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## Hyderabad Metro to operate extended hours for New Year celebrations

Hyderabad: To facilitate the New Year celebrations and to ensure safe travel for commuters, Hyderabad Metro Rail will operate extended hours on New Year's Eve, Tuesday night.

MD, HMRL, NVS Reddy on Monday stated that the last metro train will leave from all terminal stations at 12:30 am and reach their respective end points by about 1:15 am on January 1, 2025, providing safe and convenient late-night connectivity for passengers.

## Revanth Reddy Proposes Installation of Manmohan Singh's Statue in Financial District



GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has proposed the installation of a statue of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in Hyderabad's Financial District. During a recent assembly session, he requested the members to extend their approval for the initiative. Revanth Reddy emphasized the significant contributions of Manmohan Singh to India's economic growth and financial reforms. "Dr. Manmohan Singh played a pivotal role in transforming the nation's economy and establishing India as a global financial powerhouse. His legacy deserves to be honored in a space that symbolizes economic progress," he stated. The Financial District, being the hub of Telangana's economic activities and a major driver of the state's IT and financial sectors, is seen as a fitting location for the statue. Revanth Reddy expressed hope that the installation would serve as a tribute to Manmohan Singh's vision and inspire future generations to contribute to the nation's development. The proposal is now awaiting further discussion and approval from the assembly members.

## CM Revanth Reddy Meets Satya Nadella: Focus on Investments and Data Centers in Telangana



GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy held a crucial meeting with Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella in Hyderabad, accompanied by key ministers Uttam Kumar Reddy, Sridhar Babu, and Chief Secretary (CS). The discussion revolved around strengthening Microsoft's presence in Telangana and exploring avenues for further investments. As part of the engagement, Microsoft announced its plans to establish six data centers in Telangana, marking a significant milestone in the state's technological infrastructure. The Chief Minister expressed his commitment to fostering a business-friendly environment and invited Nadella to consider additional investments in various domains, including artificial intelligence and cloud computing. The meeting also delved into discussions about setting up a Skill University in Telangana to promote advanced technical education and equip students with industry-relevant skills. Emphasizing the state's focus on innovation and digital transformation, CM Revanth Reddy highlighted Telangana's strategic initiatives to become a hub for technology and talent development.

## KTR questions ED's strange aggression on Formula-E race case; says intimidation tactics won't work

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Hyderabad: BRS working president KT Rama Rao, who said he had received summons from the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the Formula-E case, questioned the agency's unusual aggression in the case. "Unlike other cases, the ED seems aggressive in this case. I have filed a quash petition in the High Court and have confidence in the legal process. We will take a further decision based on the outcome," he told press persons here on Monday. Dismissing the corruption charges against him in the Formula-E race case, Rama Rao termed them to be politically motivated. He said the Congress government was misusing agencies like the ACB to target him, while failing to provide any concrete evidence of corruption against him. He questioned why no case was filed against the Formula-E race organisers, if the latter had indeed received undue benefit as accused by the government. "Where is the undue benefit gained by either me or those who signed the agreement? There are no cases based on suspicion—only evidence can lead to prosecution," he said.

## Telangana Assembly Pays Tribute to Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

The Telangana Assembly's special session began on a solemn note as members paid tribute to former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. Hon'ble Chief Minister Sri A. Revanth Reddy introduced a heartfelt condolence resolution in the Telangana Legislative Assembly following the passing of Dr. Singh, calling his death an immense loss to the nation. He praised Dr. Singh for his transformative economic reforms and policies that reshaped India. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy also honored Dr. Singh as a key ally of Telangana, recognizing his crucial role in the formation of the state. Revanth Reddy stated, "The formation of Telangana was realized dur-



ing Dr. Manmohan Singh's tenure as Prime Minister. His efforts in the statehood process were unparalleled, and his leadership in steering the nation's economic policies on the global stage remains unmatched."

Honouring Dr. Singh's legacy, Reddy credited him with introducing landmark legislations like the Right to

Information Act and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which have had a transformative impact on the nation. He further emphasized Dr. Singh's commitment to progress, undeterred by criticism, and described him as a leader who worked tirelessly with humility and vision. Revanth Reddy proposed a resolu-

tion recommending Dr. Singh for the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award, in recognition of his invaluable contributions. He also announced plans to install a statue of Dr. Singh in Hyderabad's Financial District as a lasting tribute to his role in the state's formation and his enduring impact on the country. The Chief Minister shared his personal interactions with Dr. Singh's family, recounting how his wife expressed Dr. Singh's deep affection for Telangana. She had reportedly encouraged Reddy to work hard, assuring him of Dr. Singh's blessings. The session reflected the Assembly's heartfelt homage to a leader who played a crucial role in shaping Telangana's future and strengthening India's democratic framework.

## Prashant Kishor Faces Backlash Over Role in BPSB Protest Crackdown



GNS News Agency, Dec 30

A confrontation erupted on Sunday night in Patna between students and political strategist-turned-politician Prashant Kishor, amid allegations of his absence during police action against Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSB) aspirants. The police had resorted to lathi-charges to control the protesters, triggering widespread discontent. The incident occurred at Patna's Gardanibagh, where aspirants accused Kishor of failing to support them when police used batons and water cannons. The tension escalated as students, chanting "Prashant Kishor, go back," demanded his departure from the protest site. During the altercation, Kishor's remark, "You take blankets from us

and then show us attitude," further agitated the students.

The protesters questioned Kishor's whereabouts during the police action, with many expressing disappointment over his perceived absence during critical moments. Thousands had gathered at Gandhi Maidan earlier that day, calling for a re-examination of the 70th BPSB preliminary examination and seeking an audience with Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. The protest, which began on December 13, has garnered support from political leaders, educationists, and activists. Following the unrest, Kishor addressed a press conference on Monday to respond to the allegations. He denied abandoning the students and provided a timeline of events, stating that he had advised the protesters to disperse before the lathi-charge occurred, approximately 45 minutes after his departure. He condemned the police's actions and announced plans to file an FIR against Patna Police, take legal action, and approach the Human Rights Commission. Kishor reiterated his commitment to the students' cause, emphasizing that the movement was being led by the students themselves, as agreed during the 'Chhatra Sansad' (Student Parliament). He also warned that if the demands of the delegation meeting are not addressed, he would rejoin the protest starting January 2. In response to criticism from Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav, Kishor refuted claims of neglecting the students, asserting that his actions were in their best interest.

## India's defence exports crossed record 21,000 crore over decade: Rajnath

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Monday (December 30, 2024) that India's defence exports have crossed a record ₹21,000 crore from ₹2,000 crore a decade ago. Addressing officers at the Army War College (AWC) in more than two-centuries-old Mhow Cantonment, Mr. Singh said a target has been set to achieve defence exports of ₹50,000 crore by 2029. He said mastering frontier technologies is the need of the hour in the constantly evolving times, noting that military training centres are playing a crucial role in equipping and readying soldiers to deal with future challenges. "Our defence exports, which were around ₹2,000 crore a decade ago, have crossed the record figure of ₹21,000 crore today. We have set an export target of ₹50,000 crore by 2029," Mr. Singh said. He said Made-in-India equipment is being exported to other countries. Mr. Singh mentioned radical changes in warfare in his speech, saying that unconventional methods like information warfare, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based warfare, proxy warfare, electromagnetic warfare, space warfare, and cyber-attacks are posing a big challenge.

He stressed the need for the military to be well-trained and equipped to fight off such attacks and lauded training centres in Mhow for their valuable contributions. Mr. Singh commended the training centres for constantly improving their training curriculum as per changing times, and striving to make the personnel fighting fit for every kind of challenge. The Defence Minister said the Modi government is committed to strengthening integration and jointness among the three services. "In the times to come, the armed forces will be able to face challenges together in a better and more efficient way," he added. Mr. Singh said high-level training is provided to officers of all wings in the Mhow Cantonment. He appealed to officers to explore the possibility of promoting integration through training in areas such as weapons training in Infantry School; AI and communication technology in Military College of Telecommunication Engineering (MCTE), and leadership - junior and senior command in AWC. Mr. Singh said that some officers will work as defence attaches in the future, and they should strive to secure national interests at the global level. "When you take up this post of defence attaches, you should imbibe



the government's vision of 'aatmanirbhar Bharat'. Only through self-reliance can India strengthen its defence capabilities and gain more respect on the world stage," he added. The Defence Minister is on a two-day visit to Madhya Pradesh since Sunday (December 29, 2024).

## TTD makes arrangements for New Year, Vaikunta Ekadasi at Himayat Nagar, Jubilee Hills temples

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Hyderabad: The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) is making elaborate arrangements at Himayathnagar and Jubilee Hills temples for the convenience of devotees visiting the temples for darshan of Lord Sri Venkateswara on New Year day and Vaikunta Ekadasi on January 10. On the New Year day, devotees would be permitted for Sarva darshanam at the temples from 6 a.m. onwards. Last year, about 15,000 devotees had darshan at Himayathnagar temple and nearly 40,000 at the Jubilee Hills temple on the New Year day.

## Rachakonda Police introduces body-worn cameras to boost transparency and trust

Hyderabad: The Rachakonda Commissioner of Police, G Sudheer Babu distributed 50 body worn cameras to traffic police officials on Monday.

The cameras will be worn by the officers while on duty and help in recording their interactions with the public and record the events. The aim is to maintain transparency and accountability, improved officer conduct, enhanced public trust and accurate evidence collection. "We believe that the introduction of body worn cameras, will not only enhance the professionalism of our officers but also increase public trust and confidence in our department," said G Sudheer Babu.

## Modi pays rich tribute to ANR



GNS News Agency, Dec 30

New Delhi: In the final edition of his monthly radio programme 'Mann Ki Baat' for the year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid rich tributes to the late Telugu actor Akkineni Nageswara Rao, aka, ANR. He praised Akkineni Nageswara Rao for his significant contribution to the Telugu film industry, highlighting how his films showcased Indian traditions and values, elevating the Telugu film industry to new heights. The PM commended the veteran actor for leaving an indelible mark on Tollywood through his artistic legacy. PM Modi remembered four icons of Indian cinema — Raj Kapoor, Mohammed Rafi, Tapan Sinha, besides ANR — during their birth centenary year in his final radio programme on Sunday. "In 2024, we are celebrating the birth centenary of several film personalities who were instrumental in bringing global recognition to the country. The lives of these personalities are a source of inspiration for our film industry," he said. The PM lauded Raj Kapoor for sensitively portraying India's essence to the world through his cinematic works. "Through his films, Raj Kapoor ji made the world aware of India's soft power," Modi noted. He praised Mohammed Rafi's magical voice, stating, "His incredible voice would touch the heart of every listener. Be it devotional songs, romantic songs, or sad songs, he made every emotion come alive with his voice. The fact that the youth of today also listen to his songs with the same passion is a testament to his greatness as an artist. This is the true meaning of timeless art." Highlighting the contributions of renowned Bollywood director Tapan Sinha, Modi said his films paved the way for societal transformation. "Tapan Sinha ji's films gave a new vision to society. His films conveyed the message of social consciousness and national unity," he added.

## Punjab bandh farmers protest: Commuter traffic crippled; rail, bus service suspended

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Life was hit in several places of Punjab due to a



'bandh' imposed by farmers who have been agitating against the Centre for a legal guarantee of a minimum support price for their crops. Rail and road traffic was crippled and commercial establishments remained shut in many places of the state. Farmers staged 'dharnas' on several roads and highways including in Patiala, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Ferozepur, Bathinda, and Pathankot as part of their bandh call from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., throwing commuter traffic out of gear. A call for a statewide shutdown was given over a week ago by Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha over the Centre not acting on the farmers' demand for a legal guarantee for the MSP. The bandh was also enforced to express solidarity with farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal who has been on a fast for the last 35 days at Khanauri border protest site of farmers. Farmers observed a sit-in at Dhareri Jattan Toll Plaza which affected vehicular movement on the Patiala-Chandigarh National Highway.

