Hebbalkar releases video of objectionable comments, says will continue legal battle against BJP MLC Ravi



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Karnataka Women and Child Development Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar Monday released a video clip to the media where BJP legislator C T Ravi is heard using an objectionable word against her at the Legislative Council. The video came a day after Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said that there was audio and video evidence to show that the BJP MLC had used a derogatory word against his Cabinet colleague.

Speaking to reporters at Belagavi, Hebbalkar said she would continue her legal battle against Ravi and accused him of lowering the dignity of the upper house of the state legislature. The objectionable remark, she said, was made when Congress legislators were protesting the insult meted out to Dr B R Ambedkar by Union Minister Amit Shah.

"Why did you raise (Congress leader) Rahul Gandhi's name when we were doing the Satyagraha? Why were you dancing in front of me saying 'drug addict Rahul Gandhi, drug addict Rahul Gandhi? Should I be silent when you drag our leaders' names to such a level?' she asked. In response to Ravi's attack on Rahul Gandhi, Laxmi Hebbalkar said she had asked whether Ravi can be called a "murderer for killing three people in an accident." The derogatory word was used by the BJP MLC then, she said, releasing a clip of the exchange that took place on the floor of the Legislative Council last Thursday. Hebbalkar said she would write to the President of India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi about the incident, and given a chance would also meet the Prime Minister to explain her ordeal. "I will continue my legal battle against him," she said, adding that everyone present in the state legislature had heard the word used by Ravi. "Four opposition legislators even apologised to me that day," the minister said. The alleged use of the abusive word had triggered a row and the police arrested Ravi last Thursday following a complaint by the minister. C T Ravi was released on bail later, following which he claimed that the police had "conspired to encounter him" over the issue.

Encounter in Pilibhit: One linked to crime, another on bail, third a newlywed

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Three men from Gurdaspur district, killed in an encounter in Uttar Pradesh, were residents of villages located within a 15-kilometer radius of the Indo-Pak border. Varinder Singh, from Agwan village, was known for his association with bad company and addiction, with a family history of smuggling. Gurwinder Singh, from Kalanaur town, and Jashandeep Singh, from Nikka Shoor village, came from poor families. Varinder Singh

Twenty-three-year-old Varinder Singh lived with his mother in Agwan village. His father, a known drug smuggler with multiple cases against him, died about 15 years ago. Varinder's brother lived separately. Unmarried and unemployed, Varinder owned less than an acre of land and was reportedly in contact with gangsters. "Recently, there was an attack on the Bakshiwal police check post, allegedly involving a gangster named Manu.

Some young men from our village were in touch with him, and Varinder was suspected to be among them," said Inderjit Singh, Sarpanch of Agwan. He alleged, "Varinder's father, Ranjit Singh, was a smuggler with several cases against him. Varinder was also an addict and was known to sell banned drugs. Everyone in the village knew about his bad company. Many believe it was his main source of income since he only owned half an acre of land." Inderjit further revealed that drug smuggling was rampant in the village. "Around 10-15 cases are registered against individuals here, and three are currently in jail," he said. Gurwinder Singh

Gurwinder Singh, from Kalanaur, was the only child of his parents. He had been missing for five days, and his family was searching for him when they received the news of his death. His father, Gurdev Singh, said, "The police informed us today that he was shot dead. They had never visited our house before, and now they came only to tell us about his death. He hadn't been home for five days, and his phone was switched off." The family claimed Gurwinder had no prior criminal record. "We live in a rented house. I am a labourer, and I don't understand how my son was involved in anything that led to his death," Gurdev said. His mother, Paramjit Kaur, said, "He used to go out with friends but always returned home by evening. Both Jashandeep Singh and Varinder Singh were known to him." She also revealed that Gurwinder had been involved in a murder case. "Once, he went swimming in a canal with his friends. One of them drowned, and all seven others, including my son, were booked for murder. The case was pending in court, and he was out on bail," she said. Jashandeep Singh Jashandeep Singh, from Nikka Shoor village, had been married just three months ago. He had been missing since last Tuesday, and his family said he had gone as a helper on a truck for the first time since his marriage. His mother, Paramjit Kaur, said, "He left with a truck last Tuesday. His phone was switched off, and we only learned about the encounter this morning. I have five children—two daughters and three sons. All of them are labourers. Jashandeep never went to school. We are poor—just look at our home," she told the media. "We tried calling him repeatedly since he left. He wouldn't do something like this. We even told him to find work nearby, but he insisted on going on the truck," she added. A former Sarpanch, Inderjit Singh, said, "The family is known to be good and hardworking. We've never heard anything negative about them. We are shocked by the news of Jashandeep being killed in the encounter. A proper investigation is needed to find out what really happened."



till December 31. Canning is located in the Sunderban delta. The Sunderbans forest sprawls over 10,000 sq km across India and Bangladesh, with 40% of it in India. Javed Munshi, an alleged expert in IEDs and weapons handling.

Pune rivers in 2024: Floods, flies, bloodworms and threat to riparian zones



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

The year that's ending has raised a lot of concern for us. Schools in Pune had to be closed for a record number of days due to floods. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the city was cancelled amid heavy rain in September 2024. This was yet another year when we chose to neglect the Mula Mutha and its tributaries, which are the lifelines of our city.

Water everywhere Most of Pune's water network has been very grossly neglected by Pune Municipal Corporation and Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation. The streams and tributaries that meet the main channel are not taken care of. If they are managed well, the floods in the rivers will also be managed well. If you identify the locations other than Ekta Nagari on Mutha river, which had maximum floods, you will see that there are pockets where flooding has happened or increased that are actually away from the main rivers. These housing societies, which got affected by the floods, were along the stream bank and the river regressed into these streams, which indicates the carrying capacity of the river. In the July floods, there was flooding inside Yerawada jail, which is away from the river. This had nothing to do with the Mula flooding but was probably due to streams that have been diverted or altered in some way so that the water entered the jail. This is an alarming situation if we have to vacate jails, where there are prisoners, due to flooding. Then, a report from PMC, which was in response to the RTI filed by Vivek Velankar, showed that the former agreed and accepted that the flooding had happened because of the encroachment. So, officially there is an agreement that there is encroachment and some action needs to be taken. They are now working on making flood control processes. Polluted waters

In July 2024, a report from the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) talked about the water quality on the stretches of Mula-Mutha and Pawana. It showed that Mula was still in Priority 2, which is "highly polluted" but the "maximum polluted" stretches are still in Mutha where not much of the work for improving the pollution level has happened in the last year. There were two pollution indicators that made citizens worry. The first were an unnaturally large number of flies that formed walls and assaulted the people. The second was in April in Hinjewadi, where, before the Mula enters Pune city, a housing society that has 15000 people noticed bloodworms in their water. The housing complex has a filter and, then, every building has its own filter. Then, every house has a filter. Yet, these bloodworms had escaped and reached into the household tap water. There was, probably, a leakage in the pipes but the main reason is that they were lifting the Mula river water. If such type of water pollution is entering our homes, there is a question about what we are doing about the pollution abatement? A research paper was published this year about the Khadakwasla catchment area pollution. Where's the Water Security

India is known to be a water scarce country. In the peak summer months, across India, there is a water shortage and over extraction of groundwater is happening. We are among the maximum groundwater extractors in the world. This is happening in Pune city as well, despite having a chain of dams upstream, from Khadakwasla to Pawana to Mulshi. A big issue is the increase of water tankers every year. Where PMC water supply does not reach, all peri-urban areas depend on alternative water supply, either by tankers or borewells that go dry in summers or lift it from polluted rivers and treat. PMC has not able to reach out to the people with the services and the basic right to water has been a challenge for the authorities. Right to water is deprived in the developing areas. Villages in Pune Metropolitan Region do not get water supply from PMC. Pune Metropolitan Region Development Authority does not have its water source. Water Resources Department refuses to give additional water. It simply means priorities are not for providing basics but for providing aesthetics. A groundwater cell was initiated last year in PMC, which has happened probably for the first time in the country. Roots and Branches

Let me talk about tree felling. There has been a lot of tree felling and in 2023 the Bombay High Court ordered PMC to stop cutting trees on Ganeshkhind Road. In October this year, the National Green Tribunal, western zone bench, directed PMC to submit a revised proposal on felling trees for the construction of the Sadhu Vaswani railway overbridge. Unfortunately, the Tree Act that used to support the old-growth trees and heritage trees has been modified. This makes me very sad that people are now allowed to cut these. About the riparian zone protection, nothing has still been done along the river bank. When you look from the rivers' perspective, there has hardly been any conservation or protection work being followed by the urban local bodies. Spring restoration programmes are not happening by the urban local bodies. Feel the heat The heat island effect has been increasing in Pune, particularly in Koregaon Park areas where, recently, embankments were done. Koregaon Park used to be green and pristine and, this year, it was among the hottest areas in Pune. Even the air quality has suffered. Looking ahead 1) The PMC committee which has taken the stand that they would take action on flood control. In June, there was also a Bombay High Court order, according to which we should expect the revised floodlines to be demarcated by the Water Resource Department in 2025. We hope that floodlines will be respected — which means there will be no encroachment on the river — and people will be safe from floods.

2) This year embankments have started being constructed on the PMC and PCMC side by riverfront development. Mula has a rich riparian vegetation. A large number of old growth trees are present here. This year will be about watching how many trees are going to be felled for the riverfront development. At present, you can see the JCBs from Wakad to Sangvi and excavations and dumping have started happening. . Till now, a lot of the land with green cover was with the defence. Now, both urban local bodies have taken permission and defence has given away the land to them along the riverbank for the riverfront development. 3) What is not even present at the policy level is the lack of protection for aquatic life. We have laws to protect the tiger and the Great Indian Bustard, and this is essential. But, have you heard of a single fish getting protection? If policymakers include the rights of fish and aquatic life in 2025, I can assure you that conservation and restoration methods will automatically follow.

Arvind Kejriwal and Delhi CM Atishi visit East Kidwai Nagar, face mixed reactions from residents



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi and Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal visited a private residential colony in East Kidwai Nagar on Monday as part of a door-to-door campaign, enrolling women in the Government's Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojana and listening to people's grievances. As Kejriwal and Atishi moved from house to house, AAP volunteers jotted down details of the residents and handed bright yellow guarantee cards to them.

The Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojana, under which non-tax paying women up to the age of 60 will be given Rs 1,000 per month, was announced in the Delhi budget in March but is yet to be implemented. Earlier this month, Kejriwal said that if the AAP is voted back to power in the elections, expected to be held in February next year, the amount will be increased to Rs 2,100 per month. Lal Quarters, the society in East Kidwai Nagar where Kejriwal conducted the registration programme, also has a history with the party. "When the AAP government first came to power, it was Kejriwalji who had helped us not get evicted because of area redevelopment," said G Ranganathan, chairman of the Lal Quarters Resident Welfare Association.

"When these government quarters were being made, there was immense pressure on us to be moved out and shifted to a smaller area nearby...the NBCC and L&DO created a lot of problems for us, they even threatened to cut off our electricity and water supply...Kejriwalji had supported us a lot then. He encouraged us to go to court with the matter," Ranganathan said. NBCC Limited, a public sector enterprise, and the Land and Development Office function under the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. The housing complex is a society of 40 houses, of which 33 have freeholding status and seven are under the New Delhi Municipal Corporation's jurisdiction to provide housing for its employees.

"Before Kejriwal worked in this area, there were several issues. We used to face waterlogging and the roads were in a really bad shape... All of that was fixed by the AAP," Ranganathan's daughter said. Crowds flocked around Kejriwal and Atishi as they made their way around the housing complex and children ran alongside the campaign trail. People waited in their balconies, hoping to take a picture of the chief minister and the former chief minister. Often, Kejriwal had to stop mid-way to pause for a resident's selfie. Almost everyone echoed Ranganathan's opinion. "We

had gone to the MP first back then but they had simply folded their hands and told us they could do nothing. It was very frustrating!" said Jeetu Sharma, 40, a resident.