At Amritsar's Golden Gate, scores of farmers staged a dharna near the city's entry point. Police there assisted some stranded foreign tourists by arranging auto rickshaws for them to reach the Golden Temple. Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher told reporters in Amritsar that emergency and other essential services were allowed to operate. He said anyone travelling to the airport to catch a flight anyone going to attend a job interview, or anyone needing to attend a wedding, will be allowed.

"All establishments are closed. Punjabis have shown their unity today and they are extending full support," Pandher claimed. "We are seeing a successful bandh. Train services are also completely suspended and no train is entering Punjab," he said. In Phagwara, farmers staged a dharna near the Sugarmill crossing on NH-44, blocking the roads leading from Phagwara towards Nakodar, Hoshiarpur and Nawanshahr. They also staged a dharna at Behram toll plaza on Phagwara-Banga road. Grain markets were shut in several places.



# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## Migration slowing

DOMESTIC migration is slowing in India, according to a working paper released recently by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister. The total number of migrants in the country has dropped by 11.78 per cent as compared to the 2011 Census figure. This indicates that fewer people are travelling to other states in search of jobs as they are preferring to work in their own district or state. This trend is being attributed to improved economic avenues and infrastructure in areas from where high migration has traditionally been taking place.

West Bengal and Rajasthan have emerged as the new migrant destination hotspots, while Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh also figure among the top five. It is apparent that states such as Punjab and Haryana — which have high stakes in the agricultural and industrial sectors — are not so attractive to migrants. This is partly due to tensions between locals and 'outsiders'. Migrants would rather not live and work in states where they might face hostility and discrimination. Policymakers need to understand the ground reality, which has serious implications such as labour shortage and higher production costs. Every state needs horses for courses to spur economic growth, and migrants come in handy when locals are reluctant to do unskilled work in particular. However, initiatives such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana have changed the demographic dynamics. It was MGNREGS that helped millions of workers stay afloat after they trudged back to their villages during the Covid-induced lockdown in 2020. And this reverse migration has not turned out to be a mere aberration. Various states must take this shift into consideration while framing or reviewing policies. The priority should be to maximise economic gains while ensuring social harmony.

## Pune art needs more local buyers, global events and spaces for traditional works

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Lisa Pingale, founder of Monalisa Kalagram, an art gallery in Pune, reflects on a year of growth and resilience in the art scene. Lisa Pingale, founder of Monalisa Kalagram, an art gallery in Pune, reflects on a year of growth and resilience in the art scene. As 2024 ends, I look back at a year that has been one of growth, learning, and resilience for the art scene in the country. Globally, artists, too, are trying to make sense of a troubled world and interpret the increasing challenges to humanity. Today, contemporary Indian art is a vibrant tapestry of diverse styles, mediums, and themes. At the same time, traditional Indian artists are pushing their boundaries and experimenting with newer art forms. Personal connections

Pune is powerfully drawn to art that reflects personal emotions and stories. This was the reason for the popularity of Bengaluru-based visual artist and designer Chithkala Ramesh, whose works reminded us of a time that we seem to have forgotten. "Once Upon a Time, A Pandemic" was a display of visuals that introspect about life, grief, recollection and resilience that shaped the traumatic pandemic years. The works served as lyrical tools to understand the fragility of the world around us. Another cultural memory was stirred when Rashmi Ghosh presented her works based on stepwells, which have great significance in Maharashtra. Something old

In recent years, the art world in India has witnessed a significant shift in terms of focusing on contemporary works. While contemporary art has its own charm and relevance, traditional art is being relegated to the background. Traditional art is often misconstrued as being rigid and "un-innovative". As a result, it is often overlooked in favour of more experimental and modern art forms. What we fail to recognise is the skill, craftsmanship, and emotional depth and involvement that go into creating these art forms. There are many traditional artists who have evolved within their forms and evolved a contemporary style within it. I feel that traditional art forms receive limited exposure in mainstream art galleries in India, and definitely in Pune, in terms of exhibitions. In the new year, I hope that traditional artists and artisans will find more spaces to engage with people. Grass is greener

Talking of the collector behaviour in Pune, I notice that though we have a thriving art scene, it is often overshadowed by the allure of big cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, and Kolkata. Art buyers in Pune associate art from big cities with higher value, prestige, and possibly recognition, which is unfortunate because Pune has reputed galleries that display national and international artists. At the same time, I notice a promising shift in the Pune art scene in the form of young collectors. Post-lockdown, there has been a significant increase in the number of young buyers in the city and I feel like this demographic is more open to discovering and purchasing art from Pune galleries and does not rush to buying from other metros. This habit will sustain established Pune galleries and encourage other spaces to come up. This has the potential to provide a boost to the city's art scene.

Global outreach

Pune is a city rich with cultural heritage and we have a lot of artistic talent, but it still remains underexposed to national and international mainstream art events. This lack of exposure contributes to a limited presence for Pune's art scene. This was true in 2024 as well. There are few opportunities for Pune artists to engage with the global art community. Possibly this is because we have a limited number of state-of-the-art galleries, museums, and art spaces. Pune's art ecosystem needs to collaborate with international art organisations, galleries and festivals to develop more modern and efficient art spaces so that we can provide a global platform for international art events to happen in our city. Globally, there is an interest in art made from waste and sustainable material. As a gallery, we are also shifting more towards natural and sustainable products and supporting artists who are working with these products. In April, an exhibition by Meenal Parkhi, who works completely with sustainable products and creates sculptures from leftover scrap fabric and artwork from cow dung will be held in Pune. We are trying to promote traditional artists too and hold farmers' markets and so on. With the rise of digital platforms, AI, social media, and online art marketplaces, Indian artists are now more connected than ever to global art trends and audiences. This has led to a proliferation of innovative and avant-garde art practices, from digital art and photography to installation and performance art.

## After 1-month shutdown, BMC to appoint new contractor for Mumbai's first robotic car parking facility



GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Located on Bhulabhai Desai Road, the facility is a 21-storey building featuring mechanised platforms designed to accommodate vehicles. (File Photo) Located on Bhulabhai Desai Road, the facility is a 21-storey building featuring mechanised platforms designed to accommodate vehicles. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is preparing to issue a new tender to appoint a contractor to maintain and operate the city's first robotic car parking facility in Breach Candy, South Mumbai. This facility, inaugurated in 2021 by former mayor Kishori Pednekar, was shut down last month due to a dispute with the contractor responsible for its operation and maintenance.

Located on Bhulabhai Desai Road, the facility is a 21-storey building featuring mechanised platforms designed to accommodate vehicles. A car parked on one of these

platforms is lifted and stored in a chamber on one of the 21 floors. This mechanised system alleviates the burden of finding a parking space, making it easier for car owners to park their vehicles. The facility had the capacity to accommodate 240 vehicles simultaneously. However, in November this year, the civic authorities suspended the parking lot operation after one of the robotic arms responsible for controlling the platforms malfunctioned. Additionally, the authorities reported leaks in multiple areas within the building. "The contractor was instructed to repair the arms and make them operational as soon as possible. However, the contractor requested a balance payment that was due at the end of the current financial year. Since the BMC did not pay this amount upfront, the contract was revoked," stated a civic official. "For a city like Mumbai, which is short on space, robo parking offers a viable solution to the increasing vehicular density. Although these facilities are compact, they can accommodate a substantial number of vehicles. The facility has been quite popular among citizens, as it would often be fully occupied throughout the day on weekends. Therefore, we need to restore this facility to operational status," an official said. "A contract will be floated next month, and we are hopeful that by the first quarter, the facility will become operational again," said the official, adding that the facility will also be repaired before restarting operations. The BMC previously charged Rs 4,400 for monthly parking passes, while the hourly rate was Rs 70 per hour. If a vehicle was parked for more than 12 hours, the fee for the additional hours was Rs 240 per hour after the first 12 hours.

## Hospitals can't deny free treatment to sexual assault and acid attack survivors: Delhi HC

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

The Delhi High Court has reiterated that survivors of acid attack and sexual assault will have to be provided free treatment at all medical facilities, whether private or government. A division bench of Justices Prathiba Singh and Amit Sharma, while dealing with an appeal by a man who had sexually assaulted his daughter, issued directions in an order on December 10 after noting that "despite the provisions under the BNSS or CrPC, as also the guidelines formulated by the MoHFW (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare), the court has been informed that survivors of sexual violence and acid attacks face difficulties in availing free medical treatment."

The court has directed if any sexual assault and acid attack survivors approach a medical facility, diagnostic facility, nursing home, hospital, clinic etc, whether private or public, "such victim/survivor shall not be turned away without providing FREE medical treatment, including first aid, diagnostic tests, lab tests, surgery and any other required medical intervention." The court has reiterated that it is a statutory right of survivors. The directions issued by the bench include that every medical facility shall put up a board at the entrance, reception, counters and all prominent places in both English and vernacular languages, stating, "Free outpatient and in-patient medical treatment is available for victims/survivors of sexual assault, rape, gang rape, acid attacks." The court also directed that specific circulars shall be issued by the management of the medical establishments informing that anyone violating provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure or the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita provisioning for free treatment for such survivors "would be liable to be punished with imprisonment for a period of one year or with fine or with both," and thus "non-providing such victim/survivor with required medical treatment is a criminal offence and all doctors, administration, officers, nurses, paramedical personnel etc., shall be in-



formed of the same". "If the police find that any medical professional, para-medical professional, medical establishment, whether public or private, refuses to provide necessary medical treatment to such victims/survivors, then a complaint shall be immediately registered under Section 200 of BNS 2023 (Section 166B of IPC) as the same is a punishable offence. The police may also inform the concerned DLSA or DSLSA to enable assistance to the victim/survivor," the court has directed. Hospital transfers, if required for such survivors, "shall also be made smooth and hassle free". The court has further directed that if a survivor "has been brought in an emergent situation, the concerned medical establishment that is approached by or on behalf of such victim/survivor, shall not insist on ID proofs in order to admit the said victim/survivor and administer immediate treatment to the same". Additionally, the court has outlined that survivors shall be "immediately examined and if required, be given treatment even for sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV etc", "shall be provided physical and mental counselling as may be required", "shall be checked for pregnancy, and provided with contraception, if required", and "if any tests are required to be conducted including ultrasound, etc., the same shall also be conducted."

## E-filing in Maharashtra courts yet to be a gamechanger, a brief look at challenges faced by this digital push

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

In its efforts towards modernisation, the Indian judiciary has embraced digital transformation with the introduction of the e-filing system. This initiative represents a significant shift aimed at improving accessibility and alleviating the ongoing backlog issues in Indian courts. However, this digital revolution has encountered several challenges that have hindered the full success of the system. In September 2023, e-filing was made mandatory in Maharashtra's lower courts to increase convenience, speed and response during court proceedings. However, several glitches and redundancies have made the system inoperable, still relying heavily on physical files.

"The e-filing system has improved efficiency by reducing paperwork and enabling remote submissions, but the transition has not been seamless. We as lawyers face various issues during e-filing like technical glitches, server outage, difficulty in payment of court fee challans, delays in verification/checking at court etc.," says advocate Jitendra Sawant, a criminal defence lawyer practising in Pune. "Most importantly, the whole e-filing process cannot be run without the internet, which is a huge problem in courts and on its premises. There are extreme network and internet issues, which make it very difficult to file certain applications during ongoing hearings in court. Furthermore, there is limited availability of technical support, and most of the court staff is also not trained to solve the problems faced by the lawyers on a daily basis," adds Sawant.

The judiciary's digital push is a necessary step toward modernisation, but it risks alienating those unable to keep up, according to Sawant. "While the digital future promises efficiency and transparency, it could also widen the gap between tech-savvy practitioners and those senior advocates struggling with the transition, fundamentally altering the legal landscape in ways that may not always be inclusive. The concept of e-filing has been brought to reduce the use of paper, but honestly, the goal has not been attained, and the use of paper is the same as before," says Sawant. Under Phase 3 of the E-Courts Mission Mode Project, which was implemented last year, 49,58,821 cases have been filed through the e-filing process as of August 2024. In addition, 1,365 e-Sewa Kendras have also come up across district courts to ensure this improved access to justice through the use of technology. E-Sewa Kendras aim to bridge the digital divide by providing citizens with access to judicial services, especially those who do not possess convenient access to technology.

"E-filing has been a game-changer for individuals and firms in rural and under-resourced areas, breaking down barriers that once made justice seem distant. For example, imagine a farmer from a remote Maharashtra village facing

a land dispute. With e-filing and e-Sewa kendras, this farmer can now file their case online, track hearing dates via text messages, and may even be able to attend virtual hearings if needed. This saves time and money and empowers them with direct access to the legal system, which previously felt out of reach," says advocate Parth Chanchlani, founding partner of Chanchlani Law World. The thrust for digitisation of the filing system has also trumped the questions of ethics, digital literacy, and having a sound system that can fend off cyber attacks while not being victim to any form of malware. "A collaborative approach involving academic research can aid in the digital transformation of the judicial structures. This process includes analysing data protection frameworks, evaluating digital literacy levels among stakeholders, identifying infrastructure deficiencies, scrutinising algorithmic bias in AI-driven legal tools, and addressing potential cybersecurity risks," says Dr Shaista Peerzada, associate professor at Ajeenkya D Y Patil University, Pune. "By prioritising these areas, such a cooperative strategy can prevent damage to court institutions and, in turn, help create a more egalitarian and productive digital justice framework to reduce the gap between theoretical ideals (like Wikipedia-style open access) and practical realities (like Delima's structured legal databases)," adds Dr Peerzada. Several law universities in India have begun incorporating e-filing modules into their curriculum. This initiative aims to ensure that future lawyers are proficient in using these systems as they evolve and become more efficient. "Regarding e-filing and other practical procedures, we have integrated modules into our academic syllabus. In our field, a significant emphasis has been placed on internships incorporating these systems, allowing us to learn more effectively," says Sakshi Kirad, a law student at ILS Law College in Pune.

## Railways announce weekly special train between Muzaffarpur and Secunderabad

Hyderabad: To clear the extra passenger rush, the Railways announced weekly special train services between Muzaffarpur – Secunderabad- Muzaffarpur starting January 7, 2025. According to the weekly special Train No.05293 Muzaffarpur – Secunderabad will depart on Tuesdays at 10.40 am and arrive Wednesday at 11.50 pm. However, this train will not be running on January 14 and 28 and February 4, 11 and 25.

## Bengal TMC MLA Kanchan Mallick's 'reimbursement claim' for wife's delivery stirs row



GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Actor-turned-MLA Kanchan Mallick is again in the news, this time over a hospital bill he is said to have submitted to the West Bengal Assembly after the birth of his child at a private hospital. Mallick, Trinamool Congress MLA for Uttarpara, married Srimayee Chatterjee in February this year and the couple welcomed a baby girl on November 3. The hospital in South Kolkata charged them Rs 6 lakh in total. According to Assembly sources, the MLA submitted the bill to the House's health affairs department with all relevant information and documents on Tuesday. When asked about his bill, Mallick said, "From where you came to know about the bill, learn about the rest of the matter from there."

Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee said he would check all the documents. "I personally check all the health bills before giving clearance. In this case too, I will go through all the documents myself. If any questions arise, I will call the hospital concerned and talk to the authorities," he said. However, another TMC leader said Mallick has not submitted the medical bill yet. "He went to the Assembly just to enquire about the bill where the hospital charged Rs 2 lakh for the procedure and Rs 4 lakh as the doctor's fee. It's very unfortunate that everybody is saying he submitted a medical bill of Rs 6 lakh."

In the past, ministers had faced scrutiny over their health bills submitted to the Assembly. During the Left Front era, minister Manav Mukhopadhyay faced a backlash for claiming Rs 30,000 for spectacles, leading him to forgo the allotted amount. Buddhadev Bhattacharya was the chief minister then. After the Trinamool government came to power in 2011, then Women, Child and Social Welfare Development Minister Savitri Mitra submitted a bill of Rs 1 lakh for spectacles. She returned the funds after a controversy snowballed over the bill and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee intervened, saying that it was submitted by mistake. In both instances, the medical bills were submitted by ministers. This time an MLA's medical bill is at the centre of a controversy. There is no upper limit to the amount for which MLAs can submit hospital bills and claim reimbursement.

## Mumbai man sentenced to three years jail for sexual harassment of 5-year-old neighbour

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

A special court in Mumbai recently sentenced a 43-year-old man to three years in jail for sexual harassment of a neighbour's five-year-old daughter, rejecting his defence that a false case was filed against him at the insistence of his wife who wanted to divorce him. While the man was arrested on rape charge, the court cleared him of it due to lack of any evidence. The court found him guilty of charges under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) section 354 (sexual harassment) and relevant sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act.

Special Judge Nandkishore More said in the order dated December 20 that the accused had claimed that the informant (the girl's mother), a friend of the accused's wife, had falsely implicated him in this case to support her friend. The accused claimed that after the informant filed the case, his wife filed for divorce in a family court and subsequently obtained a divorce decree against him. "However, this argument is not appealing to my mind. For the simple reason, no prudent family members would implicate the accused in such case by putting reputation and character of their daughter on stake," the court noted.

Chain of events On June 13, 2017, the girl's parents left for work, and she was at the accused's house. The girl's mother said in her testimony that when she knocked at the accused's door after returning from work, he took about 10 minutes to open the door and claimed that he was sleeping. The girl told her mother later that the accused had taken her home and sexually assaulted her. The mother then filed a police complaint, and the man was arrested. In its order, the court noted that the victim, in her deposition, spoke about the sexual assault but accepted that the charges of rape were "exaggerated". It said medical evidence also showed no injuries and hence cleared him of that charge.

## Unidentified gang open fire at house near Pune, none hurt

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

A bullet casing has been found at the farmer's house on the outskirts of Pune that had been shot at by unidentified assailants. The house of a farmer in Awhalwadi, on the outskirts of Pune, was shot at in the early hours some unidentified people fired at the house of a farmer in Awhalwadi, on the outskirts of Pune, in the early hours of Wednesday. According to the Pune police, the shooters opened fire at the house of Nilesh Subhash Satav, 35, at Vadjai Vasti, around 3 km from Wagholi, at around 4.10 am.

"The unidentified suspects opened fire at the glass window of the house. No person was injured in the incident. An offence has been registered and a probe has been launched," said Pandit Rejitwad, In Charge, Wagholi Police Station. Himmat Jadhav, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Zone 4), said an empty casing of a bullet was found near Satav's house. "We have checked if he had any ongoing disputes and differences with anyone. Till now we have not zeroed in on any possible motive. Our teams are working on some possibilities. Since the area is on the outskirts, there are not many security cameras installed in the area."





## Digital pollution: 'Illegal' Internet cables choking Pune skyline

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

When asked about the overhead Internet cables, Manisha Shekatkar, Head, Electric Department of Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), said these are illegal. When asked about the overhead Internet cables, Manisha Shekatkar, Head, Electric Department of Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), said these are illegal. Written by Shubham Kurale. Once known for its lush greenery and serene skyline, Pune is now grappling with a web of illegal overhead internet cables, as activists said these wires, put "illegally" over trees, street lamps, and other structures, are threatening birds and public safety.

Among the areas where these overhead cables are prominently visible are some of the city's busy roads such as F C Road, Goodluck Chowk, and Bal Gandharva Chowk on J M Road — which is near the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC). Narendra Pardeshi, a wildlife activist, said, "Cables are usually not visible to birds, so they crash over them and fall on the road, getting them crushed under the vehicles. We see many such cases regularly and report them to the forest department. Unless we get rid of the cables it will be a hanging hazard for both birds and the trees on which they are laid." "While complaining about the suspended cables on the 'PMC Care App', I rarely see them being disposed of. Not having a specific policy about the disposal of such cables causes inconvenience. And there is always a danger of getting it stuck into vehicle tyres," said Rupesh Kesekar, a civil issues activist.

"In response to repeated complaints, Rajendra Bhosale, Municipal Commissioner of PMC, has asked the



Electric Department to draft a comprehensive policy about the dangling cables making a way for a clear sky," said Kesekar. When asked about the overhead Internet cables, Manisha Shekatkar, Head, Electric Department of Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), said these are illegal. "Though the responsibility of removing them lies with the Encroachment Department, we remove them from the electric poles at the ward level every week. While the process to make these cables underground comes under the Road Department," said Shekatkar. "We have a policy to cut away overhead cables and divert them underground through a duct where we charge Rs 600 per metre rate for excavation. Complaints regarding entangled cables are registered at ward levels and subsequent action is taken regularly," added Sahebrao Dandge, Deputy Engineer, Road Department, PMC.

## Haryana to launch awareness campaign for New Education Policy from Jan 12

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

NEP, HARYANA Haryana Education Minister Mahipal Dhanda said, "The state is fully prepared to implement the NEP. As part of the awareness campaign, seminars will be organised to gather feedback from educators at universities, colleges, and schools." Haryana will launch an awareness campaign for the New Education Policy (NEP) on January 12, marking Swami Vivekananda Jayanti. The central government aims to implement the NEP by 2030, while Haryana plans to roll it out in 2025.

Haryana Education Minister Mahipal Dhanda said, "The state is fully prepared to implement the NEP. As part of the awareness campaign, seminars will be organised to gather feedback from educators at universities, colleges, and schools. Suggestions will also be sought online through audio, video, and written formats. Additionally, students will use street plays to spread awareness about the NEP." During a review meeting with Education Department officials on Tuesday, Dhanda emphasised Haryana should become a model for implementing the NEP across the country, and instructed the education department to prepare a detailed action plan for the purpose.

To engage students directly with the policy, Dhanda suggested setting up suggestion boxes in colleges, schools, and universities. "Based on the written suggestions received, a framework will be developed to improve the NEP. The seminars should be conducted in schools, colleges, and universities to ensure every student clearly understands



the NEP. "Recognising the role of digital technology in the modern era, the minister proposed creating an online portal for students enabling them to submit their suggestions." "This portal will also be open to the general public, educators and experts in the field of education, ensuring easy access for everyone to contribute. This will help prevent any difficulties for students in the upcoming academic session," the minister added. Additionally, he suggested appointing athletes, NCC cadets and talented students as brand ambassadors for the NEP. "Their influence will help students connect with the policy more easily," said the minister. The minister said the NEP's goal is to include students from disadvantaged backgrounds in the education system. He instructed the education department to devise a strategy to ensure no underprivileged student is deprived of education.

## A love story blossoms outside Delhi's Tihar Jail — before things fall apart

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Tihar Police said during their probe, an Ertiga car was identified near the crime scene. Police then collected CCTV footage and other electronic evidence and arrested Satish aka Vicky. The two met for the first time outside Tihar Jail. Her husband was in prison and she often visited him. The man had a brother behind bars. The man and woman fell in love and decided to get married. But the woman's mother was against the decision. So, the man planned to get "rid of" the mother. On Tuesday, Noida Police nabbed two people — Satish (31) and a minor boy — for allegedly killing the woman's mother. Police found the body on November 25, in the area of Ecotech 1 police station. "We made every effort to find out who she was," said Additional DCP, Greater Noida, Ashok Kumar Singh. Singh said after contacting every police station in the NCR, on November 29, the deceased was identified as a 40-year-old resident of Mangolpuri in Delhi.