Sonu, 42, a homemaker, had just finished registering herself for the dole. Holding her yellow card, she smiled and said, "He's a man with a pure heart and he's worked for people like us, the poor. He will win this election because he's done good work." However, a few metres away, at the gate of the society, a group of women glowered as the procession made its way. They had heard about the registration and rushed to the society from their slum nearby, only to be turned away. "Look, this is how they treat us," said Sangeeta Chauhan, 36, a homemaker. "They should do these campaigns once in our area too and see how we live. Waterlogging till our hips, there is so much garbage and stagnant water there, the whole place is crawling with rats and mosquitoes." "In the last elections they came and told us to give them money and that they will give us pucca houses. It's been years and I've paid over a lakh but I've never seen even a brick of that house I was promised," said Sudha Das, 45, a domestic worker who lives in the Bangali Camp slum. "Even they know that their elections are won because of the votes they get from jhuggi jhopri... I won't be voting for them this time. Just like they raise our hopes to dash them, I'll also dash their hopes by not voting for them," she added. The organisers of the programme tried to placate them saying the volunteers would eventually come around to their houses and register them, but to no avail. When asked who they will vote for this time, the woman said, "That I don't know yet... whoever works for the poor will get our vote."

Deepa Dasmunshi refuses to meet Allu Arjun's father-in-law and Congress leader Chandrashekhar Reddy

Hyderabad: Even as the stand-off between Congress party and Tollywood film actor Allu Arjun continues over the Sandhya theatre incident, the actor's father-in-law and senior Congress leader Kancharla Chandrashekhar Reddy was left embarrassed as AICC Telangana incharge Deepa Dasmunshi refused to meet him on Monday. Chandrashekhar Reddy, one of the senior leaders of the party in Nalgonda, arrived at Gandhi Bhavan to meet the AICC incharge, who was present there. However, when Chandrashekhar Reddy wanted to meet Deepa Dasmunshi and went to her office, she refused to meet him. Left with no choice, he had to leave Gandhi Bhavan disappointed. It may be recalled that Cinematography Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy had demanded the actor to tender an apology to Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy for countering his remarks made in the Assembly.

Delhi High Court seeks response from TMC's Saket Gokhale on contempt petition by ex-diplomat Lakshmi Puri



GNS News Agency, Dec

The Delhi High Court Monday sought a response from TMC Rajya Sabha MP Saket Gokhale in a contempt petition filed by former diplomat Lakshmi Murdeshwar Puri against Gokhale for failing to comply with the court's directions in a 2021 defamation suit by Puri. In July this year, the Delhi High Court directed Saket Gokhale to apologise to Puri and pay Rs 50 lakh to her in damages. The court also directed Gokhale to post his apology on his X handle, saying it should be retained for "six months from the date it is put out", and publish it in a leading English newspaper in four weeks. The High Court said the damages should be paid within eight weeks.

In July 2021, the High Court passed an interim order, restraining the Trinamool Congress leader from posting any defamatory, scandalous or factually incorrect posts against Puri or her husband, former diplomat and Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri. In her lawsuit filed in Delhi High Court, Puri claimed that Gokhale had "tarnished her good name and reputation by making reckless and false allegations" in relation to her financial affairs in the "context of an apartment that she owns in Geneva, Switzerland". Arguing before the bench of Justice Manoj Jain Monday, Puri's counsel informed the court that the July order has not been complied with to date, no apology has been issued and no payment of the damages. The counsel also pointed out that the non-compliance of the order persists despite Gokhale being "fully aware" of the directions that were issued by the court earlier. The counsel submitted that an execution petition has also been filed seeking recovery of damages.

On Monday, Justice Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora took up the execution petition, and sought a response from Gokhale. Justice Arora kept the matter for further consideration on February 5. Justice Jain also orally remarked, "...there has to be some apology unless he challenges it..." Justice Jain issued notice to Gokhale on the contempt petition, seeking his response, and also recorded in the order that none appeared on behalf of Gokhale despite Puri serving the contempt petition to him in advance.

Returning from US, teenager forced to pay Rs 3,500 for auto ride costing Rs 106 from Mumbai airport

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Mumbai A police officer said taxi drivers at the Mumbai airport are known to overcharge travellers coming from abroad, however, in this particular case, the amount charged was excessively inflated, and the threats used made it more akin to extortion than just overcharging. The Mumbai police recently arrested an autorickshaw driver for allegedly overcharging a 19-year-old man from Sangli who had hired his vehicle at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport upon returning from the United States.

The police said the driver, Ritesh Kadam, 26, picked up the man from the airport and dropped him off in Chembur on December 14, from where the teenager planned to travel to Sangli. As the autorickshaw reached Chembur, its meter allegedly showed a fare of Rs 106. The driver, however, demanded Rs 3,500, as per a complaint filed by the passenger. When the complainant refused to pay, the driver allegedly called someone who allegedly threatened him over the phone. The complainant said he paid the driver Rs 1,000 in cash and Rs 2,500 through Google Pay. However, he took a photo of the autorickshaw's registration number plate before leaving.

The passenger then sent an email with the photo to



the Mumbai police, resulting in the police registering an offence. The police arrested the accused driver on December 17 after tracking him down using the registration number. The police said the driver confessed to overcharging the teenager who had returned from the US as he needed money and suspected the complainant could be bullied into paying extra. A police officer said taxi drivers at the Mumbai airport are known to overcharge travellers coming from abroad. "However, in this particular case, the amount charged was excessively inflated, and the threats used made it more akin to extortion than just overcharging," the officer said.

Anurag Thakur releases 'charge sheet' highlighting AAP 'corruption', Arvind Kejriwal says 'BJP has no agenda but to abuse him'

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Senior BJP leader Anurag Thakur issued a "chargesheet" against AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal ahead of the Delhi assembly elections. Anurag Thakur has issued a "chargesheet" against Arvind Kejriwal ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls. Reacting to BJP MP Anurag Thakur's "charge sheet" with allegations of corruption against Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders, former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal Monday said the BJP had no agenda ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls except to abuse him.

Thakur released an 'aarop patra (charge sheet)' against AAP leaders at the Delhi BJP office. The document highlights the expenditure on the redevelopment of the Civil Lines home where Kejriwal lived when he was the chief minister, his and former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia's arrest in the excise policy case, and that of Satyendar Jain in a separate money laundering case, air pollution, the polluted Yamuna and poor sanitation, among others. Thakur said at a press conference, "This charge sheet has stories of AAP's corruption. Arvind Kejriwal has made fake promises to people living in Delhi. He said would provide free medical, water, and electricity, but people still pay for these services. The AAP said that they would make Delhi cor-



ruption free but eight of their ministers and 15 MLAs were jailed."

Kejriwal, on the sidelines of the door-to-door registration drive to enrol people in the women and elderly health scheme the Delhi government has proposed, said, "The BJP doesn't have an agenda for the upcoming elections, nor does it have a vision for Delhi. They don't even have a chief minister. They only know one thing, which is to abuse Kejriwal." AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, responding to Thakur, said, "The people of Delhi know us well. The BJP's politics is based on lies."

Chandigarh PGI doctor saves former Army man's life on Bengaluru-Delhi flight

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Doctor on flight saves life on ex army man Chandigarh's PGI doctor Dr Ritin Mohindra saved the life of an ex-army man mid-flight on an IndiGo aircraft going from Bengaluru to Delhi. A doctor from Chandigarh PGI saved a former Indian Army man's life on board a flight from Bengaluru to Delhi Sunday by stabilising the flyer.

Assistant Professor Ritin Mohindra in the Division of Acute Care and Emergency Medicine, Department of Internal Medicine department, PGI Chandigarh, was travelling back from Bengaluru to Delhi when flight attendants announced an emergency



on board the IndiGo plane.

"The passenger, a 44-year-old gentleman, was complaining of uneasiness, headache and weakness on the left side of the body. We were about 1.5 hours from Delhi airport," Dr Mohindra

told. "An announcement was made asking if any doctor was on board as there was an emergency. I immediately asked the man about his history and medicines and got to know that it was suspected hypoglycemia,"

said Mohindra.

He asked the crew to arrange sugar syrup and other sugar items as sugar levels had fallen. "After a few minutes, he recovered. He was better after the treatment."

'Indian numbers are arguably the nearest thing the world has to a universal language'



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

The Silk Road, that network of trade routes connecting the East to the West and synonymous with the Chinese civilisation, is often thought of as the first truly global trade route in history because many believe that it played a pivotal role in the promulgation of various cultures, ideas, and, of course, goods like silk. William Dalrymple, however, is sceptical of this idea. "What people don't realise is that the notion of a silk road only dates from the 1870s," says the Scottish historian and writer to the vast crowds thronging the waterfront at the Lalit Ashok, Bengaluru, where his session, one of the most popular ones of the 13th edition of the Bangalore Literature Festival, took place. According to him, the German geographer and traveller Ferdinand von Richthofen first coined the term Silk Road, "not any classical source." He believed that while Indian ideas, Indian philosophy, Indian mathematics, and Indian art are among the crucial foundations of our world, more often than not, ancient Greece and China are touted as the most important sources of many critical existential answers as well as perceived wisdom.

Ancient Greece's influence in our history was tom-tommed by colonial powers, "not just British but also French, Dutch and Portuguese," he says. And yes, "there's also the answers provided by China," says Dalrymple. He claims that one of the reasons for the accepted view of the pre-eminence of the role of ancient China in shaping our worldview is that the country has been excellent at putting out its version of the world, one which makes the Red Dragon the centre of it. "Of all the ways in which it managed to do this, the idea of a Silk Road is probably the most important," he says. Roman coins that the Silk Road was the first thing that broke down "the silos of nationalistic history, connecting East and West, creating a narrative of globalisation centuries before we think globalisation takes place," is a persistent one, says Dalrymple, sharing a map taken from one of the many books focusing on this ancient trading route.

This map, completely bereft of the many ports that studded India's coastline back then, gives the impression "very clearly, that the action, the real story of trade and the passage of ideas, took place between Rome and China, of which India made no part of the network," says Dalrymple. And yet, as another map he puts out depicting the presence of Roman coins across the world, including in places like Israel, Spain, France, Yemen and Afghanistan, indicates, "No Roman coin has ever been found in China," he says, comparing this to India where vast quantities of these coins have been excavated, clearly proving that "Rome was the trading partner of India." So active was the trade between Rome and India back then that Pliny, the Elder, the Roman writer, historian, naval commander and naturalist who died in 79 CE while trying to conduct a rescue operation during the deadly eruption of Mount Vesuvius, seems to have complained about the impact of this partnership on Rome's economy and its people's moral moorings. "He [Pliny] claims that India is the sink of all precious things in the world...the drain of all the gold in Rome," he says. In Dalrymple's opinion, all this evidence points to the need to expand our ideas of ancient trade and trade ideas. "We need to put India right at the centre of it," he says. Roman influence on Indian art can be seen in the great masterwork of Gandharan art. Roman influence on Indian art can be seen in the great masterwork of Gandharan art. | Photo Credit: K. BHAGYA PRAKASH

The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World, Dalrymple's latest book, does exactly that, propos-

ing that India had a significant role in shaping and reshaping the ancient and medieval world. In his view, besides trade in commodities like pepper and ivory, of course, three major Indian exports revolutionised the world: Buddhism, Sanskrit and Hinduism, and mathematics. "Indian numbers, numbers that we in the West call Arabic numbers, which we often got from Arabs, are arguably the nearest thing the world has to a universal language," he says. Dalrymple then proceeds to expand on these ideas, starting with the genesis and spread of Buddhism. "One of the strange things about Buddhism is that it's almost invisible in the first two or three hundred years," he says. "It is only with Ashoka that this begins to change." This "waterfall of words" across pillars, boulders and cave walls transformed the fate of what was until only "a relatively minor local faith," he adds. With the help of Ashoka's edicts and emissaries, Buddhism soon fanned across the country, seeping into parts of the arid, rocky Deccan Plateau and even landing on the shores of sea-fringed Sri Lanka, thanks to the efforts of Ashoka's first-born son, Mahinda, who ended up converting the island country's king, Devanampiya Tissa. "So Sri Lanka becomes the centre for Buddhist missionary activity," he says. "And you see this extraordinary spread of Indic ideas across Asia... out of Kandahar, up to Bactria and through China, right through Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia..." he argues.