Singh said, "We learnt that her daughter had filed a missing person's report on November 25." He said the body was identified by the family, following which police registered an FIR of murder on December 12. Police said during their probe, an Ertiga car was identified near the crime scene. Police then collected CCTV footage and other electronic evidence and arrested Satish aka Vicky. "During questioning, he revealed that his brother was lodged in Tihar in a murder case... he met the woman's daughter outside the



jail and fell in love with her," said Singh. According to officers, the victim opposed their match and wanted her daughter to go back to her husband once he got out of jail. The deceased's daughter too did not want to go against her family's wishes. So, police said, Satish made a plan to kill the mother and roped in two accomplices. "Satish sent the minor to call the victim from her home on the pretext of getting her a gold chain. They made her sit in his car and strangled her to death near Bhalswa Chowk on Karnal Bypass in Delhi, dumped the body, and fled. After heading back, he and the other accused pretended to look for her to avoid suspicion," said the Addl. DCP. "We are trying to apprehend the other accused. Further investigation is underway," he added.

## Ladki Bahin scheme resumes in Maharashtra, Mahayuti plans to increase payout

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

The Ladki Bahin Yojana in Maharashtra resumed on Tuesday (December 24, 2024) and beneficiaries will receive December's payout in the next four days, the State's Women and Child Development Minister Aditi Tatkare said. The scheme was halted due to the Model Code of Conduct for the Assembly elections. "In the Winter Session, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis assured providing benefits to women by the end of December," Ms. Tatkare said.

"The scheme, which was temporarily halted due to the Model Code of Conduct, has resumed, with around 1,287,503 women receiving financial assistance in the first phase," she posted on X. Mr. Fadnavis, his deputies Ajit Pawar and Eknath Shinde have credited the scheme for the Mahayuti's landslide victory in the Assembly elections. Under the scheme, women aged between 21 and 60 are eligible to receive ₹1,500 per month. So far, the government has credited five installments to the beneficiaries of the scheme in which more than 2.43 crore women have enrolled. While campaigning for the elections, the Mahayuti had promised to increase the payout to ₹2,100 per month. Mr. Fadnavis has assured that the poll promise will be fulfilled after curating an execution plan. "Our sisters show-



Under the scheme, women aged between 21 and 60 are eligible to receive ₹1,500 per month. So far, the government has credited five installments to the beneficiaries

ered a lot of love on the Mahayuti, so as soon as the session is over, we will be crediting the December installment," the Chief Minister had said in the Assembly in Nagpur.

## Why are activists opposing EC's election rule amendment? | Explained

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

The Centre on December 20 amended the Conduct of Election Rules to restrict access for the public to a section of poll documents. This was done by the Union Law Ministry following a recommendation from the Election Commission (EC). While the EC said the amendment aims to restrict access to electronic data, the Opposition and transparency activists have been up in arms, branding it as an attack on the right to information and electoral freedom.

What is the Conduct of Election Rules?

The Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, is a set of rules which provide for provisions on how to conduct the elections as per the Representation of People Act.

What is the amendment?

This amendment was brought into effect through a notification issued by the Ministry of Law and Justice on December 20. Rule 93(2)(a) of the 1961 Conduct of Election Rules had earlier stated that "all other papers relating to the election shall be open to public inspection" but after the amendment, it reads, "all other papers as specified in these rules relating to the election shall be open to public inspection."

Why has the amendment been brought in now?

The move comes after a recent direction to the EC by the Punjab and Haryana High Court to share all documents related to the Haryana Assembly election, including treating CCTV footage also as permissible under Rule 93(2) of the Conduct of Election Rules, to petitioner Mahmoud Pracha. According to a senior official of the EC, "The rule mentioned election papers. The election papers and documents does not specifically refer to electronic records. In order to remove this ambiguity and considering the serious issue of violation of secrecy of vote and potential misuse of CCTV footage of inside the polling station using artificial intelligence by a single person, the rule has been amended, to safeguard misuse of CCTV footage of inside of the polling station. The EC argues that sharing of CCTV footage may have serious repercussions, especially in sensitive areas like Jammu and Kashmir, axal-affected regions, etc where secrecy is important. The lives of the voters may also be at risk. All election papers and documents are otherwise available for public inspection." "Candidates in any case have access to all documents, papers and records. Even Mr. Pracha was entitled to all the documents and records from his constituency when he contested as a candidate in Lok Sabha elections 2024", the official said. adding nothing has been amended in the rules in this regard.

Why are the transparency activists protesting?

RTI activists have termed the move as a setback to transparency. According to transparency activist Anjali Bharadwaj, Rule 93 is akin to the Right to Information Act



as far as elections are concerned and, any change hurts the citizen's right to know about the process. Venkatesh Nayak, Director Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative explained further that "upon initial examination, the amendment appears to be aimed at restricting citizen-voters' right to access a large number of documents created during Parliamentary and State Assembly elections many of which are not specifically mentioned in the Conduct of Election Rules, instead, they are mentioned in the handbooks and manuals published by the Election Commission from time to time". Some of these records are reports submitted by Election Observers, scrutiny reports submitted by Returning Officers after polling day and the Index Cards sent to the EC after the declaration of results which contain detailed statistics relating to the elections. He said that given the controversy about voter turnout in recent Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, access to the Presiding Officers' diaries which contain detailed data about voter turnout at different points of times throughout polling day and the number of tokens they distribute to voters who are in the queue at the hour scheduled for closing of polling are not mentioned specifically in the Conduct of Election Rules. "Yet access to such documents is crucial to assess the fairness of elections. The amendment seeks to prevent access to such documents and many other reports and returns that are filed by various election officials".

What does the Opposition say?

The Congress claimed that a change in rules regarding the conduct of elections vindicated their assertions regarding the rapidly eroding integrity of the electoral process managed by the EC. The Congress moved the Supreme Court against the amendments on Tuesday. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has said it was part of a "systematic conspiracy to destroy the institutional integrity of the EC", while the Samajwadi Party and the Left parties accused the EC of "undermining multi-party democracy" by taking "unilateral" decisions without consulting all political parties.

## EVM discrepancies: Congress fact-finding panel's interim report on Haryana loss says 'mismatch in EVMs, votes'

The head of the Congress's fact-finding committee that went into the details of the party's loss in Haryana Assembly polls released an interim report on Monday (December 23, 2024) alleging discrepancies in the electronic voting machines (EVMs) during counting of votes. "Every survey was in favour of the Congress before the polls, the atmosphere in State was in favour of the Congress. But results were opposite," eight-member committee head and party's senior leader Karan Singh Dalal told reporters here. Mr. Dalal also trained guns on the ruling BJP for "misusing" the government machinery in its favour. The BJP returned to power for a third consecutive term winning 48 seats; the Congress won 37. Mr. Dalal alleged that "the issue of batteries of EVMs having remained charged even up to 99% was registered by the Congress and the counting having been slowed down was also an issue".

"A detailed analysis depicts the mismatch of EVM votes at various booths. The hike of votes in areas where the BJP won with slender margins and the increase of 10.52% and 11.48% EVM votes in Panchkula district and in Charkhi-Dadri district respectively after the end of the polls are other serious indicators," he alleged. "All these pointers indicate that there has been some serious manipulation," he said. "...the conduct of the Election Commission of India is not above board and lacks transparency. Its approach is lackadaisical," Mr. Dalal said. While the Congress had levelled several allegations immediately after results



were out, the EC had then rejected allegations levelled by it over "irregularities" in the polls. It said the party was raising "the smoke of a generic doubt" about the credibility of an entire electoral outcome as done in the past. Mr. Dalal added, "Data suggest that the gross mismatch in the figures of votes polled and made available immediately after polling and then a day later coupled with the failure of the ECI to abide by its legal obligations... is a pointer to the fact that either EVMs had been tampered with or the EVMs were changed/replaced, which makes the entire exercise unreliable/suspect." He also questioned why the EC website did not have figures on the total number of votes polled by candidates, and only the vote percentage.

## Myth of meritocracy, caste-based disparities in IT sector

India's IT sector is one of the fastest growing industries in the country, contributing over 7% to India's GDP, so much so that the sub-Saharan African countries look to follow its lessons to replicate India's success in software exports. The performance-driven and high-paying nature of jobs in the IT sector make it a preferred career destination for millions of Indian youth. The job market in this industry is often touted as the epitome of skill-based meritocracy and inclusivity, with the social backgrounds of candidates playing no role in their hiring. What NSSO data show

However, an empirical test of the inclusivity-promoting image of IT reveals a different reality. Analysis by the writers of this article based on household surveys by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) unravels stark caste-based disparities in employment probabilities and wage earnings in the IT industry, indicating that social inequalities are significantly alive in the job market. The study utilises two rounds of NSSO surveys: NSS 78th (2020-21) and NSS 68th rounds (2011-12), which are representative at the national level. The study's sample comprises 29,289 individuals, with 20,437 drawn from the NSS 78th round and 8,852 from the 68th round for India. The variation in the selected sample size from the two periods is due to the variation in the overall sample covered under these surveys. The employment probabilities were estimated after controlling for observable factors that could influence the outcome variable. Industries that are dominated by the public sector were used as the benchmark in the probability estimation.

The study finds that the probability of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) to be engaged in the IT sector is only 10% in comparison to upper castes (27%). The finding remains robust even after accounting for differences in educational attainment and other individual char-

acteristics such as gender and regional background (rural and urban). Surprisingly, this disparity in employment probabilities has increased over time from 2011-12 to 2020-21, though both caste groups were at a relatively disadvantaged position in the first time period than the later period. In 2011-12, lower caste groups faced only 6% probability of being engaged in the IT sector as compared to 17% for upper castes. Thus, while the overall employment probabilities for engagement in the IT sector increased for both caste groups, the deficit of lower castes went up from 11% in 2011-12 to 17% in 2020-21. This suggests that as the IT sector grows, it fails to address or even acknowledge the social barriers that exclude marginalised groups. The study also reveals that even when lower caste groups manage to enter the IT job market, they face labour segmentation as reflected in caste-based disparities in wage earnings. SC and Other Backward Classes workers in the IT sector face negative wage differentials of 24.9% and 22.5%, respectively, as compared to upper caste workers, even after accounting for differences in educational attainment and type of employment (regular versus temporary). These findings align with the labour market segmentation theory, which predicts a division of the labour market into dualistic segments (lower and upper labour segments), with workers in the lower segment facing structural barriers in upward mobility. The findings indicate that lower castes are relegated to the lower segments of the job market, facing limited returns to private investments in education and skills. Gender inequality: The labour market disparities in IT also affect other vulnerable sections, especially women. Female workers in IT earn 26.2% lower than males, irrespective of their caste, though their employment probabilities are closer to that of men. Labour market segmentation, particularly in a high-growth and high-paying sector such as IT, has far-reaching socio-economic implications.



## In corruption cases, get voice sample tested at state forensic lab before sending it to private testing agency: Karnataka HC



GNS News Agency, Dec 30

The Karnataka High Court noted that there were issues of jurisdiction in the case as the event had occurred in the jurisdiction of the Chikkaballapura Lokayukta police, adding that at most a Zero First Information Report (FIR) ought to have been registered and the case immediately transferred.

The Karnataka High Court has observed in a corruption case that the authorities should first get the voice sample in question tested at the state forensic laboratory before sending it for analysis to a private firm. The order was passed on December 6 by a bench comprising Justice Srishananda while dismissing a petition filed by the Lokayukta police challenging a 2016 order discharging corruption charges against

a government official. The order was made available this week. The case pertains to a complaint that the accused officer allegedly demanded a bribe for the release of a private vehicle during 2014 General Elections. The investigation was later transferred to the Lokayukta police at Chikkaballapura. As the bribery trap in the case was unsuccessful, the police filed a chargesheet based on eyewitness statements. The High Court noted that there were issues of jurisdiction in the case as the event had occurred in the jurisdiction of the Chikkaballapura Lokayukta police, adding that at most a Zero First Information Report (FIR) ought to have been registered and the case immediately transferred. It added that since a partial investigation had been done with a station without jurisdiction, a fresh investigation ought to have begun at Chikkaballapura. The bench added, "it is found from the records that the alleged voice sample was not referred to the Forensic Science Laboratory of Karnataka. Instead, the said sample has been sent to a private laboratory... and a report has been obtained. It is pertinent to note that without exhausting the remedy before the Forensic Laboratory of Karnataka, sending the voice sample to... a private agency and collecting the report which has been placed as a gospel truth in filing the charge sheet has also resulted in affecting the rights of the accused. Therefore, the very cognizance itself should not have been taken..." Having made these observations, the court added that the previous order discharging the accused did not seem to have any factual or legal defect.

## 'Not more than 4 large drinks will be served': Mumbai hotels plan strict measures for safe New Year parties

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

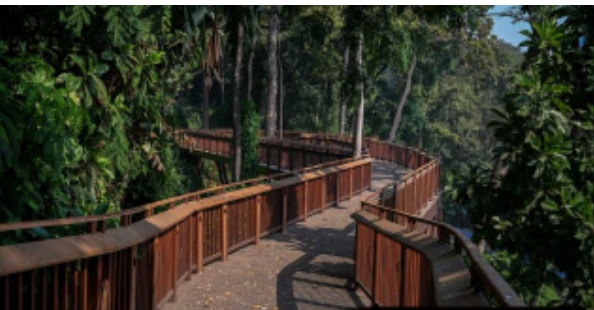
The Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India (HRAWI) has implemented a new policy, where guests will be given a maximum of four large drinks (1 large is 90 ml), after which they will be urged not to consume any more alcohol. As the Maharashtra government has granted permission for all-night New Year celebrations, hotel owners in Mumbai have taken proactive steps to ensure a safe experience for partygoers and prevent any untoward incidents, particularly related to alcohol consumption. The initiative is designed to limit the chances of accidents or inappropriate behaviour caused under the influence of alcohol, said Pradeep Shetty, secretary of HRAWI.

The Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India (HRAWI) has implemented a new policy, where guests will be given a maximum of four large drinks (1 large is 90 ml), after which they will be urged not to consume any more alcohol. The initiative is designed to limit the chances of accidents or inappropriate behaviour caused under the influence of alcohol, Pradeep Shetty, secretary of HRAWI. Large-scale events are planned across a number of Mumbai hotels on December 31 as the state government has allowed hotels and restaurants to remain open until 5 am on New Year day. Hotel owners have been instructed to make arrangements to ensure that intoxicated guests get home safely. This includes hiring designated drivers for those with cars and arranging transportation for



those without, such as booking Ola or Uber rides. ID checks to ensure legal drinking age. In the wake of drink-drive road accidents, including the May 19 Pune Porsche case where a minor was involved in the death of two motorcyclists, the association has adopted stricter measures. Staff members, particularly bartenders, have undergone special training for New-Year parties to ensure that both guests and the community stay safe during the celebrations. All guests, especially young partygoers, will be required to present valid ID cards upon entry to ensure alcohol is only served to those of legal drinking age. Kamlesh Barot, former president of HRAWI, highlighted the association's efforts to not only monitor alcohol consumption but also promote responsible drinking. Posters reminding guests of the dangers of drunk driving, along with the slogan 'Don't Drink and Drive', have been prominently displayed at hotels to raise awareness.

## Mumbai to get first elevated forest walkway: Inside the making of Malabar Hill nature trail



At its peak, sources said that at least 20-25 labourers would work on the project at a time to ensure maximum productivity within the limited time frame.

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Mumbai is all set to get its first elevated forest walkway with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) planning to open by New Year the trail through the lush greens of Malabar Hill that provides an unhindered view of the cityscape and the Girgaon Chowpatty. According to the civic body, over 90 per cent of the work is complete on the 482-metre trail that threw up an array of challenges, including protecting the flora and fauna to limited working hours. The Indian Express took a walk through the newly constructed nature trail, constructed along a slope without damaging any trees. Difficult terrain

A senior civic official told The Indian Express, "The site of the project was neither barren land nor situated on a plain. It is situated on a 70-80 degree slope, and therefore, accessing the location was our first challenge. It was only after assessment that the work commenced." All initial works were undertaken manually by the labourers due to the inaccessibility of the sloppy area. "In the initial phase, no machines were used. The labourers manually started removing the shrubs, flattened the ground and cleared the pathway, following which piling work began using machines that were made special to cater to the demands of this work site," said one of the consultants involved in the work.

"Even most of the equipment during piling work had to be carried out manually as the area was largely inaccessible," he said adding that even the wood and the steel equipment had to be manually taken up the pathway. Mohammad Asif, one of the labourers who has been working on the project for over a year, said, "Since we had to carry the equipment up a slope, we would plan accordingly. If the machine was heavy, four people would carry it, instead of two. Similarly, what normally takes 10 minutes took 20 minutes as we had to carry heavy things slowly." At

present, Asif, along with other labourers, is working on the final leg of the project that entails the construction of the utility panel room near the entrance gate. The Malabar Hills is home to lush flora and grand old trees, and protecting them was paramount during the making of the walkway. The BMC ensured that not a single tree was chopped off over the years as the project took shape. However, it was no cakewalk. The BMC, along with the consultants, conducted a series of surveys to determine the total number of trees along the alignment. "The alignment was changed on several occasions to save the trees. Earlier, the pathway was slated to be longer but after re-alignment, the length of the walkway was reduced to 482 metres on one side," said a source involved in the work. The walkway is 2.2 metres wide and a complete walk along the trail would be nearly a kilometre. It has a bearing capacity of nearly 500 kg/square metre.

To minimise disturbance in the area, BMC officials said that minimal concrete was used. "The pillars on which the pathway has been erected have been made using structural steel, instead of concrete," said an official involved in the project. British-era pipelines According to officials, British-era water pipelines from the Hanging Garden reservoir run beneath the surface of the nature trail. To ensure no disturbance to the pipelines, the BMC survey entailed marking them.

"The pipelines from the reservoir belong to the British era. Therefore, finding the exact location and determining the route of these water lines was yet another challenge," said an official. Once the locations were determined, the civic body and consultants re-aligned the distance between the structural steel pillars. While the typical distance between the pillars on which the nature trail has been constructed is five metres. The distance was increased where the pipelines were traced. "Wherever we identified the water lines, the gap was increased to seven metres, 10 metres or even 12 metres in some cases," the official said. Limited hours

To ensure minimal disturbance to the natural flora and fauna of the eco-sensitive zone, no work was undertaken after dusk, leaving a limited time frame to execute the tasks. "Typically, our working hours would be 9 am to 6 pm. To ensure that there was no disturbance in the area, no work was executed during the night," said the consultant. A BMC official added that special technology-driven machinery was employed to minimise the noise, even during the working hours. How it took shape First proposed in 2020, the tender for the project was awarded in 2021 for Rs 22 crore, and civil works began in 2022. Initially, the BMC kept a one-year deadline for the completion of the project, while the difficulties posed by the limited working time led to the extension of the deadline by a year. At its peak, sources said that at least 20-25 labourers would work on the project at a time to ensure maximum productivity within the limited time frame. At present, nearly 90 per cent of the work has been completed, with the BMC eyeing to finish the pending works by end of January. The final leg entails construction of a utility room, illumination, installation of CCTV cameras and speakers for public address among others, officials said.

## Threat of extinction, fear of rivals, links with 'Khalistan groups': How Delhi's gangs became parts of terror syndicates



GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Two men. A similar beginning, a common story, and two divergent paths. Notorious gangsters Arshdeep and Lawrence, who have grabbed headlines recently, may stand far apart today but their stories are indistinguishable. Arshdeep Singh Gill aka Arsh Dalla is 27. He was designated a terrorist by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in January last year and has over 70 cases — ranging from extortion to terrorism registered — against him in India. On October 29, he was detained by police in Canada. Lawrence Bishnoi is 31. With an alleged criminal empire of 700 operatives, he has escaped his gangster image to become an icon of extra-judicial power and vigilante justice. Lawrence is currently lodged in Sabarmati jail and has 84 cases, ranging from murder and extortion to terrorism, registered against him across India. His name has popped up in many recent high-profile killings like the murder of popular Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala on June 6, 2022. His "gang members" were also allegedly involved in firing outside the house of Bollywood actor Salman Khan — years after the latter allegedly hunted and killed a blackbuck, which is held sacred by the Bishnoi community, in 1999. His gang, police said, is also responsible for the murder of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader and former minister, Baba Siddique, 66, in Mumbai on October 12. Dalla's operatives executed crimes on his orders, including the murder of Moga businessman Jitendra alias Pinka in 2020. The NIA filed separate chargesheets against Lawrence and Dalla in March last year in terror-related cases. Lawrence Bishnoi, high profile murder, Indian express Lawrence Bishnoi is alleged to be involved in several high-profile murder and extortion cases.

Born as Balkaran Brar in 1993 in Fazilka district, Lawrence's father was a constable in the Haryana Police. "Lawrence is from a well-to-do family which has around 100 acres of farmland," a police officer said. He completed his initial education from Abohar, before moving to Chandigarh for his undergrad in 2010. According to the NIA chargesheet, Lawrence had his first brush with the law when he was a law student at Punjab University in 2008.

His police dossier shows that 18 of the 84 cases registered against him were filed while he was in college, where he was part of the Student Organisation of Panjab University (SOPU). During his involvement with the organisation, Lawrence came in touch with Sampat Nehra, Virender Pratap Singh alias Kala Rana, Satwinderjit Singh alias Goldy Brar and Amandeep Multani — gangsters who are currently at the helm of his operations now. "While campaigning for a nominee for student body elections in 2008, he and his friends got into a spat with students from a rival faction," an officer said.

Five days later, Lawrence and seven others reportedly set fire to the car belonging to a person campaigning for a rival candidate. "He and his friends were arrested in 10 days. In jail, he met Ranjeet Dupla, an arms supplier who currently runs a transport business in the US. The duo introduced each other to their criminal acquaintances," the officer said. In 2013, Bishnoi allegedly killed a rival of the candidate he was supporting for SOPU polls and fled. He was arrested in 2014 in Rajasthan. However, he fled police custody during a court appearance in 2015. He was again arrested in Punjab's Fazilka later that year. From 2015 onwards, Lawrence's notoriety spiked as he ran his criminal empire from behind bars.

According to a police officer, his entry and expansion in Delhi started when he forged alliances with other 'traditional' Delhi gangs, most of which have their important figures locked up as well. On the other hand, Dalla started as a small-time gangster in Moga, Punjab, before fleeing to Canada in 2018. There, he allegedly came in contact with Khalistan Tiger Force chief Hardeep Singh Nijjar and began collaborating with him. Arsh Dalla Arsh Dalla used his connections in Punjab to form a "terrorist gang". According to the NIA, Dalla used his connections in Punjab to form a "terrorist gang". "He, along with Nijjar, raised funds through extortion and targeted killings of businessmen and leaders from specific communities in Punjab," the NIA claimed.

Investigations revealed that Dalla allegedly operated his syndicate from his base in Surrey, Canada, where he lived with his wife and minor daughter. Police said his network, which allegedly included his father Charanjit Singh and brother Baldeep, thrived on extortion, arms smuggling, and targeted killings, with victims ranging from small traders to prominent figures, both in Punjab and Canada. The NIA also stated there is a conflict between the Dalla and Bishnoi gangs, which reportedly escalated in December

2023 as numerous Indian-origin business owners in Canada began reporting extortion calls and threats. Forming allies

According to sources "local gangs, including those from Delhi, joined these rival syndicates to survive and expand their area of influence. For instance, the NIA alleged that Lawrence allied with gangsters Kala Jathedi (to expand in southern Haryana), Virender Pratap (to expand in Chandigarh) and Jitender Gogi (to expand in Delhi).