Historian William Dalrymple explaining World's earliest dated inscription of the circular symbol "0", to represent zero is still the Gwalior inscription. The Brahmi numerals, 2, 3, 4, 7, & 9 are already instantly recognizable. Historian William Dalrymple explaining World's earliest dated inscription of the circular symbol "0", to represent zero is still the Gwalior inscription. The Brahmi numerals, 2, 3, 4, 7, & 9 are already instantly recognizable. | Photo Credit: K. BHAGYA PRAKASH

Another fascinating story gleaned from the talk is how Buddhism spread across China, thanks to the efforts of the Chinese monk Xuan Zang or Huiyen Tsang, who visited Nalanda University in the 7th Century and Wu Zetian, a minor concubine in the Chinese royal harem during the Tang dynasty, who ultimately became the country's first and only empress. He also brings up an ancient Buddha statue discovered two years ago in a temple dedicated to the ancient Egyptian Goddess Isis, located in the port city of Berenike, "as multicultural an object as you ever imagine." Sharing a picture of this statue, Dalrymple uses it to expand on the idea of India's internationalism in the ancient world: the statue, largely Gandharan in style, is carved in Alexandria, using marble from what is now modern Turkey to celebrate the arrival of a sea captain from India. Dalrymple briefly expands on India's other significant contributions, Sanskrit and Hinduism, to Southeast Asia, stating that many people in this region adopted this faith. As a result of this, "stories from this part of the world, including the Ramayana and Mahabharata, become second nature to vast numbers of people there," he says, the remnants of this cultural shift still lingering in temples like Prambanan in Indonesia and Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

India's ally in its globalisation quest was its strategic geographical location and an understanding of monsoon winds and currents that lent to its maritime prowess. He says that the sheer scale of the Tibetan plateau gave India a gift that no other country had: a wind system that moves very fast in both directions, making it easy for Indian coastal communities to sail across the world. He talks about the fabled city of Muziris, the ancient port of the Cheras, which many experts today say was located in Pattanam in Kerala's Ernakulam District. "It is currently being dug up by P.J. Cherian," says Dalrymple, who visited this very site only a week ago, referring to the work of the archaeologist. These ancient maritime trade networks were transformative for the Indian economy "because your ancestors badly overcharged my ancestors (Scotland too was part of the Roman Empire)," he quips, a statement that elicited much applause, cheers and laughs from the crowd.

'Throughout history, indigenous peoples have worked with land and nature in incredibly sustainable ways'



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Arati Kumar-Rao whisks her audience away from the relatively colder climes of Bengaluru to Jaisalmer district in the heart of the scorching Thar desert. "It has been almost two years since there has been any rain," she explains at a talk titled Marginlands: An Exploration of Indian Landscapes, which was part of the fourth edition of the recently-concluded Green Literature Festival (GLF). "This is what it looks like, the dunes we are on," says the Bengaluru-based writer and photographer, displaying photographs of this arid area. But the pastoralists who call the desert their home also know the secrets it harbours, including where to find water, even during prolonged droughts. Rao talks about sitting on top of a dune with her friend, Chhattar Singh, a shepherd farmer from that area, watching him unearth water from the belly of a dune.

"It hasn't rained here for 22 months. How is this dune wet?" she asks before sharing what Singh has told her: there are places in the dunes in the Thar desert where they hold water in their bellies. It is why the desert is dotted with self-replenishing, pitcher-shaped hand-dug wells or beris, a system suited for, "the youngest and most populated desert of the world." The Thar, clearly, thrums with life, from pastoralists like Singh, who spend their lives walking their ungulates through the undulating landscape, to many plants and animals like the small but deadly saw-scaled vipers, hunting for food as the sun goes down and the hardworking scarab beetles, moving large balls of dung several times their own body weight to secret chambers deep in the dunes. "If you look around in the desert, it's hardly deserted," says Rao. "Our metaphors are so wrong; there are signs of life everywhere."

Life is now proving to be a struggle for many of these people. They have to deal with extreme climate events, laws and policies that are not always friendly to them. Life is now proving to be a struggle for many of these people. They have to deal with extreme climate events, laws and policies that are not always friendly to them |

Over hundreds of years, people living in and off this harsh desert landscape have learnt how to not just survive but also thrive here, creating adequate water systems in a land that gets only 4 inches of rain annually, even managing to farm here. But life is now proving to be a struggle for many of these people. They have to deal with extreme climate events, laws and policies that are not always friendly to them, government interventions, or the rapid urbanisation taking over their commons, becoming scapegoats in the ongoing tussle between rapid development and conservation. "For the Indian government, the Thar is a wasteland... something that has to be better utilised," says Rao. To "improve" this wasteland, water is piped from the Sutlej down to the Thar. "By the time it reaches, there is hardly any water and what does it putrid... stinking," says Rao, pointing out that this district, which did not even know what a mosquito was, is now the district with the highest incidence of malaria in Rajasthan.

The people who live here refuse to drink this water, using it for cleaning or for their livestock instead, preferring instead to drink rainwater harvested from their wells. "The women just walk a few meters down to their local beris, and that is the time of socialising for them because that's the only time they get out of the house," says Rao, who calls herself government-agnostic. She believes that no government in history has been fair to the desert landscape and its people, their interventions often ironically converting perfectly healthy deserts into the wastelands they perceive them to be. This, in turn, forces people who've traditionally lived off this land into congested cities since they can no longer sustain themselves on these vastly altered landscapes. "We live in the age of a mass forgetting of local geographies... do not know how to treat the land anywhere," she says, pivoting the discussion back to Bengaluru, which

oscillates between spells of flooding and water shortage precisely because we have forgotten the city's topography. "Chhattar Singh says that before a drought caused by a shortage of rainfall comes the drought of ideas. And that is what we're living through today." Symbiotic relationship

The view that the deeply symbiotic relationship between local communities and the landscapes they inhabit means that they should be included in the larger conservation narrative was repeatedly reiterated in this edition of the GLF. Take, for instance, the opening session titled The Nilgiris in Focus: A Conservationist's Nightmare, which had conservationists Vasanth Bosco and Dr. Tarsh Thekaekara in conversation with writer Monisha Raman, discuss, among other things, the role played by communities in preserving and restoring ecosystems. Or how many sustainable solutions already exist within communities, as entrepreneur Nagaraja Prakasam states in a session titled India's Green Transition: Opportunities for Investors and Ventures, where he shared the stage with other entrepreneurs Rajan Mehta, Vishal Pandya and Benedict Paramanand (also the founder of GLF). Prakasam, the author of Back to Bharat: In Search of a Sustainable Future, believes that while climate change and inequality are big problems, his extensive travels across the country have shown him that solutions are within reach. In his opinion, many existing systems practised by various communities in the country already provide answers to some of these problems, whether it is the regenerative nature of Jhum cultivation or the opportunities and health benefits of traditional backyard poultry farming. "India has solutions. You just have to go find it, promote it, and fund it, of course," reiterates Paramanand.

The close relationship between humans and nature in India was also emphasised by wildlife biologist and conservation scientist Ravi Chellam at an afternoon session titled Rewilding: The Only Hope. "India is a shining example of how coexistence is possible," says Chellam, who shared the stage with Dr. Alister Scott, the co-director of the Global Rewilding Alliance, Nina Chandavarkar, the founder of Okios Landscape Architects and Seema Mundoli, writer and faculty at Azim Premji University, on this occasion. "Over the decades, while giving talks outside the country, I found people being amazed that we've done such a good job of retaining our wildlife populations," says Chellam, who believes that the usage of the term "rewilding" could have enormous, potentially harmful implications for how conservation is practised in a country like India. "The official policy paradigm is, there is wildlife, and there are people, and if there are people where wildlife is, they need to be moved out," he says, pointing out that this is especially true of tiger reserves in India.

Referring to the earlier Nilgiris discussion, where one of the points discussed was how invasive plants are running rampant in the absence of local people who were once integral to the ecosystem in many protected areas, Chellam says that this is a good example of what happens when we blindly adopt "the western model" of conservation in our country. "When you start with the view that people and wildlife are not compatible, the official conservation policy is throwing the people out," says Chellam, who believes that using the term "rewilding" will only strengthen this argument. "In this era of climate change, what are we talking about? Why do people with the least carbon footprint have to continue paying the cost for conservation as currently mandated by official policy?"

Colonial history Scott, in his official role as the co-director of the Global Rewilding Alliance, which, according to him, has "223 organisations operating in over 125 countries influencing the rewilding of about 2.5 million sq km of land and about 5 million sq km of ocean," agrees that a conservation narrative that advocates the removal of people is not the way to go. "Out of those 223 organisations, I would say that exactly zero advocate removing people from landscapes to help nature recover. There is absolutely zero tolerance for that kind of policy among our members," he says. In his opinion, this policy stems from "an ugly history, especially in the United States and many countries with a colonial history," which had a tradition of removing people from the landscapes they inhabited. He brings up the example of Yellowstone, once home to many Native Americans, which was declared a national park in 1872, leading to the expulsion of many tribes from that landscape. "The concept of wilderness was created to create this false idea that an untouched landscape with no humans in it was the only legitimately wild landscape," he says. "But as we know, throughout history, indigenous peoples have worked with the land and nature in incredibly sustainable ways."

Bangladesh initiates investigation into Russia-backed Rooppur nuclear project

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

An anti-corruption outfit in Bangladesh has initiated investigation into the \$12.65 billion Rooppur nuclear powerplant that is being constructed with Russian assistance. A statement from the Anti-Corruption Commission of Bangladesh has alleged that around \$5 billion financial irregularities have been discovered in the project that has been progressing for more than a decade. "The report implicates ousted Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her son Sajeeb Ahmed Wazed Joy and niece Tulip Siddiq—who have embezzled \$5 billion from overpriced \$12.65 billion Rooppur nuclear power plant through various offshore bank accounts in Malaysia," the Anti-Corruption Commission has declared in a statement.

The commission further said that Tulip Siddiq who is a Labour MP in the United Kingdom and has been facing scrutiny in the U.K. since the fall of the government of her aunt Sheikh Hasina was involved in an elaborate scheme to launder money that involved her paternal uncle Tarique Ahmed Siddique. "Tulip Siddiq and her family members are stakeholders in a company named Prochchaya which along with another entity Destiny Group had laundered \$900 million," it has been alleged. Earlier, Sunday Times in the U.K. reported that U.K. Treasury Economic Secretary Tulip Siddiq was questioned by the Cabinet Office's propriety and ethics team over allegations of siphoning around £3.9 billion from the Rooppur nuclear power plant project. Ms Siddiq's mother Sheikh Rehana is the younger sister of Sheikh Hasina and was evacuated by a Bangladesh military helicopter to India on August 5 when the Awami League government fell in Dhaka. The under construction Rooppur nuclear power plant is located 160 km from Dhaka and is one of the largest nuclear projects that Russian nuclear major Rosatom has been building. The deal to build the power plant was initiated in February 2011 which led to an initial contract between Rosatom and Bangladesh Atomic



Energy Commission in December 2015. Subsequently the Bangladesh Atomic Regulatory Authority issued the first site licence for the plant in June 2016. The project has been under construction since 2017 and the first unit of the nuclear power project is expected to be completed in 2025. Once fully operational the power plant will generate 2400 megawatt electricity. The project has been in international spotlight because of western sanctions that Russia has been facing since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. To dispel doubts, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Dhaka in September 2023 when he assured then Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen about Russia's commitment to complete the project on time. "Our flagship joint project is construction of the Rooppur nuclear power plant on the territory of Bangladesh. The project is progressing smoothly in line with the schedule, and delivery and charging of first nuclear fuel are expected as early as in October," Mr. Lavrov said after meeting Foreign Minister Momen. The project led to a tripartite agreement among Russia, Bangladesh and India which was signed in March 2018. Rooppur power project led to a trilateral agreement among India, Bangladesh and Russia in March 2018 when India's nuclear players such as NPCIL began to assist the construction of the units.