He was later joined by gangster Hashim Baba after both of them met in Tihar jail in 2021, according to a police officer. Foot soldiers for his gang are mainly arranged by the Gogi and Baba gangs. According to Delhi Police officers, Baba and Gogi (now deceased) were both notorious gangsters in Delhi and ran their operations on their own before joining Lawrence. Recently, Baba, who is in jail, in a "judicial confession" claimed Lawrence ordered Delhi gym owner Nadir Shah's killing in Greater Kailash in June this year. According to the NIA's chargesheet, Dalla's alliance partners in Delhi include the Bambiha gang, led by Kaushal Chaudhary and Amit Dagar, the Bawana gang led by Neeraj Bawana, Tilly Tajpuriya, and Himanshu Bhau. The NIA chargesheet states that after Davinder Bambiha's death in 2016, Kaushal took over the reins of the gang and developed direct links with Dalla.

The Delhi Police said the glorification of names like Lawrence Bishnoi in popular culture and social media has created more fear in Delhi. "The Northeast and Outer areas of Delhi have always been prone to shootings and extortions, and that is a problem. But once the name of Lawrence Bishnoi is attached to these incidents, it makes them sound more dangerous than the reality on the ground," a police officer said. An officer, who had interrogated Bishnoi in 2021, said it's not him alone but the network outside the country backing him which is the real threat. "Lawrence has been owning up murders since 2015. His role is restricted to phone calls. When he was shifted from Bharatpur jail in 2020, phones were discovered under his bunk bed. He also used to visit a temple weekly, from where he would make calls to Brar and other members. On his own, he hasn't gone and shot anyone even once," the police officer said. "He (Lawrence) issued a threat to Salman Khan while he was appearing in a Jodhpur court. He used it to get recognition as a gangster while he was in jail. It's his money supply from Canada and his fame on social media that has made local gangs in Delhi associate themselves with him". "Operating like Mumbai's underworld Sources said there are similarities in the way Dalla and Lawrence operate: Though they are viewed differently by law enforcement, they have a "lot in common". Both of them, sources said, have a similar modus operandi: operating like Mumbai's notorious underworld and incorporating Delhi gangs into their criminal syndicate. As per the NIA's chargesheets against the two, the syndicate members forged a symbiotic relationship with terror organisations working for the cause of Khalistan to procure sophisticated weapons. "The (Bishnoi) syndicate is trying to settle its important members and executives abroad... with the help of 'pro-Khalistan elements' who are well settled in various countries across the world. This created a symbiotic terrorist-gangster network between gangster and pro-Khalistan elements which fulfill their requirement of the shooters to carry out targeted killings, who in return, get sophisticated weapons from across the border," the chargesheet against Bishnoi alleged.

Similarly, the chargesheet against Dalla alleged he was associated with the Khalistan Tiger Force, which works against the territorial integrity of India. In the third and most recent chargesheet filed in the case against Lawrence, the NIA claimed Darmanjot Singh (co-accused in the case against Bishnoi) was a "key link" between Canada-based Lakhbir Singh (absconder) — an alleged operator of the banned terror outfit Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) — and Bishnoi's syndicate. Darmanjot had allegedly been involved in a range of criminal activities, including the smuggling of weapons, explosives, and drugs from across the border.

The rise of these syndicates, claim the chargesheets, is homologous to the rise of the underworld in Mumbai in the 90s. In fact, the chargesheet against Dalla alleges that his syndicate operates on "an exact parallel with Mumbai's underworld, which initially used to carry out criminal activities such as murders, shooting of important personalities and businessmen, abductions, extortions, land grabbing etc". In the chargesheet against Lawrence, the NIA alleged that his growth had tremendous similarities with the rise of Dawood Ibrahim, who became part of a locally organised crime syndicate and subsequently created his own gang known as the D-Company. The Bishnoi and Dalla syndicates, alleged the NIA, used social media to publicise their crimes to influence younger people to join them and to "create widespread terror amongst the public at large". Apart from money and clothes, the leaders of the syndicates offered tickets to Canada to lure new recruits to join them, claimed the agency. Since most associates of the syndicates were either abroad or lodged in jails, cadres of the syndicate, who would get "sophisticated weapons from across the border with the help of Khalistan associates", would carry out targeted killings. "Anonymity" was also key, the NIA stated while describing the functioning of the syndicates. A person in the gang allegedly knew only the person who was above him in the hierarchy — a way that ensured other members remained safe.

## Cold wave slated to be back in Pune, city to usher in 2025 with single-digit temperature



Currently, Pune city and its surrounding areas are reporting a minimum temperature of around 16 degree Celsius, with daytime temperature at around 26 to 27 degree Celsius. Parts of the city and the district at large have reported cloudy skies with IMD forecasting isolated incidents of rain in some parts.

After a brief sunny period, Pune might experience another spell of cold weather as northern winds are expected to be back. Pune might be ringing in the New Year with single-digit night temperatures as clear skies would help in

cooling, said the India Meteorological Department Anupam Kashyapi, former head, Weather Forecasting, IMD, said single-digit temperatures are expected to be back by the end of this week. "Rain with thunder and lightning are expected in some places in Pune and other parts of the state. This is mainly due to the opposite wind interactions from December 26. Skies are likely to be clear from December 29," said Kashyapi.

Kashyapi said northerly cold winds from Western Himalayan are likely to settle and penetrate Maharashtra from December 30 which would cause a significant fall in night temperatures. Currently, Pune city and its surrounding areas are reporting a minimum temperature of around 16 degree Celsius, with daytime temperature at around 26 to 27 degree Celsius. Parts of the city and the district at large have reported cloudy skies with IMD forecasting isolated incidents of rain in some parts. So far, winter has been a mixed bag for Pune with the city and district reporting single-digit temperature in the last week of November and towards the second week of December. Parts of the district like NDA have reported temperatures as low as 6 degree Celsius which could be the lowest recorded in the district for this season.



## Azerbaijan Airlines plane crash: An Embraer plane crashed in Kazakhstan, leaving 12 survivors out of 72 onboard



GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Azerbaijan began a national day of mourning Thursday after a passenger jet from the flag carrier crashed in western Kazakhstan on Christmas Day, killing 38 of the 67 people onboard. "An Azerbaijani airliner with 67 people onboard crashed Wednesday (December 25, 2024) near the Kazakhstani city of Aktau, killing 38 people and leaving 29 survivors," a Kazakh official said. Deputy Prime Minister Kanat Bozumbaev disclosed the figures while meeting with Azerbaijani officials, the Russian news agency Interfax reported.

"The Embraer 190 was en route from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku to the Russian city of Grozny in the North Caucasus when it was diverted and attempted an emergency landing 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) from Aktau," Azerbaijan Airlines said. A drone view shows emergency specialists working at the crash site of an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger plane near the city of Aktau, Kazakhstan December 25, 2024. A drone view shows emergency specialists working at the crash site of an Azerbaijan Airlines passenger plane near the city of Aktau, Kazakhstan Speaking at a news conference, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said that it was too soon to speculate on the reasons behind the crash, but said that the weather had forced the plane to change from its planned course. Ilham Aliyev declared Thursday a day of mourning and cancelled a planned visit to Russia for an informal summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a grouping of former Soviet nations. "The information provided to me is that the plane changed its course between Baku and Grozny due to worsening weather conditions and headed to Aktau airport, where it crashed upon landing," he said.

Prosecutor General's Office in Azerbaijan later reported that at least 32 people survived the crash, adding

that the number wasn't final. RIA Novosti quoted Russia's Civil Aviation Authority, Rosaviatsia, as saying that preliminary information showed that the pilot had chosen to divert to Aktau after a bird strike on the aircraft led to "an emergency situation on board". Mobile phone footage circulating online appeared to show the aircraft making a steep descent before smashing into the ground in a fireball. Other footage showed part of its fuselage ripped away from the wings and the rest of the aircraft, lying upside in the grass. The footage corresponded to the plane's colors and its registration number. Some of the videos posted on social media showed survivors dragging fellow passengers away from the wreckage of the plane. Flight-tracking data from FlightRadar24.com showed the aircraft making what appeared to be a figure-eight once nearing the airport in Aktau, its altitude moving up and down substantially over the last minutes of the flight before impacting the ground.

FlightRadar24 separately said in an online post that the aircraft had faced "strong GPS jamming" which "made the aircraft transmit bad ADS-B data", referring to the information that allows flight-tracking websites to follow planes in flight. Russia has been blamed in the past for jamming GPS transmissions in the wider region. Embraer did not immediately respond to a request for comment early Wednesday morning. In a statement, Azerbaijan Airlines said it would keep members of the public updated and changed its social media banners to solid black. Azerbaijan's state news agency, Azertac, said that an official delegation consisting of Azerbaijan's emergency situations minister, the country's deputy general prosecutor, and the vice president of Azerbaijan Airlines had been dispatched to Aktau to conduct an "on-site investigation". The President's press service said Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, who had been travelling to St Petersburg, returned to Azerbaijan on hearing news of the crash. Aliyev was due to attend an informal meeting of leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States, a bloc of former Soviet countries founded after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Mr. Aliyev expressed his condolences to the families of the victims in a statement on social media. "It is with deep sadness that I express my condolences to the families of the victims and wish a speedy recovery to those injured," he wrote. Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke to Aliyev on the phone and expressed his condolences, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. Both Kazakhstani and Azerbaijani authorities were investigating the crash. Embraer told The Associated Press in a statement that the company is "ready to assist all relevant authorities."

## At least 13 people killed in Pakistani strikes on suspected militant hideouts in Afghanistan

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

In Kabul, the Afghan Defence Ministry condemned the airstrikes by Pakistan, saying the bombing targeted civilians, including women and children. It said that most of the victims were refugees from the Waziristan region. Local Afghans and the Pakistani Taliban said Wednesday (December 25, 2024) that civilians, including women and children, were killed after Pakistan launched rare airstrikes inside neighbouring Afghanistan. Pakistani security officials, speaking on the condition of anonymity in line with regulations, told The Associated Press that Tuesday's (December 24, 2024) operation was to dismantle a training facility and kill insurgents in the province of Paktika, bordering Afghanistan. Residents in the area told an AP reporter over the phone that at least 13 people were left dead, adding that the death toll could be higher. They also said the wounded were transported to a local hospital.

Meanwhile, in a statement, Mohammad Khorasani, the spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban or Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, claimed that 50 people, including 27 women and children, have died in the strikes. In Kabul, the Afghan Defence Ministry condemned the airstrikes by Pakistan, saying the bombing targeted civilians, including women and children. It said that most of the victims were refugees from the Waziristan region. Pakistan has not commented on the strikes. However, on Wednesday (December 25, 2024), the Pakistani military said security forces killed 13 insurgents in an overnight intelligence-based operation in South Waziristan, a district located along eastern Afghanistan's Paktika province. The strikes are likely to spike tensions



between the two countries further. Afghanistan's ruling Taliban government denounced the attack, saying on Tuesday (December 24, 2024) that most of the victims were refugees from the Waziristan region and promising retaliation. The TTP is a separate group but also a close ally of the Afghan Taliban, who seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021. In March, Pakistan said intelligence-based strikes took place in the border regions inside Afghanistan. Pakistan has seen innumerable militant attacks in the past two decades but there has been an uptick in recent months. The latest was this weekend when at least 16 Pakistani soldiers were killed when TTP attacked a checkpoint in the country's northwest. Pakistani officials have accused the Taliban of not doing enough to combat militant activity across the shared border, a charge the Afghan Taliban government denies, saying it does not allow anyone to carry out attacks against any country.