Homeless persons treated, rehabilitated in Karnataka's first public-private partnership for mental health

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Recently, a 65-year-old woman was found wandering in Frazer Town by social workers from a non-governmental organisation (NGO) during their field work. The homeless woman, who exhibited signs of mental duress, was admitted at the Emergency Care and Recovery Centre (ECRC) at the State-run Sir C.V. Raman General Hospital.

The woman was not just treated and counselled at the Centre for over a month, but also provided rehabilitation and reunited with her family under Manovruksha, a mental healthcare initiative for homeless, mentally-ill persons. She is one of the over 60 persons who have undergone treatment and rehabilitation at the hospital over the past two months. Most of them have been reunited with their families. The State Health Department, in association with Aaladamara Foundation, a city-based NGO dedicated to providing holistic mental healthcare to homeless individuals with severe mental illness, launched the initiative in C.V. Raman Hospital in October this year. Hospital Medical Superintendent Rajesh K.S. said a 22-bed mental health ward has been set up in the hospital. "While we are providing medicines, food and other required consumables for the patients admitted here, the Aaladamara Foundation has deployed manpower, including a psychiatrist and three nurses apart from psychiatric social workers and healthcare workers," the doctor said. "Besides, the Foundation is also providing outreach services wherein social workers go and recover/rescue persons from public places/streets. It is also supporting their rehabilitation and providing them with skills to integrate into society upon recovery," Dr. Rajesh said. Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said this public-private partnership is the first of its kind in Karnataka and many more such centres will be started to respond to the needs of the vulnerable population. "The idea is to provide comprehensive psychiatric care and holistic recovery services in addition to social care. This initiative is expected to set the standard for future collaborations between the government and other like-minded NGOs in Karnataka," the Minister told. The mental health landscape of Karnataka Over 38 lakh people have been treated and counselled for mental health issues at State-run mental health clinics in district



hospitals and medical colleges in Karnataka from 2020 to 2024. While 10,63,242 people with mental illness have been treated and counselled in the government centres in 2019-2020, the subsequent years saw 9,02,040, 8,65,386, and 9,40,514 people receiving treatment and counselling. There are 71 posts sanctioned for psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, and psychiatric social workers in district hospitals. Of these, 19 posts are vacant. Besides, of the 244 sanctioned posts for outsourced employees, 32 are vacant (as of January 2024). The 250-bed C.V. Raman Hospital sees around 800 patients in the out-patient department (OPD) daily. The facility has a 13-bed geriatric ward and 12-bed palliative care ward. Dr. Rajesh said a proposal to set-up a satellite centre of the Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research (SJCSR) — similar to the one functioning in K.C. General Hospital — has been submitted to the Health Department and is under consideration. "We do not have a cardiac facility in this part of the city," he said. Stating that another NGO, Child Health Foundation, has come forward to set up a super-specialty hospital adjoining the C.V. Raman Hospital, Dr. Rajesh said the hospital caters to residents of five Assembly constituencies and around 17 slums. "We have submitted a proposal to the government and are awaiting approvals," Dr Rajesh said. "The Child Health Foundation in association with Coal India has agreed to run the facility free-of-cost with their manpower. We just need to provide them 10,000 square feet of land on our hospital premises. The proposal is to start cardiology, neurology, gastroenterology, endocrinology, nephrology and urology and other related speciality units here.

South Korean Opposition threatens to impeach President Han Duck-soo over martial law counsel



would "immediately initiate impeachment proceedings" against the acting President if the legislation was not promulgated by Tuesday (December 24, 2024). "The delays show that the Prime Minister has no intention of complying with the constitution, and it is tantamount to admitting that he is acting as a proxy for the insurgent," Democratic Party floor leader Park Chan-dae told a party meeting, referring to Mr. Yoon. Mr. Han is a technocrat who has held leadership roles in South Korean politics for 30 years under conservative and liberal presidents. Mr. Yoon appointed him Prime Minister in 2022. Mr. Han's office could not immediately be reached for comment. He previously said he had tried to block Mr. Yoon's martial law declaration, but apologised for failing to do so. Mr. Park also accused Mr. Yoon of hampering the Constitutional Court trial by repeatedly refusing to accept the Court documents. "Any delay in the investigation and impeachment trials is an extension of the insurrection and an act of plotting a second one," Mr. Park said. A joint investigative team including police and the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials has made a second attempt to call Mr. Yoon in for questioning on Dec. 25, though it was unclear whether he would appear. Woo Jong-soo, Investigation Chief of the National Police Agency, told Parliament on Monday (December 23, 2024) that police had tried to raid Mr. Yoon's office twice. Still, the presidential security service denied their entry. Mr. Woo said his team sent a request to preserve evidence, including a secure phone server.

South Korea's main Opposition party threatened on Monday (December 23, 2024) to impeach acting President Han Duck-soo if he failed to proclaim a law to launch a special counsel investigation into President Yoon Suk Yeol's failed bid to impose martial law. Prime Minister Han has taken over from the suspended Mr. Yoon, who was impeached on Dec. 14, 2024, and faces a Constitutional Court review on whether to oust him.

With a majority in Parliament, the Opposition Democratic Party passed a bill this month to appoint a special counsel to pursue charges of insurrection, among others, against the conservative Mr. Yoon and to investigate his wife over a luxury bag scandal and other allegations. The party, which has accused Mr. Han of aiding Mr. Yoon's martial law attempt and reported him to the police, said it

Rival protests over South Korea's impeached President Yoon held in Seoul

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Demonstrators supporting and opposing South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol held rival protests several hundred metres apart in Seoul on Saturday (December 21, 2024), a week after he was impeached over his short-lived declaration of martial law. Mr. Yoon's presidential powers are suspended but he remains in office. He has not complied with various summonses by authorities investigating whether martial law, which he declared late on Dec. 3 and rescinded hours later, constituted insurrection.

He has also not responded to attempts to contact him by the Constitutional Court, which decides whether to remove him from office or restore his presidential powers. The court plans to hold its first preparatory hearing on Friday (December 20, 2024). Saturday's (December 21, 2024) pro- and anti-Yoon protests were held in Gwanghwamun in the heart of the capital. There were no clashes as of 4 p.m. (0700 GMT) Tens of thousands of anti-Yoon protesters, dominated by people in their 20s and 30s, gathered around 3 p.m., waving K-Pop light sticks and signs with sayings such as "Arrest! Imprison! Insurrection chief Mr. Yoon Suk Yeol" to catchy K-pop tunes.

"I wanted to ask Mr. Yoon how he could do this to a democracy in the 21st century, and I think if he really has a



conscience, he should step down," said 27-year-old Cho Sung-hyo. Several thousand pro-Yoon protesters, chiefly older and more conservative people opposing Mr. Yoon's removal and supporting the a restoration of his powers, had gathered since around midday. "These rigged (parliamentary) elections eat away at this country, and at the core are socialist communist powers, so about 10 of us came together and said the same thing - we absolutely oppose impeachment," said Lee Young-su, a 62-year-old businessman. Mr. Yoon had cited claims of election hacking and "anti-state" pro-North Korean sympathisers as justification for imposing the martial law, which the National Election Commission has denied.

Brazil plane crash: At least 10 killed; several people on ground injured

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

A small plane crashed into a Brazilian town that's popular with tourists on Sunday (December 22, 2024), killing all 10 passengers on board and injuring more than a dozen people on the ground, Brazil's Civil Defence Agency said. The agency in a post on X said the plane hit the chimney of a home and then the second floor of a building before crashing into a mobile phone shop in a largely residential neighbourhood of Gramado. More than a dozen people who were on the ground were taken to hospitals with injuries including smoke inhalation, with two said to be in critical condition. Local media reported that the plane was piloted by Luiz Claudio Galeazzi, a Brazilian businessman who was travelling with his family to Sao Paulo State. In a statement published on LinkedIn, Galeazzi's company, Galeazzi & Associados, confirmed that the 61-year-old was on the plane, adding that he was traveling with his wife, their three daughters, several other family members and another company employee, who perished in the crash. "In this moment of intense pain we are deeply thankful with the manifestations of solidarity and love that we have received from friends, colleagues and the community" the statement reads. "We also express our solidarity with those who have been affected by this accident in the region."



Um avião caiu na manhã de hoje (22) no centro urbano de Gramado/RS. Equipes de emergência atuam neste momento no local. Security cameras filmed the small Piper plane departing from Canela airport in Rio Grande do Sul State, minutes before it crashed in Gramado, which is about 10km from the airport. Gramado is in the Serra Gaucha mountains and popular with Brazilian tourists who enjoy the cool weather, hiking spots and traditional architecture. The town was settled by large numbers of German and Italian immigrants in the 19th century and is a popular spot for Christmas vacations.

Bangladesh launches \$5 billion corruption probe against Sheikh Hasina's family



Along with Hasina, the now-former prime minister who fled to India after being toppled by a revolution in August, those subject to the inquiry include her son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, and niece, Tulip Siddiq, a British lawmaker and government minister.

Those subject to the inquiry include her son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, and niece, Tulip Siddiq, a British lawmaker and government minister. Bangladesh has launched a probe into the alleged \$5 billion embezzlement connected to a Russian-backed nuclear power plant by ousted leader Sheikh Hasina and her family, the anti-corruption commission said Monday. Along with Hasina, the now-former prime minister

who fled to India after being toppled by a revolution in August, those subject to the inquiry include her son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, and niece, Tulip Siddiq, a British lawmaker and government minister. The allegations were raised by a writ seeking an investigation filed in the high court by Hasina's political opponent, Bobby Hajjaj, chairman of the Nationalist Democratic Movement party. "We seek justice through our court", Hajjaj told AFP on Monday. Key allegations are connected to the funding of the \$12.65 billion Rooppur nuclear plant, the South Asian country's first, which is bankrolled by Moscow with a 90 percent loan. A statement Monday from the commission said it had launched an inquiry into allegations that Hasina and family members had "embezzled \$5 billion" from the Rooppur plant via "various offshore bank accounts in Malaysia".

Also Read: India protests social media post by key member of Bangladesh interim government said its investigations were examining "questionable procurement practices related to the overpriced construction" of the plant. "The claims of kickbacks, mismanagement, money laundering, and potential abuse of power raise significant concerns about the integrity of the project and the use of public funds", the commission said. Graft allegations also include theft from a government building scheme for the homeless. Hasina, 77, fled by helicopter on August 5 into exile in India, infuriating many Bangladeshis determined that she face trial for alleged "mass murder". It was not possible to contact Hasina for comment. Siddiq has "denied any involvement in the claims" accusing her of involvement in embezzlement, according to a statement from the British prime minister's office. Joy, who is understood to be based in the United States, was also unavailable for comment.

New York police nab suspect in death of woman found on fire in subway car



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Unbeknownst to the officers, the suspect remained at the scene and was seated on a bench on the subway platform, just outside the train car. Body cameras worn by the officers caught a "very clear, detailed look" at the suspect and those images were publicly disseminated. New York City Police announced Sunday they have in custody a "person of interest" in the early morning death of a woman who they believe may have fallen asleep on a stationary subway train before being intentionally lit on fire by a man she didn't know.

Transit police apprehended the suspect after receiving a report from three high school students who had recognized the man. They had seen images of the suspect taken from surveillance and police body cam video and widely distributed by police. "New Yorkers came through again," said New York City Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch, who described the case as "one of the most depraved crimes one person could possibly commit against another human being."

Tisch said the suspect and the woman, both of whom have not been identified, were riding a subway train to the

end of the line in Brooklyn at around 7:30 a.m. After the train came to a stop, surveillance video from the subway car showed the man "calmly" walk up to the victim, who was seated and possibly sleeping, and set her clothing on fire with what appeared to be a lighter. The woman's clothing then "became fully engulfed in a matter of seconds," Tisch said. Police do not believe the two knew one another.