## Japan Foreign Minister raises 'serious concerns' over China military buildup

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya raised "serious concerns" on Wednesday (December 25, 2024) over China's military buildup as he met counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing, Tokyo said. On his first visit to China since becoming Japan's top diplomat earlier this year, Mr. Iwaya told Mr. Wang that Tokyo was "closely monitoring the Taiwan situation and recent military developments", according to his Foreign Ministry. Meeting with Mr. Wang at Beijing's opulent Diaoyutai State Guesthouse, he also "expressed serious concerns over the East China Sea situation, including around the Senkaku Islands (and) China's increasing military activity", Tokyo said. Mr. Iwaya in addition called for the "swift release" of Japanese nationals detained by Chinese authorities. "Opacity surrounding the anti-espionage law is causing Japanese people to think twice about visiting China," he warned. But the two Ministers also agreed to work towards a visit to Japan by Wang "at the earliest possible timing next year". China's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the meeting would take place "at an appropriate time", without mentioning discussions of Beijing's military manoeuvring or detained Japanese nationals. Mr. Iwaya earlier met Chinese Premier Li Qiang and agreed to work for a "constructive and stable" relationship, the Japanese news agency Kyodo said.

China and Japan are key trading partners, but increased friction over disputed territories and military spending has frayed ties in recent years. Beijing's more assertive presence around disputed territories in the region, meanwhile, has sparked Tokyo's ire, leading it to boost security ties with key ally the United States and other countries. Tense ties in August, a Chinese military aircraft staged the first confirmed incursion by China into Japanese airspace, followed weeks later by a Japanese warship sailing through the Taiwan Strait for the first time. Beijing's rare test launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile into the Pacific Ocean



On his first visit to China since becoming Japan's top diplomat earlier this year, Mr. Iwaya told Mr. Wang that Tokyo was "closely monitoring the Taiwan situation and recent military developments", according to his Foreign Ministry in late September also drew strong protests from Tokyo, which said it had not been given advance notice. Tensions between the two sides also flared last year over Japan's decision to begin releasing into the Pacific Ocean some of the 540 Olympic swimming pools' worth of reactor cooling water amassed since the 2011 tsunami that led to the Fukushima nuclear disaster — an operation the U.N. atomic agency deemed safe. China branded the move "selfish" and banned all Japanese seafood imports, but in September said it would "gradually resume" the trade. On Wednesday, the two ministers affirmed their support for that plan. China imported more than \$500 million worth of seafood from Japan in 2022, according to customs data. Japan's brutal occupation of parts of China before and during World War II remains another sore point, with Beijing accusing Tokyo of failing to atone for its past. Visits by Japanese officials to the Yasukuni shrine that honours war dead — including convicted war criminals — regularly prompt anger from Beijing.

## Japan govt to increase JGB sales for first time in four years



GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Japan is set to raise scheduled sales of Japanese government bonds (JGB) slightly to 172.3 trillion yen (\$1.1 trillion) next fiscal year from the current year, the first increase in four years, according to a draft plan. Much of the increase in sales of scheduled JGBs to the market will be made in shorter-dated debt to tap demand from Japanese banks, which the government hopes would partially replace the Bank of Japan (BOJ) as major holders. The sales of super-long bonds, with maturities of 30 and 40 years, will be reduced to reflect shrinking demand from life insurers, as they mostly completed purchases for meeting new capital requirements. The latest sale plan reflects the government's efforts to fill a huge hole left by the BOJ's diminishing presence in the JGB market. The BOJ this year started tapering its huge bond-buying and reducing its holdings, which make up roughly half of total JGBs sold in the market, heightening the need for the government to find stable buyers to avoid a spike in bond yields.

## Vocal on growth, silent on inflation

In November, a Cabinet Minister reportedly stated at a press conference that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) should focus on growth and not be concerned with food price inflation. Though the Minister clarified that he was speaking in his personal capacity, it is not in the spirit of things that once the central bank has been given a mandate to target an inflation index that includes the price of food, a member of the executive advises it in any way, leave alone exhorts it to target something else. The comment perhaps reflects some nervousness, on behalf of the government, about the performance of the economy. This would not be unfounded. The media has made references to declining consumption expenditure in the economy, though it is not evident in the national income statistics, available up to 2022-23. But there have been reports of the slow growth of sales of companies in the fast-moving-consumer-goods (FMCG) segment during the current financial year. This is a fairly reliable source of information on consumption growth. There is, however, a more overarching reason why the government would be concerned about growth in the economy, which is based on a longer view.

We now have national income data for a decade since 2014, enabling a broad evaluation of economic performance during the tenure of the Modi government. First, at the aggregate level, the average annual growth of the economy is lower since 2016-17. The decline is substantial too. At 7.1% for the period 2004-05 to 2015-16 and 5.2% for the period 2016-17 to 2023-24, it amounts to 27%. National income data for the sectors is less up to date but extends enough to make a confident assessment, and it would be as follows. Of the 11 sectors at the initial level of disaggregation, only one, namely 'Real Estate', shows a higher growth rate since 2014. Interestingly, for all of the policy focus on manufacturing, this sector actually slowed after 2014. Having grown at well over 7% per annum from 2006-07 to 2014-15, its growth slowed to just over 5% afterwards. This extent of decline in the rate of growth of manufacturing across successive growth phases is by far the highest since Independence while the percentage increase in the rate of growth of the real estate sector since 2014 is not the highest, having been exceeded in the 1980s. This would not be a comforting story for any government that takes pride in its growth performance. While the government is vocal on growth, it remains silent on inflation. This is telling, as the October print for inflation shows that it breached the 6% mark, the upper tolerance level granted to the RBI, while food-price inflation breached the 10% mark. There is an assumption, commonly held by a section of the economics profession that was voiced by the Minister when he encouraged the RBI to ignore food price inflation. It is that the price of food is volatile, and its fluctuations cancel themselves out over time.

This, however, has been proven to be wrong, at least in India. Food inflation rose in 2019-20 and has remained elevated since. That it rose before the COVID-19 pandemic and has persisted even as growth has recovered gives us

Issuing too many shorter-term bonds, however, would require Japan to roll over debt more frequently and make its finances vulnerable to bond market swings. JGB sales to the market have been set initially at 171 trillion yen for this fiscal year. Under the plan for the next fiscal year, sales of 30-year JGBs and those of 40-year JGBs will be 1.2 trillion yen lower than this year each at 9.6 trillion yen and 3 trillion yen, respectively. It is the first time in seven years that the sale of 40-year JGBs will be reduced. The size of reduction will be largest since their introduction in November 2007. Sales of five-year JGBs would be 1.2 trillion yen higher than this year at 28.8 trillion yen, while those of treasury discount bills would be 2.4 trillion yen higher at 40.8 trillion yen, the draft showed. Sales of two-year debt, as well as benchmark 10-year JGBs and 20-year bonds, would be unchanged, according to the draft. Climate transition bonds worth 1.2 trillion yen will be sold to the market in the next fiscal year to promote decarbonisation, down 0.2 trillion yen from this year.

In a bid to attract buying from banks, the government is preparing to introduce a new type of floating-rate note with a short-term duration that helps investors mitigate the risk from rising bond yields. The Japanese banking sector was the biggest holder of JGBs before former BOJ chief Haruhiko Kuroda deployed a huge asset-buying scheme in 2013, which forced yields down and prompted the banks to shift deposits to their current accounts at the central bank. The banks now hold just 14% of the JGB market, down from 41% before the introduction of Kuroda's stimulus. Tighter capital regulation has also made banks wary of ramping up bond buying.



an idea of why the assumption is wrong. Recent inflation in India is not related to some temporary supply-chain disruptions, as, for instance, in the United States, where it has declined considerably post pandemic even as growth has recovered. Inflation in India is a structural problem reflecting the type of growth it is experiencing, one in which agricultural production is not expanding at the rate at which the demand for its products is rising. Further, and relevant in the context, food price inflation triggers a wage price spiral in the rest of the economy, which can continue for a while even if food prices decline.

The implication for welfare of the inflation we are currently experiencing is obvious. High inflation, especially of food products, adversely affects the well-being of those whose income does not keep pace with the inflation. The growth impact is less obvious, but surely is there. As household budgets are stretched to accommodate the higher cost of food, the demand for other goods and services must grow less fast. Non-agricultural output and employment growth now slows down. A mechanism of this kind is likely to have played a role in lowering the rate of growth of manufacturing production in recent years. From the data in the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's 'National Accounts Statistics 2024', we can see a correlation between the rise in food price inflation from 2019-20 onwards and manufacturing growth since, with the annual rate of change of the latter actually negative in two out of the five years since. So, while the Minister is right to suggest that the RBI's capacity to rein in food inflation is weak, he is wrong to suggest that food price inflation need not be controlled. If food price inflation were to be taken out of the RBI's brief without an alternative proposal for its control, India would be left bereft of an anti-inflation policy. Uncontrolled inflation can throw sand in the wheels of growth itself. Presently, the problem facing India's economy is not the lack of growth. The provisional estimate for GDP growth in 2023-24 (over 8%) is quite high by historical standards. The problem lies in its inequitable distribution across the population, partly induced by food price inflation. The Minister's observation should induce the government to re-focus current economic policy from growth to inflation.

## Trump vows to pursue executions after Biden commutes most of federal death row

President-elect Donald Trump promised on Tuesday (December 24, 2024) to "vigorously pursue" capital punishment after President Joe Biden commuted the sentences of most people on federal death row partly to stop Mr. Trump from pushing forward their executions. Mr. Trump criticized Mr. Biden's decision on Monday (December 23, 2024) to change the sentences of 37 of the 40 condemned people to life in prison without parole, arguing that it was senseless and insulted the families of their victims. Mr. Biden said converting their punishments to life imprisonment was consistent with the moratorium imposed on federal executions in cases other than terrorism and hate-motivated mass murder. "Joe Biden just commuted the Death Sentence on 37 of the worst killers in our Country," he wrote on his social media site. "When you hear the acts of each, you won't believe that he did this. Makes no sense. Relatives and friends are further devastated. They can't believe this is happening!" Presidents historically have no involvement in dictating or recommending the punishments that federal prosecutors seek for defendants in criminal cases, though Mr. Trump has long sought more direct control over the Justice Department's operations. The president-elect wrote that he would direct the department to pursue the death penalty "as soon as I am inaugurated," but was vague on what specific actions he may take and said they would be in cases of "violent rapists, murderers, and monsters." He highlighted the cases of two men who were on federal death row for slaying a woman and a girl, had admitted to killing more and had their sentences commuted by Mr. Biden. On the campaign trail, Mr. Trump often called for expanding the federal death penalty — including for those who kill police officers, those convicted of drug and human trafficking, and migrants who kill U.S. citizens. "Trump has been fairly consistent in wanting to sort of say that he thinks the death penalty is an important tool and he wants to use it," said Douglas Berman, an expert on sentencing at Ohio State

University's law school. "But whether practically any of that can happen, either under existing law or other laws, is a heavy lift." Mr. Berman said Mr. Trump's statement at this point seems to be just a response to Mr. Biden's commutation. "I'm inclined to think it's still in sort of more the rhetoric phase. Just, 'don't worry.' The new sheriff is coming. I like the death penalty," he said. Most Americans have historically supported the death penalty for people convicted of murder, according to decades of annual polling by Gallup, but support has declined over the past few decades. About half of Americans were in favor in an October poll, while roughly 7 in 10 Americans backed capital punishment for murderers in 2007. Before Mr. Biden's commutation, there were 40 federal death row inmates compared with more than 2,000 who have been sentenced to death by states. "The reality is all of these crimes are typically handled by the states," Mr. Berman said. A question is whether the Mr. Trump administration would try to take over some state murder cases, such as those related to drug trafficking or smuggling. He could also attempt to take cases from states that have abolished the death penalty. Mr. Berman said Mr. Trump's statement, along with some recent actions by states, may present an effort to get the Supreme Court to reconsider a precedent that considers the death penalty disproportionate punishment for rape. "That would literally take decades to unfold. It's not something that is going to happen overnight," Mr. Berman said. Before one of Mr. Trump's rallies on Aug. 20, his prepared remarks released to the media said he would announce he would ask for the death penalty for child rapists and child traffickers. But Trump never delivered the line. One of the men Mr. Trump highlighted on Tuesday (December 24, 2024) was ex-Marine Jorge Avila Torrez, who was sentenced to death for killing a sailor in Virginia and later pleaded guilty to the fatal stabbing of an 8-year-old and a 9-year-old girl in a suburban Chicago park several years before.