Officers on a routine patrol at the Coney Island-Stillwell Avenue subway station smelled smoke and discovered the woman on fire, standing in the middle of the subway car. After the fire was extinguished, emergency medical personnel declared the woman dead at the scene. Unbeknownst to the officers, the suspect had remained at the scene and was seated on a bench on the subway platform, just outside the train car, Tisch said. Body cameras worn by the officers caught a "very clear, detailed look" at the suspect and those images were publicly disseminated.

After later receiving a 911 call from the teenagers, other transit officers identified the man on another subway train and radioed ahead to the next station, where more officers searched each car and ultimately apprehended him without incident. The man had a lighter in his pocket, Tisch said. The case marked the second fatality on a New York subway Sunday. At 12:35 a.m., police responded to an emergency call for an assault in progress at the 61st Street-Woodside Station in Queens and found a 37-year-old man with a stab wound to his torso and a 26-year-old man with multiple slashes throughout his body. The older man was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital while the younger man was in stable condition, police said. An investigation was continuing. New York Gov. Kathy Hochul this year has sent New York National Guard members to the city's subway system to help police conduct random searches of riders' bags for weapons following a series of high-profile crimes on city trains. Hochul recently deployed additional members to help patrol during the holiday season.

Aussie billionaire with whom Trump allegedly shared nuke secrets donates \$15.1mn to back Prez-elect: 'Time to live in...'

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Anthony Pratt, an Australian businessman, is one of the top five donors to President-elect Donald Trump, with contributions of more than \$15 million to his campaign. With this substantial donation, the executive chairman of Pratt Industries, a firm that uses only recycled paper and packaging, joins the ranks of high-profile donors like Linda McMahon, Timothy Mellon, Elon Musk, and Miriam Adelson. He was accused of sharing US nuclear secrets with scores of people after receiving them from Trump, as per Fortune. Anthony Pratt opens up about \$15.1mn donation following Trump's massive victory, Pratt declared that he will move to the US, where he has strong commercial connections and a history with Trump.

"Honoured to be granted my Green Card for permanent USA residency last month," Pratt wrote in a LinkedIn post last month. "We decided it was time to live in America because: My family are all US citizens [and] over the past 30 years we have invested to build 70 factories in America, creating 12,000 well-paying American manufacturing jobs."

Here's what Pratt has to say over huge donation. The \$14 million donation from 64-year-old Pratt, who is now the largest Australian employer of Americans with 70 plants constructed in the US and 12,000 manufacturing jobs created, will primarily go to the super PAC Make America Great



Again, Inc. The remaining \$1.1 million would be used for Trump's inaugural fund. Calling Trump a great President, Pratt asserted his support for the US President-elect will continue, stressing that he "was a great president and will once again be a great president." "I've been proud to support him not only by making this donation, but also by investing billions in well-paying American manufacturing jobs during his first presidency. I will do so again in his upcoming presidency," he stated. On being asked about his permanent US residency, he said, "We decided it was time to live in America because my family are all U.S. citizens and I wanted to devote more time growing my US business."

US President Joe Biden commutes sentences for 37 of 40 federal death row inmates

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

US President Joe Biden on Monday commuted the death sentences of 37 of 40 federal inmates, taking action ahead of the return of Donald Trump who oversaw a sweeping number of lethal injections during his first term. With less than a month left in office, Biden had faced growing calls from death penalty opponents to commute the sentences of those on death row to life in prison without parole, which the 37 will now serve.

The move leaves only a handful of high-profile killers who acted out of hate or terrorism facing the federal death penalty -- for which there has been a moratorium under Biden. "These commutations are consistent with the moratorium my Administration has imposed on federal executions, in cases other than terrorism and hate-motivated mass murder," Biden said in a statement. "I am commuting the sentences of 37 of the 40 individuals on federal death row to life sentences without the possibility of parole," he said. The three inmates who will remain on federal death row include Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who helped carry out the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, and Dylann Roof, an avowed white supremacist who in 2015 shot and killed nine Black churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina. Robert Bowers, who killed 11 Jewish worshippers during a 2018 mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, will also remain on death row. Those commuted included nine people convicted of murdering fellow prisoners, four for murders committed during bank robberies and one who killed a prison guard. "Make no mistake: I condemn these murderers, grieve for the victims of their despicable acts, and ache for all the families who have suffered unimaginable and irreparable loss," Biden said. "But guided by my



conscience and my experience...I am more convinced than ever that we must stop the use of the death penalty at the federal level," he added.

Trump death penalty expansion Biden campaigned for the White House as an opponent of the death penalty, and the Justice Department issued a moratorium on its use at the federal level after he became president. During his reelection campaign, Trump spoke frequently of expanding the use of capital punishment to include migrants who kill American citizens and drug and human traffickers. There had been no federal inmates put to death in the United States since 2003 until Trump resumed federal executions in July 2020. He oversaw 13 by lethal injection during his final six months in power, more than any US leader in 120 years. The last federal execution -- which was carried out by lethal injection at a prison in Terre Haute, Indiana -- took place on January 16, 2021, four days before Trump left office. The death penalty has been abolished in 23 of the 50 US states, while six others -- Arizona, California, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Tennessee -- have moratoriums in place.

TTP commander among 11 killed in Pak security forces assault in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

GNS News Agency, Dec 26 Peshawar: The security forces gunned down 11 suspected terrorists, including a commander of the banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), in two intelligence-based operations in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Sunday. The operations were conducted in the volatile Tirah Valley in Khyber district and Lakki Marwat district after reports about the presence of militants. A group of militants was moving through the Tirah Valley via Pir Mela when they were intercepted by the security forces. In the subsequent firing, 10 militants were killed while four others were injured.

Among the militants killed was a commander who was leading the group, sources said. The slain militants belonged to the banned extremist organisation's Hafiz Gul Bahadur group. Separately in Lakki Marwat district, police and the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) conducted a joint intelligence-based operation in the Shagai area. During the exchange of fire, one terrorist was killed and weapons and ammunition were recovered. The deceased terrorist was identified as Asif Ali, who was a close associate of the notorious outlawed commander Inamullah, also known as Lamba, a high-profile terrorist allegedly involved in multiple bombings.

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, The Indian Express 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 adroitness, 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 gaming 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, Kalski, 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. However, there is a question mark on the status of these rules. For now, these laws have no regulatory teeth, which furthers the problem of the legal lacunae that exists around online gaming in general, and opinion trading platforms in particular. "We would like to get regulated. The IT Ministry has shown and continues to show interest in regulating the sector, which is a great starting point. A platform with a similar business model to ours has been regulated in the US," Probo's Gupta said.

Duty hike likely amid surge in steel imports; DGTR notifies anti-dumping investigation

Amid a surge in steel imports from several countries, including China, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry is likely to recommend an increase in duty on steel products, according to a person aware of the development. This comes as the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) initiated an anti-dumping investigation into the imports of certain steel products in India as per notification released on Friday.

"There are concerns about the impact of a steel duty hike on the downstream industry, but at the same time, there is massive overcapacity in China. A recommendation for a duty is likely, as several Western countries are imposing duties on Chinese steel products, and that steel could be rerouted to India," the person said.

The Ministry of Steel has asked the Ministry of Commerce to impose a 25 per cent duty on steel products, citing that steel imports from China surged by 80 per cent to 1.61 million tonnes between January and July this year, compared to 0.9 million tonnes during the same period last year. However, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have warned that a safeguard duty on steel products would negatively impact 8 lakh MSMEs. According to the DGTR notification, the Indian Steel Association (ISA), comprising ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India Limited, AMNS Khopoli Limited, JSW Steel Limited, JSW Steel Coated Products Limited, Bhushan Power & Steel Limited, Jindal Steel and Power Limited, and the Steel Authority of India Limited, is seeking the imposition of a safeguard duty on imports of "Non-Alloy and Alloy Steel Flat Products" into India.

"The applicant alleges that there has been a recent, sudden, sharp, and significant increase in the volume of imports, which has caused significant injury to the domestic industry in India. The applicant further alleges that imports have occurred in such increased quantities and under such circumstances as to cause or threaten to cause serious injury to the domestic industry," DGTR said in a notification. ISA argued that beginning with the imposition of a 25 per cent duty under Section 232 by the United States of America under its Trade Expansion Act, 1962, several countries have introduced multiple trade remedy measures against steel product imports. The evidence indicates that 129 trade remedy measures were imposed by various countries against steel products between 2019 and 2023.

"The existence of significant excess capacity far exceeding domestic consumption in China, Japan, and South Korea has arisen, inter alia, due to slowing demand in those countries. China's recent domestic policy measures resulted in a decline in consumption of long steel products, which are mainly used in the real estate sector. To mitigate the decline in steel consumption for long products, Chinese steel companies shifted a significant percentage of their production from long products to flat products, which are



Amid a surge in steel imports from several countries, including China, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry is likely to recommend an increase in duty on steel products, according to a person aware of the development.

now being exported to global markets," ISA stated in its application to DGTR. Think tank GTRI argued that imports are primarily due to the gap between steel production and consumption.

"In FY 2024, India produced 139.15 million tonnes (MT) of steel, exported 7.5 MT, and consumed 136.29 MT, according to official figures. This left little surplus, making imports necessary to meet domestic demand. Steel imports, which account for only 6 per cent of domestic production, primarily cater to large steel firms, with 50 per cent consisting of raw materials such as steel scrap and 40 per cent specialised products unavailable locally," GTRI said. The ISA further said that the ASEAN region is expected to significantly increase its crude steel production capacity, with 75 per cent of the region's planned capacity expansion linked to investments by Chinese companies. ASEAN is the leading region for cross-border investments by Chinese steel companies, which are heavily investing in overseas steel projects. The capacity in ASEAN is expected to rise to levels far exceeding the region's steel demand, ISA said. Rating agency ICRA had said that the domestic steel industry's capacity utilisation in 2024-25 could fall below 80 per cent for the first time in four years due to the surge in imports. ICRA predicted that, alongside record ongoing expansion plans, the industry's capacity utilisation rate would decline from 85 per cent in 2023-24 to an estimated 78 per cent in the current fiscal year, the lowest level in four years.

'I picked it up and smashed it on my head': Honey Singh on his battle with bipolar disorder and psychotic symptoms; expert tips to cope



Honey Singh's openness about his struggles with bipolar disorder and psychotic symptoms sheds light on the challenges many face in silence. In his Netflix documentary, Yo Yo Honey Singh: Famous, the rapper recounted experiences of paranoia and delusions, sharing how he would feel terrified of even routine interactions. Singh recalled being invited by Shah Rukh to join him for a tour in the United States. Despite being overworked, he agreed to the offer.

During this tour, he mentioned that he wasn't in the state to perform but was forced to. "Gradually, I developed symptoms of suspicion and paranoia, someone's going to frame me or something weird like that. May be they'll file a case against me. I didn't really understand what was happening to me. Why was I feeling like this?"

He continued, "Somebody spread rumours that Shah Rukh Khan slapped Honey Singh. That man loves me so much, he could never slap me. Now I'll tell you what happened nine years ago. When they took me to Chicago for the show, I said, 'I don't want to perform'. I was sure that I was going to die during that show. Everyone told me that I should get ready, but I refused. My managers came over, and they said, 'Why aren't you getting ready?' I said, 'I'm not going' I went to the washroom, took a trimmer, and I shaved my hair off. I said, 'How will I perform now?' They said, 'Wear a cap and perform'." Singh revealed. Singh then grabbed on to his chair, and refused to let go. He started yelling that he didn't want to perform. "There was a coffee mug lying there. I picked it up and smashed it on my head."

Full-body MRI scans may not be as effective as believed to be; know why

Full body scans have gained popularity in recent years, with many celebrities like Kim Kardashian endorsing them as a way to detect hidden diseases early. However, a new study raises questions about the effectiveness of these scans. Led by Adam Taylor from Lancaster University, the study analysed 16,000 brain MRI scans of volunteers to assess their ability to identify preventable diseases. The results were surprising: MRI scans were found to be less effective than many believe.

The study revealed that MRI scans detected serious findings in only a small percentage of cases: 1.4% for the brain, 1.3% for the chest, and 1.9% for the abdomen. Additionally, the scans often produced false positives, indicating the presence of a disease when none existed. For example, in 1,000 breast scans, 97 were false positives, while prostate scans showed 29 false positives per 100 scans. While full-body scans may provide peace of mind for some, it's important to consider their limitations. Let's first understand how full-body MRI scans work and why they might not be as useful as previously thought.

What are full-body MRI scans and are they useful?

According to Dr Rakesh Gupta, Senior Consultant at Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, full-body MRI scans are diagnostic imaging procedures that use powerful magnets and radio waves to create detailed images of the entire body. These scans are often used when there are concerns about systemic diseases, metastatic cancer, or unexplained symptoms affecting multiple systems. The procedure itself is non-invasive and does not use radiation, making it a safer option for repeated screenings. According to Dr Shruti Sharma, Senior Consultant — Internal Medicine at Yatharth Super Speciality Hospitals, they are highly effective for identifying soft tissue abnormalities, vascular issues, and tumors across the body. She explains that these scans provide detailed views of various organs and tissues, including the brain, spinal cord, heart, lungs, and limbs. Their high resolution allows for early detection of certain conditions,



particularly cancer staging and metastasis detection. However, while the scans are accurate for specific conditions, their sensitivity and specificity can vary. They are not infallible and may produce false positives, which can lead to unnecessary follow-up procedures and anxiety.

Can full-body MRI scans be used for preventive medicine?

Dr. Rahul Gautam, Associate Consultant — Radiology at Yatharth Super Speciality Hospitals, acknowledges that while full-body MRI scans can detect early signs of disease, their role in preventative medicine is controversial. The scans can uncover asymptomatic diseases like precancerous lesions and structural abnormalities, but the risk of overdiagnosis and overtreatment is a significant concern. These incidental findings may lead to unnecessary medical interventions, causing more harm than good. Moreover, while full body MRI scans can detect some early-stage diseases, Dr Gupta points out that they are not suitable for identifying all dangerous preventable diseases. For example, early-stage coronary artery disease, one of the leading causes of mortality, may not be visible on an MRI. Similarly, some metabolic disorders may go undetected until they progress to a more advanced stage.

Can having sex help you sleep better?

If you suffer from insomnia, you must have tried millions of remedies to help you sleep better, from melatonin to meditation. According to Shivani Misri Sadhoo, Relationship Counsellor & Psychologist sexual stimulation might help promote a better quality of sleep. "During sexual activity, the body releases endorphins and oxytocin, which are able to promote relaxation and reduce stress," she said. These hormones promote quicker sleep onset and contribute to a deeper and more restful sleep. Additionally, sexual activity often leads to physical exhaustion, which can further help in falling asleep. Sexual activity often leads to physical exhaustion, which can further help in falling asleep.

Is this effect different for men and women?

The sleep benefits of sex can apply to both men and women, but individual experiences may differ based on personal factors and preferences. For example, some men might feel physically exhausted after sex, helping them fall asleep faster, while others might feel more energized. Likewise, women may find that the emotional connection and relaxation from sex enhance their sleep, though this can also vary depending on individual stress levels and circumstances.

Does masturbation also help in improving sleeping patterns?

Just like sexual activity with a partner, masturbation also leads to the release of endorphins and oxytocin, which



promote relaxation and may reduce stress. This hormonal release mostly results in a sense of calm and contentment, which can make it easier to fall asleep. Masturbation also leads to physical exhaustion, which may contribute to improved sleep quality. "However, individual experiences vary, and while it might be beneficial for many, others probably not find it as effective or may experience different effects based on personal factors and stress levels," said Shivani.

How often would having sex help with sleeping patterns?

The frequency at which sex benefits sleep can differ from person to person.

Vivek Oberoi says he's madly in love with wife Priyanka Alva: 'Among all the women in the universe, I would only choose her'



tures come in place to express that you still love and care."Vivek met Priyanka when he was in his post heart-break phase and had decided to never get married. He said, "My journey from I don't want to meet this girl to I cannot live without her, I just knew this is the girl I want to spend rest of my life with."However, when asked if they both apologise to each other post arguments, the actor quipped, "There is no concept of first. Its me, who always tells sorry."

Vivek also spoke about the importance of marriage and how it helps build a sense of commitment and trust and a medium to pass values to the next generation. Vivek shared, "I believe marriage is a practice of how to work in a team. It is a practice in trust, compassion, respect, because even though you are familiar, you take each other for granted... you have to feel the inner respect. You will not disrespect your partner, neither will you let anybody else disrespect them. It teaches you a lot of things including commitment. It is an amazing institution."

He added, "When you have kids, it goes to another level because they learn from you. They observe your energy. They see how you behave with your partner and they are printing the blueprints of how a relationship looks. If you are misbehaving, they will think this is how it is between a husband and wife, but if they will see you respectful towards each other, correcting mistakes, loving, they will know this is how it is meant to be."Vivek who has been married to Priyanka for over a decade also shared his opinion about open marriage. He said, "I don't understand the concept of open marriage. I don't understand the definition of open exclusivity. Either you are exclusive or you are nothing, there cannot be anything like open exclusivity. I think I am a typical Punjabi guy. Maybe not made for this culture or maybe not as liberal. I am very desi. There is a reason people have been following an exclusive relationship for ages."Sharing his relationship, the actor said, "My commitment with Priyanka is different. In fourteen years of marriage, I look at her every day and ask myself, 'Among all the women in the universe, would I still choose her?' and the answer is yes, I will still choose her. It is the most liberating feeling because you are in it because you want to not because you have to."Calling himself lucky, Vivek shared the only demand his wife makes is ask for his time. "She only asks for my time and gets excited whenever she knows we are going out together. Expensive stuff don't excite her. And this makes you feel the luckiest that all that makes her happy is spending time with you."

Vivek Oberoi is known for fondly speaking about his relationship with his wife Priyanka Alva. The couple met in an arranged marriage set-up, but all they needed was one meeting with each other to know they are made for each other. There has been several instances where the Bollywood star-turned-businessman has shared his love story with his wife. Now, after around 14 years of marriage, Vivek Oberoi spoke about the importance of marriage and how the gesture for your partner shifts from grand to simple over the years and basics of a healthy marriage. In a recent conversation with MensXP, Vivek Oberoi shared, "I have been madly in love with my wife for the last 14 years. Even today when she puts her makeup on, I keep admiring her and when she catches me doing that, it is different kind of romantic. That feeling of acknowledgement makes a woman feel womanly."

Speaking about the shift he witnessed in his personal life from the time he met his wife to now after having kids, Vivek said, "I moved from grand gestures to little ones." He explained, "When you are younger, you think of the biggest gestures. When I proposed to Priyanka before our wedding, she had gone to Florence for shopping. I landed up without telling her, set the whole stage, dress, shoes, jewellery for her and left a note, 'meet me on the bridge across forever'. This is where we first met. She dressed up and walked down and she was welcomed with music and then she saw a carriage and she met me and we spent the whole evening in that carriage. I was dressed in a tuxedo with a ring and then wrote a poem for her. But, this you can't keep doing every time. So here is when the small ges-

Allu Arjun's children moved to safety after home vandalised; Congress denies involvement in incident

Hours after a group of people barged into the premises of Telugu star Allu Arjun's residence in Hyderabad, Telangana, and vandalised parts of the property, his children were reportedly moved to a secure location to avoid any untoward incidents. The Allu family took this precautionary measure after a group, who claimed to be members of the Osmania University Joint Action Committee (OU JAC), forcefully entered the compound and protested.

In a video circulating online, a group of people can be seen scaling the walls of the house, entering the premises and pelting things at the residence, in addition to vandalising flower pots, demanding justice for the woman who died in the Pushpa 2 theatre stampede incident. The clip also shows a tense confrontation between the protesters and security personnel at Arjun's residence. Now, other videos have emerged showing the actor's children, Ayaan and Arha, being escorted away to safety.

Meanwhile, since the time of the incident, allegations have been rife that the ruling Congress party might be involved in the incident, particularly given its timing which followed a war of words between Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Allu Arjun. However, the Congress party has dismissed these claims as baseless. "None of them belong to Congress. If they find any Congress link, those workers will stand disqualified," Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee official spokesperson Sama Ram Mohan Reddy told NDTV.

Soon after the incident, CM Reddy also condemned it and instructed the Director General of Police (DGP) and the city police commissioner to enforce strict measures to maintain law and order. "No laxity will be tolerated in this regard. Senior officials should take precautions to prevent police personnel, who are not involved in the Sandhya Theatre incident, from responding," he noted on social media.

In a statement issued to the media, Telangana police detailed that the incident at Arjun's house on Sunday — when the actor was not present — began when one of the protesters climbed the compound wall and threw tomatoes. When security staff objected, the protesters reportedly manhandled them and flower pots were damaged. The group also raised slogans demanding Rs 1 crore in financial assistance for the deceased woman's family. A placard left by the protesters read, "crores of rupees are made by making films, while those watching films are dying," news agency PTI reported. The Jubilee Hills police reached the scene and detained six persons, registering a case against



them. However, those accused of vandalising Arjun's residence were granted bail by a Hyderabad court on Monday, according to news agency ANI. "The students of Osmania University were demonstrating peacefully. When the police force attacked them, they acted in their self-defence. Police filed a case against them. After their appearance before the judge today, six people have been given bail without any conditions and a fine," advocate Ramdas, appearing for the accused, told ANI.

The tragic incident that sparked the protests took place on December 4 at Sandhya Theatre in Hyderabad, where a 35-year-old woman was killed and her eight-year-old son injured during a stampede-like situation. Thousands of fans had gathered to see Allu Arjun at the premiere of Pushpa 2: The Rule in the theatre, leading to overcrowding and chaos that resulted in the fatal bottleneck. Following the tragedy, Hyderabad police registered a case against Allu Arjun, his security team and the theatre management based on a complaint from the deceased woman's family. The actor was arrested on December 13 but was granted four weeks of interim bail by the Telangana High Court on the same day, leading to his release on December 14.

Blake Lively's co-stars America Ferrera, Amber Tamblynz and Alexis Bledel support her lawsuit against Justin Baldoni: 'We saw her summon the courage...'

The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants stars come out in support of Blake Lively. Blake Lively's co-stars from The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants have come out in her support. Blake Lively's former co-stars from The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants—America Ferrera, Amber Tamblynz, and Alexis Bledel—have voiced their support for the actor after she filed a lawsuit against her It Ends With Us director and co-star, Justin Baldoni, accusing him of harassment and launching a smear campaign against her.

The trio shared a joint statement, declaring, "As Blake's friends and sisters for over twenty years, we stand with her in solidarity as she fights back against the reported campaign waged to destroy her reputation. Throughout the filming of It Ends With Us, we saw her summon the courage to ask for a safe workplace for herself and colleagues on set and we are appalled to read the evidence of a premeditated and vindictive effort that ensued to discredit her voice."They also criticized Justin Baldoni and his team for weaponizing

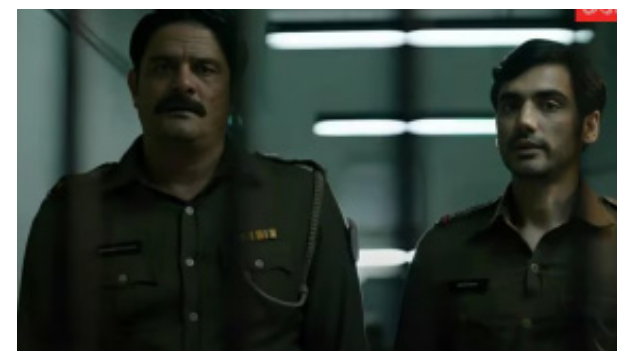
the story of It Ends With Us, which is centered on domestic violence survivors, to silence a woman advocating for her safety. "The hypocrisy is astounding," the statement read. It further read, "We are struck by the reality that even if a woman is as strong, celebrated, and resourced as our friend Blake, she can face forceful retaliation for daring to ask for a safe working environment. We are inspired by our sister's courage to stand up for herself and others."Earlier, Colleen Hoover, the writer of the book It Ends With Us on which the film is based, and also an executive producer of the movie, came forward to support Blake Lively. Taking to her Instagram Stories, Colleen wrote, "@blakelively, you have been nothing but honest, kind, supportive and patient since the day we met. Thank you for being exactly the human that you are. Never change. Never wilt."In her lawsuit, Blake Lively alleged that Justin Baldoni engaged in sexual harassment and orchestrated a smear campaign to damage her reputation.

Triptii Dimri and Sam Merchant's latest Instagram posts point to a joint getaway.

Rumoured couple Triptii Dimri and Sam Merchant are making headlines again. This time, the duo seems to be vacationing together in the picturesque Cotswolds in England. While the Animal star shared many clicks of herself on her Instagram story, Sam too posted a few photos. What caught the attention of netizens were the similar locations in their pictures. This has sparked speculation about them being together. Earlier, Triptii shared photos of her feeding goats and enjoying hot chocolate. Sam was also seen doing the same activities at similar locations. Sam Merchant is a model-turned-businessman who won the Gladrags Manhunt Contest in 2002. He is now a hotelier and owns several beach clubs and hotels in Goa. He is quite popular on social media.



Paatal Lok season 2 to feature in Prime Video's slate in 2025; streamer announces January premiere



Prime Video is turning back the clock, and taking us back to the time when streaming platforms were putting together something unique and novel every week to keep us engaged to the screen at a time when everyone was home due to the global lockdown. After the launch of the second season of Bandish Bandits, the streamer is now

set to bring back the much-awaited second season of the gritty Paatal Lok.

Announcing the release date with a new poster, Prime Video wrote, "Gates open this year. New Season, Jan 17." The sequel is set to begin streaming on January 17, and is directed by Avinash Arun, who not only helmed the first season, but also went on to make the poignant feature, Three of Us, between the two seasons. The series, headlined by Jaideep Ahlawat, who played the no-nonsense cop Hathiram Chaudhary, will feature the actor in the lead role in the second season too. Paatal Lok season 2 will also see the return of actors Gul Panag, and Ishwak Singh, who reprise their roles of Hathiram's wife Renu, and assistant cop Imran, respectively. Created by Sudip Sharma, Paatal Lok season 2 will also find newer entries to the world that explores the cruel underbelly of the society. The new cast members include Tillotama Shome, and Nagesh Kukunoor. Backed by Clean Slate Filmz Production, in association with Eunoia Films LLP, Paatal Lok season 2 is set to kickstart the Prime Video slate in 2025.

'Amitabh Bachchan changed after getting success; Rajesh Khanna was an egoist': Moushumi Chatterjee

Veteran actor Moushumi Chatterjee, known for her candid opinions, recently reflected on her time working with Amitabh Bachchan and Rajesh Khanna. She hinted at how Bachchan's immense hard work for success led to a change in his persona once he became a superstar. She also spoke about Khanna being an egoist but also reflected how it came from his immense stardom. Moushumi, who starred in several films of the 70s, and was last seen with Bachchan in Shoojit Sircar's Piku, shared her thoughts during an interaction with Anandabazar Patrika.

"Amitabh Bachchan didn't become big for better. Moushumi spoke about Amitabh Bachchan's dedication and hard work, recalling that he was a quiet and focused individual. However, she also remarked on how success had a significant impact on him. "Amitabh Bachchan struggled a lot and became big after a lot of hard work. But I won't say he became big for the better. When you receive so much, you behave very differently. You won't even think about helping others," she said. She further shared insights into his behaviour on set, describing how Amitabh kept to himself. "His brother Ajitabh used to arrange for a car which would pick up Bachchan from the sets. He used to be a very quiet person, sit alone, and have lunch with the hairdresser," Moushumi said. Earlier this year, Moushumi also subtly took a jibe at Jaya Bachchan, Amitabh's wife. At an event, Moushumi walked past the photographers and then turned back to say with a smile, "I am a much better person than Jaya Bachchan." She continued to pose for the photographers before adding, "Agar aap log nahi hote to humara kya hota (What would have happened to us if you guys were not there?)." Moushumi's jibe was in reference to Jaya Bachchan rebuking paparazzi often for taking her photos. Moushumi Chatterjee has worked with Amitabh



Bachchan in several iconic films, including Roti Kapada Aur Makaan, Benaam, Hum Kaun Hai?, Manzil, and others.

"Rajesh Khanna was an egoist" Moushumi also spoke about her Anurag and Prem Bandhan co-star and said, Rajesh was an egoistical man. "During our time, one hero who was an egoist was Rajesh Khanna. And rightfully so. He gave so many hits. How can he stay away from success getting into his head?" she said.

Pushpa 2 director Sukumar shares first review of Ram Charan's Game Changer: 'He will win a National Award'

Over the past few days, we have seen strong solidarity within Telugu cinema. It is best exemplified during pre-release events when filmmakers and actors hype each other not just the film but their peers too. Remember SS Rajamouli hyping up Pushpa 2, Allu Arjun and Sukumar to the hilt at one of the many pre-release events of the blockbuster film? Now, it is the turn of Sukumar to extend the same to another film. With just days left for the release of director Shankar's much-awaited Game Changer, which marks Ram Charan's return to the big screen as a solo lead, the team were in the US for a promotional event. Sukumar, who was the special guest at the event, revealed that he has seen the film already.

Speaking at the Dallas event, Sukumar said, "I watched Game Changer with Chiranjeevi sir. So, I want to give the first review. The first half is awesome. There's a blockbuster interval. And trust me... the flashback episode in the second half gave me goosebumps." Game Changer marks



Shankar's maiden direct Telugu film, and expressing his admiration for the filmmaker, Sukumar said, "I enjoyed it as much as Shankar's Gentleman and Bharateeyudu (Indian)."

Before the Pushpa films, Sukumar had helmed Rangasthalam, which showcased Ram Charan's versatility as a performer. Talking about the performance of the

RRR actor, Sukumar said, "I was so sure Charan would receive a National Award for Rangasthalam, so did others. But seeing his performance in Game Changer's climax, I have a similar feeling. He will definitely get a National Award." Interestingly, Ram Charan, who will next be seen in Buchi Babu Sana's next, is expected to work in Sukumar's followup to the Pushpa films. Elabo-

rating on his bond with the actor, Sukumar shared, "I love every hero who works with me because we work together for at least 3 years. But when the film is released, I don't stay in touch with most of them. Charan is the only exception because we stayed in touch even after Rangasthalam. He is my brother; I love him more than anything. We often meet and discuss various things."

Lamine Yamal & his joyous Trivela – combining exuberant Samba notes with dexterous Spanish passing



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Lamine YamalBarcelona's Lamine Yamal, centre, and Leganes' Javi Hernandez challenge for the ball during the Spanish La Liga soccer match between Barcelona and Leganes at the Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium in Barcelona, Spain. It was the year of Spain in football. The year they were crowned the European Champions; the year the most influential midfielder in the world, Rodri, was deservedly adjudged the best footballer on the planet; and it was also the year the country's 17-year-old sensation Lamine Yamal introduced his ridiculous talents to the world. Sadly, an injury ended his year on a sombre note, but not before he had offered to the global audience a peek into his staggering gifts as well as the future of the game.

The curlers and benders from his gliding, gilded left foot in the Euros would form the montages of greatest goals scored in the championship. Those were slithering snakes in the skin of silk. He cut in, he spat away, he ripped the ball inside, he fizzed the ball outside. He feigned and floated like a frictionless gnome. As though bored of routine deception, he has been flaunting his latest toy, the trivela, one of the most outrageous tricks in the game. It's a lobbed, out-swinging cross (often a long-ranger) from outside of the boot that swerves and spins (tremendous backspin is imparted) when allowed to land. The word is Portuguese—its best exponent has been the Portuguese forward Ricardo Quaresma—originating from the expression Tres Dedos, or three fingers because the ball is sliced with the three outer toes of the foot. At first sight—the deception always begins with the eyes—it looks like he has scuffed the shot. It seems weak, with not much pace or venom, the bend floaty, as though its lone intention is to tease. Then it evades the men and their lunging legs and heads and falls to the right man in the right space.

Three of nine assists for Barcelona have been the trivela. The most delightful one was against Villarreal. He received the ball in his own half, a few yards away from the half-line. He zips upfront, the defenders rather than closing in, are blocking the route of his classical in-swing. They were anticipating him to cut into the box, so kept dragging him away to the touchline, to his weaker right foot, ready to fling their bodies to the left, unsuspecting of Yamal's deceit. Then Yamal pauses, ponders, shifts the angle of his body with a dinky little half-step and just floats the ball into

the path of Raphinha, spearing into the box. The ball wriggled and giggled and blushed as it hung in the air, past four defenders, each shoving their limbs to thwart the ball but futilely. It lands precisely into Raphinha's feet, who nails the target.

Yamal nearly scored one against Sevilla too. This time he was on the edge of the box, on the left side. The markers again obscured the path of his inward bending curler, but he stunned them with a pearler that snapped away and snaked back. It required a full-stretch save from the goalkeeper Orjan Nyland to deny a goal. A trivela assist against Mallorca had a television anchor ask him in jest: "Is there any way to do those passes you do in video games?" He replied with a chuckle: "Yes, you can, to be fair. You need to press the L2 button and then pass, go and try it! I think it is a pass that I can do very well, I am confident with it, so I will not stop trying." Lamine Yamal Spain vs France Spain's Lamine Yamal reacts during a semifinal match between Spain and France at the Euro 2024 soccer tournament in Munich, Germany, Tuesday, July 9, 2024. Left Spain's Rodri. It's hard to perfect the craft—which Quaresma used to say required a bit of god's gift and devil's luck. The Portuguese was discouraged to perform the trivela, as the peak of his career unfolded at a time when managers fetishised systems, where trivela-like frippery was discouraged, when individual flair was construed as antithetical to the idea of the collective. The demand was for two-footed, 360-degree passing metronomes. Tricksters and romantics were largely outliers or castaways.

Yamal strikes the perfect blend between system and individual, liberating the game from the clutches of excessive structuralism and breathing a fresh air of improvised brilliance the game had long yearned for. In this sense, he is not a classical La Masia player, but rather bridges the school and streets. He is as much as La Masia as Mataro, the town he grew up in and honed his tricks in. His game has the exuberant notes of Samba as well as the dexterous chords of the Spanish passing game. He could liberate the game from the suppressing tactical cages, without disturbing its order. It's symbolic that his rise runs parallel to Pep Guardiola's crumbling Manchester City empire. Pep symbolised the ideals of the modern game; maybe it is getting outdated. A point comes when every philosophy requires rethink, revision and perhaps scrapping. The future could be Yamal and his types, when humans make the system work, and not the other way around, when rigid structures don't stifle individual creativity. His rise has wider social and cultural dimensions too. He embodies the winds of multiculturalism that is sweeping Spain in general and Spanish football. He is of Moroccan-Equatorial Guinea descent, who grew up in a town largely populated by migrants from North Africa. From such multi-ethnic backgrounds are his national team colleague Nico Williams and others like Robert Sánchez, Alejandro Balde and Ansu Fati. Hence, it could be that Rodri was crowned the best footballer on the planet. But the eye-stopper was Yamal, the footballer from the future. Or the football future itself.

Nearly 40% of cricketers at U12 level in Australia are of South Asian heritage' – ABC writer, on why Indian migrants might be answer to future of cricket in Australia



GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Australian Broadcasting Corporation's sports presenter Paul Kennedy, a former Footie player and current journalist, was asked on the Grade Cricketer vlog, if he worried about the "influence of India's vision of cricket in Australia." He instead suggested that "Indian or South Asian heritage cricketers might actually be the answer for future of cricket in Australia. Quoting some eye-popping figures, Kennedy explained that South Asian heritage cricketers were pivotal to increase participation figures in Australian cricket. "If you look at all sports, which I do, participation levels is a big thing. You need people playing a game if you want to keep operating as a sport, particularly big sport like cricket. If you look at migration to Australia, India is a huge part of Australia life now. And what do they do? They play cricket. The stats are that at the U12 level it's up near 40% of the kids are from South Asian heritage. We went to Truganina which is west of Melbourne. In that area along eight years ago, they had 160 teams., now they have 420 teams. And

some sports haven't got the diversity to to have that future safeguard of just full participation in growing a game. So it's like a gift for cricket," he told the Grade Cricketer.

Earlier last month, writing on abc.net.au, Kennedy had stressed that the current participation boom was unlike any other trend in Australian sport: "Five years ago, 10 per cent of cricket players registered at all levels in Australia had South Asian heritage; Cricket Australia Chief of Cricket James Allsop says that figure is 20 per cent and rising." The writeup noted other growing numbers. "Registrations for 'Cricket Blast', a backyard cricket-style introductory program for kids under 10, saw children of parents from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan go up by 26 per cent for boys and 29 per cent for girls over the past year. Representative programs run by local, state, and national organisations have noted 17 per cent of their players are now of South Asian heritage. In the Under 12 age group that number is an amazing 40 per cent in boys and 25 per cent in girls."

However a sobering stat presented itself in Kennedy's findings, as he said the revolution is yet to reach the professional ranks, where contracted state players from South Asian families make up fewer than five per cent of 166 elite men and 122 women and at the highest level, only Usman Khawaja and Alana King had national contracts. A Cricket Australia multicultural plan aimed to double the number of South Asian players at state level by 2027. Alsopp was quoted as saying by ABC.net.au, "We're making inroads. But we've still got a lot of work to do and we're not shy about that. We want to make sure that all clubs are accommodating for people from all cultural backgrounds, which has been a big focus for the last five years."

Sunil Gavaskar slams Ashwin's omission in overseas Tests

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

Sunil Gavaskar slammed the Indian team management for dropping R Ashwin in overseas Tests regularly citing team combination and pitch not assisting the spinners. Even in the ongoing Border Gavaskar Trophy, the Indian off-spinner has been out of the side for the first Test in Perth and despite bowling well in Adelaide he was dropped for the Brisbane Test at the end of which Ashwin announced his retirement from the game.

At home, there was no way he could be left out because the management knew they could not win the game without him. If the excuse was that the pitch and conditions wouldn't suit the ICC's number one-ranked bowler, how come the same excuse was not used for the batters even if they were not top-ranked by ICC, but who struggled in similar pitches and conditions?" Gavaskar wrote in his column for Mid-Day.

"Cricket being a batters' game, the fact that he invariably won the Player of the Series award didn't win him kudos among the batters' fraternity. Every time there was even a five percent excuse to leave him out of the eleven, it was grabbed avidly with the excuse of team balance," Gavaskar added. Ashwin has taken 537 Test wickets, 156 ODI wickets,



and 72 T20I wickets. In addition to his skill with the ball, the 38-year-old's name would occasionally pop up when there were discussions about captaincy. "Ashwin would have made a fine captain for India, but he was denied even the honor of being the vice-captain. There was an opportunity to give him the belated honor even if it was for a token Test match and a limited-overs bilateral series, but that also was denied to him. That's why it was so good to see Rohit Sharma ask him to lead the team out on his 100th Test match," he said.

CM Atishi reacts to Olympiad gold-winning chess player Tania Sachdev's 'lack of recognition' comments

GNS News Agency, Dec 26

On Monday Olympiad gold-winning and Arjuna awardee chess player Tania Sachdev slammed the government of Delhi for the "lack of recognition." "Having played for India since 2008, it's disheartening to see a lack of recognition from the Delhi government for achievements in chess. States that support and celebrate their champions, directly inspire excellence and motivate talent. Sadly, Delhi has yet to take this step," she posted on her 'X' account. "In 2022 Chess Olympiad I came back with a historic team bronze and an individual medal. Two years later 2024, the historic Chess Olympic gold, and till date there has been no acknowledgment or recognition by the state govt," she added.

Tania in her Tweet tagged Delhi Chief Minister Atishi and Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal. Atishi replying to Tania said, "Hi Tania, we have always supported all our athletes, sportsmen and sportswomen, especially in our schools. Would love to meet you and understand what more can be done especially for chess players." "My office will reach out to you and I am really looking forward to hearing your thoughts and suggestions," she added.

Sachdev was part of the team that also comprised D Harika, R Vaishali, Divya Deshmukh and Vantika Agrawal



that claimed the top honours in the women's event of the 45th Chess Olympiad in Budapest, Hungary. It was the first time that the country had won the top award. Vaishali, who hails from Tamil Nadu, and the Telangana-based Harika were awarded Rs 25 lakh each by their respective state governments. Deshmukh was presented with a cash prize of Rs one crore by her home state of Maharashtra. Sachdev's other achievements include winning the team bronze as well as an individual bronze on board 4 at the 2022 chess Olympiad. In 2005, Sachdev had become the eighth Indian to earn the woman grandmaster title. In the following two years, she won the Indian Women's Championship title.

Chatter around Sam Konstas debut: A plan for Bumrah which he won't tell; funny chirps at short-leg which broadcasters will love & Greek Grandma's cooking

An ABC cricket podcast claims Sam Konstas might be set to become the youngest Australian batsman to debut since Ian Craig in 1953. Craig was 17 years 239 days old.

Konstas' exuberance was apparent after his first net session, and he was quoted as saying by Fox Cricket, "I think for me, what an amazing opportunity at my age. Pat Cummins and the group have welcomed me in, so it feels like a family. It's been awesome, a dream come true, and hopefully I get to represent my country."

His teammate Sean Abbott told Fox that Konstas would be a broadcasters delight with his chirping at short leg, where traditionally the youngest team members get posted. Abbott said, "I really enjoyed my time with him in the Shield game here a couple of weeks ago. What I will say is if he gets the chance to play, turn up the stump mikes when he's at short leg (because) he's got some good bants. He's a funny, funny young kid, and I'm looking forward to seeing how he goes about it if he gets the opportunity."

Konstas himself said he had a plan for Jasprit Bumrah – but all hush. "I do but I'm not going to say what it is, but (I will) just be trying to put pressure back onto the bowlers," Fox quoted him. "They are all very good bowlers. Obviously, they're the best in the world, but I'm looking forward to the challenge, and hopefully I'll get to experience that this week. I've watched (Bumrah) quite a bit, but (I'm) just trying to be in the moment. And hopefully I get the opportunity

on Boxing Day."

Mentored by Shane Watson he expects the former star's family to be at the MCG, as will his own Greek family. "I've probably played backyard series with my brother. (There was) a lot of food – (we are a) Greek family – so my grandma's probably cooking. I think they're coming over soon for Christmas Day. Funny enough, all my brothers are bowlers, so I scored a few runs, but it is obviously a special moment," Konstas added. Abbott told Fox he found the teenager pretty unbothered by the challenges ahead. "In terms of what he's been able to achieve so far in Shield cricket in such a short space of time and the way he approaches the game, it does not bother him who he's coming up against. Whether it's the other day when we were playing against Marcus Harris and Peter Handscomb, who've got a fair bit of experience, he was pretty unfazed (in that match). And I'd imagine, should he get the opportunity, it'd be pretty similar. From what I've seen so far, I'd probably say it's his most admirable attribute," Abbott said. Konstas himself chimed in. "I feel like I'm a pretty relaxed person and I'm just trying to live in the moment. I haven't quite checked the wicket now, but playing at the MCG, I'm pretty sure it is a sell out on day one and day two, so it'll be such a huge honour and a great challenge," he said. Cricket Australia are expecting 2.5 lakh to troop in for the duration of the Boxing Day Test. "I don't get too fazed. I think every opportunity I get, I'm just trying to put my best foot forward and score runs."

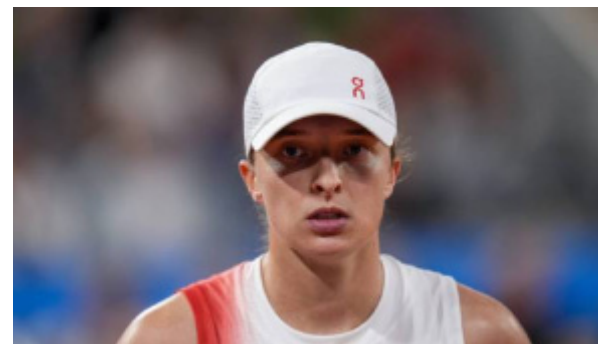
Another Grand Slam champion in doping net as Max Purcell takes voluntary suspension

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Max Purcell returns a shot to Tommy Paul, of the United States, during a second round match of the U.S. Open tennis championships. (AP) Max Purcell returns a shot to Tommy Paul, of the United States, during a second round match of the U.S. Open tennis championships. With the tennis world already rocked in 2024 by failed doping tests of two of its biggest stars, Jannik Sinner and Iga Swiatek, another Grand Slam champion has been implicated with doping charges. Australia's Max Purcell, the world no. 12 doubles player who won men's doubles titles at Wimbledon in 2022 and the US Open last year, has taken a voluntary provisional suspension under the Tennis Anti-Doping Programme after admitting to a breach of rules, the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) revealed on Monday. The charge against Purcell does not relate to the use of a prohibited substance but instead to the use of a "prohibited method". He has requested to come into provisional suspension on December 10, which came into effect on December 12.

"Time served under provisional suspension will be credited against any future sanction," the ITIA said in a statement on their website, without divulging further details. The ITIA is an independent organisation that has been founded by the governing bodies of tennis to oversee doping violations. It has come under fire recently for how they dealt with two high-profile cases.

In November, it was released that five-time Major winner and World No. 2 Iga Swiatek has accepted a one-month suspension for testing positive for a banned substance due to contamination of her sleep medication. Swiatek was retrospectively suspended which she served without public



knowledge of the failed test, leading to players alleging favouritism from the ITIA. Those allegations were also made after Jannik Sinner tested positive for the banned substance clostebol and failed two dope tests in March, but successfully appealed his case for accidental contamination, found to bear 'No Fault or Negligence' and avoiding a ban. The whole case, however, took place behind closed doors and was only made official in August once Sinner was exonerated. Sinner may still face heat as the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has appealed to the Court for Arbitration of Sport (CAS). Meanwhile, both Sinner and Swiatek will be at the Australian Open which starts on January 12. They will be joined by former World No. 1 Simona Halep, who has received a qualifying wildcard. Halep, 33, was given a four-year doping ban which was reduced, retrospectively, to nine months. Since then, the Romanian has been attempting comebacks on the tour. She is among the many furious critics of the ITIA in dealing with Sinner and Swiatek, when other players have taken months, even years, to successfully appeal their cases.

Harbhajan, Kohli and now Jadeja, Indian cricketers who came under Australian media's radar

Hyderabad: The Indian cricket team which is currently playing the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia, found itself under the scanner of Australian media, yet again, as Indian all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja's press conference was dragged into unwarranted controversy.

As per reports, during the press conference ahead of the fourth Test of BGT in Melbourne, Jadeja interacted with the media in Hindi. The Australian media claimed the all-rounder refused to answer questions in English and left the session even before the Australian reporters could pose questions. However, the Indian media group and the team's media manager refuted the claims saying the cricketer did not refuse to answer the questions in English but was genuinely in a hurry to board the team bus after a training

session. Moreover, the highly anticipated T20 match between the media representatives of both nations was ultimately scrapped owing to the press conference controversy. Few days prior to Jadeja's controversy, star player Virat Kohli was also termed as 'bully' following a confrontation of the cricketer with the Australian media over filming him along with his family at the Melbourne airport. Kohli, who arrived at Melbourne along with wife Anushka and his two kids, requested the media to film him but not his wife and children. The video of the cricketer's reaction has gone viral on social media drawing heavy criticism from the Australian media fraternity. Interestingly, this is not the first time that such altercations has occurred between the Indian cricket team and the Australian media.