## How to put PDS items, free social transfers in new retail inflation index: MoSPI asks experts



How to put PDS items, free social transfers in new retail inflation index: MoSPI asks experts For this, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has floated a discussion paper. MoSPI is in the process of revising the base of the CPI by updating weights and basket of CPI and introducing possible improvements in the methodology for CPI compilation, the ministry said.

India's statistical system is grappling with a unique issue — how to include food items under the public distribution system (PDS) and free social transfers in the proposed new Consumer Price Index (CPI) which forms the basis for calculation of retail inflation rate in the country. The contention is how to change the price of PDS items from a positive value to zero or increase the prices of PDS items from zero to some positive value in an ongoing series, or rather the big question about whether the free PDS items be included in the CPI basket? For this, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has floated a discussion paper. MoSPI is in the process of revising the base of the CPI by updating weights and basket of CPI and introducing possible improvements in the methodology for CPI compilation, the ministry said. "To make the index robust, resilient and effective, MoSPI proposes to seek views and suggestions of the users, experts, academicians, government organisations, state governments, financial institutions and the public at large on the "treatment of free PDS items in Consumer Price Index Compilation," it said.

The ministry said there are two challenges in the free distribution of PDS items in the context of CPI compilation: (1) Mid-series adjustments: How to address the reduction in the price of PDS items from a positive value to zero or increase in prices of PDS items from zero to some positive amount during an ongoing series? (2) Inclusion in CPI basket at the start of series: Should the free PDS items be included in the CPI basket?

Experts and officials aware of the developments said this has turned out to be a peculiar issue in the compilation of the proposed new CPI inflation series. "We have to comply with UN-prescribed norms also which doesn't allow conversion of value of such items to zero. Redistribution of weights has turned out to be an issue in the existing series. Some suggestions were that we should take the minimal value of 1 for such items rather than zero, while some ex-

perts have suggested removal of these items altogether in the series. This is going to be discussed in detail as it will be a tough statistical exercise," an official told The Indian Express. In the existing series, the weights of these items are pro-rata distributed on other items of the section (major cereals and products) within the state/UT in the state/UTs where free distribution scheme is implemented for all sections of the society (above poverty line (APL), below poverty line (BPL) and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)). However, concerns were raised regarding this approach used to include the free distribution in the CPI compilation as this method does not accurately capture the impact of free food grain distribution on inflation. The discussion paper has detailed three methods for dealing with items in case the price of social security transfers decreases from a positive amount to zero. Method one suggests use of a zero price and adjusting the weight during the next update. This method has been proposed for the new series of CPI. The second method suggests re-distribution of the weight to the other items within the class/section. This method was adopted in the existing series. The third method suggests re-distribution of the weight broadly over all the items of the basket. Another issue is free distribution of certain items in PDS for derivation of weights and their inclusion in the CPI basket of the new series.

In the existing series, if an item's expenditure share is not available due to free distribution since the out of pocket expenditure is zero, it will not have any positive weight and further the base price and current price for such items will also be zero, the ministry said. Hence, such items are excluded from the item basket, the ministry said, adding that this treatment of free social transfers is in line with the international best practices. In the discussion paper, the ministry has cited the statistics manual of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to state that such free items should be excluded from the index at the start of the new series. "It could be decided that the CPI should be confined to final consumption expenditure incurred by households, in which case free social transfers in kind would be excluded from the scope of the index. Even if they were to be included, they can be ignored in practice when they are considered to be provided free, on the grounds that households incur zero expenditure on them...if the main reason for compiling a CPI is the measurement of inflation or as an input into monetary policy decisions, the scope of the index should be restricted to monetary transactions only, especially since non monetary transactions do not generate any demand for money," the part of the IMF manual cited in the paper stated. The ministry is currently undertaking the base revision exercise that proposes to revise the base year of CPI from 2012 to 2024. Weights and item basket will be derived from Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2022-23. The ministry has asked experts to send their comments about treatment of PDS items and other social security transfers in the new CPI by January 15, 2025 through email psd-nso2020@mospi.gov.in.

## Heated coaches, airport-like security check: Five trains planned from Delhi to Kashmir

Heated coaches, airport-like security check: Five trains planned from Delhi to Kashmir The coaches will be sanitised before leaving the platform on either side and the passengers for Srinagar will go through a special security check, similar to the security check at the airport. Indian Railways is ready to run as many as five trains from the National Capital, which will traverse through the Himalayas to connect the Kashmir region with the rest of the country, ending the wait of almost three decades since the project was sanctioned. A senior official of the Ministry of Railways said that these will be sleeper AC trains equipped with heating facilities inside the coaches, as part of the route will pass through the snow covered region. Given the security concerns in Jammu and Kashmir, there will be enhanced security checks for these services.

"The manufacturing of these five rakes has been completed and the trains are ready for operation. It may be launched in the first month of the next year, not all five at the same time. It will have 22-coaches each. As of now, there is no plan to run Vande Bharat Sleeper train from Delhi. However, an eight coach Vande Bharat train, with chair car seating, will run on Katra to Baramulla stretch (around 250 km) of Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link Project (USBRL)," said the senior official, who did not wish to be identified. The official further said that the wheels of the coaches and the front glass of the engine are designed to avoid accumulation of snow. Additionally, on-board heating will ensure defrosting of any snow accumulation in sub-zero temperatures. "Special emphasis has been given to the security of the train. The coaches will be sanitised before leaving the platform on either side. The passengers for Srinagar will go through a special security check, similar to the security check at the airport. There will be more Railways Protection Force (RPF) personnel in comparison to normal route trains. The security concerns cannot be ignored," said the official quoted above.

However, the decision of plying the trains is contingent upon the nod from the Commission of Railway Safety (CRS). The Katra to Reasi stretch (17km) of 272-km long Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail link (USBRL) project is still in works and the CRS is yet to inspect the site. "The



CRS inspection of the stretch is expected by the first week of January...The work has been completed and the trial run of tower wagons on the cable-stayed railway bridge at Anji Khad (connecting the Katra and Reasi sections) is ongoing," said the official. The ambitious USBRL project, also called the Kashmir line, was sanctioned in 1994-95. However, it was wrecked by landslides and other adverse geological effects in the past 25 years and its cost has increased manifold to the current estimate of Rs 37,500 crore. The iconic 359-meter high Chenab Bridge lies on this line. It is 35 meters taller than the Eiffel tower. The construction of the first three phases of the project was completed by 2014 and trains have been running between Baramulla and Banihal in the Kashmir valley, and between Jammu, Udhampur, and Katra in Jammu region. The work on the intervening 111-Km section Katra-Banihal was the arduous and treacherous portion due to its geology and extensive riverine system replete with deep gorges. Out of this 111-km section, a 48-km section from Banihal to Sangaldan was commissioned in February 2024 and another 46-km long Sangaldan-Reasi section received CRS authorisation on July 01, 2024. If CRS gives approval for the remaining Katra-Reasi section, Indian Railways will go ahead to launch the train services. With the opening of this line, the government also aims to run trains from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, connecting far North and South of India. "A project connecting Kashmir to Kanyakumari is now ready, and trains will start running on this route within the next four months. This will be a major achievement for India," Minister for Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw recently said in the Lok Sabha.

## Sebi suspends trading in Bharat Global Developers over financial misrepresentation

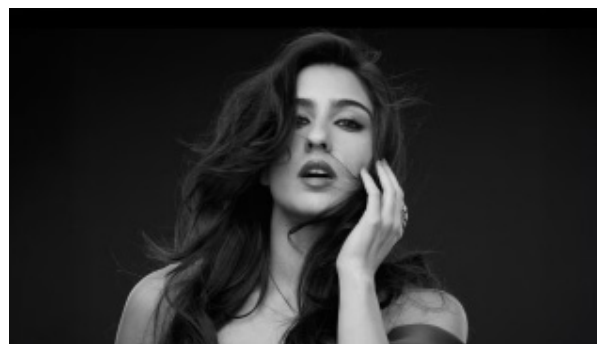
New Delhi: Markets regulator Sebi on Monday suspended trading in Bharat Global Developers Ltd (BGDL) for financial misrepresentation, misleading disclosures, price manipulation, and offloading shares at inflated prices. Additionally, the regulator has barred the company, its managing director Ashok Kumar Sewada, CEO Mohsin Shaikh and directors — Dinesh Kumar Sharma and Nirali Prabhathbai Karetha — and several preferential allottees of shares among the 18 entities from the securities market. Also, Sebi, in its interim order, has frozen illegal profits to the tune of Rs 271.6 crore made by preferential allottees through the sale of shares.

This came after the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) initiated an investigation into Bharat Global Developers following social media posts and a complaint on December 16, 2024. The inquiry was triggered by a dramatic 105-fold increase in BGDL's share price, which surged from Rs 16.14 in November 2023 to Rs 1,702.95 in November 2024. The regulator examined the matter to determine whether the company violated securities laws, including the Sebi Act, Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade

Practices (PFUTP) Regulations, and Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements (LODR) Regulations.

In its probe, Sebi found that BGDL replaced its management, approved preferential allotments to select individuals, and issued false disclosures about business expansion and partnerships. These actions were part of a scheme to manipulate share prices and allow insiders to sell shares at artificially high prices. The company portrayed itself as a successful company with large contracts and technological expertise, none of which were true. This misrepresentation attracted unsuspecting investors and inflated the share price. Moreover, the financial statements of the company also appeared to misrepresent the true state of affairs of the company and its business. The financial statements revealed that till FY23, the company had negligible revenue, expenses, fixed assets and cash flows. Suddenly, however, the financial results from the quarter ended March 2024 showed a steep spike in revenues and expenses. This was accompanied by negligible fixed assets, negative cash flows from operating activities and huge amounts of trade receivables and payables.

## Sara Ali Khan on trolling and its effect on mental health: 'Tough to face negativity when it's personal'



"Namaste darshako," has become synonymous with Sara Ali Khan, who often greets her social media followers saying that. Six years old in the industry and with over 10 films under her belt, the actor is known for movies like Simmba, Love Aaj Kal, and Atrangi Re. Indianexpress.com caught up with the starlet to discuss her journey, her growing up years surrounded by all things Bollywood, the challenges she faced in the industry, and how she managed to stay on top of her physical and mental health.

Q. You have a long association with the film industry. How did that change since you 'formally' stepped into it?

Sara Ali Khan: I grew up surrounded by films and storytelling, but being a part of it is a whole different experience. The film industry is unpredictable, demanding, and exhilarating all at once, and I'm grateful for every experience so far.

Q. How would you describe the journey so far?

Sara Ali Khan: My journey has been a mix of discovery and hard work. There have been moments of immense joy and there have been challenges that only made me stronger. I've had the privilege of working on diverse projects and learning from immensely talented co-stars, directors, and crews. Each role has taught me something new, pushing me to grow as an actor and person. One of the most fulfilling aspects has been connecting with audiences who appreciate my work—it's an indescribable feeling when people relate to your characters or see themselves in your stories.

Q. Has your profession ever negatively affected your mental health? If so, how and when?

Sara Ali Khan: Early on, I felt a lot of pressure to prove myself and live up to people's expectations. That was challenging. There have been times I've felt exhausted, anxious, and overwhelmed—particularly when trying to balance personal and professional life in such a public space. However, with time, I've learned the importance of setting boundaries and prioritising self-care. Embracing mindfulness, staying grounded, and surrounding myself with a supportive circle of friends and family have made a huge difference.

Q. How important is mental health for you? Would you rate it over physical fitness?

Sara Ali Khan: To me, real wellness is all about balance—aligning mental, emotional, and physical health to create a genuinely fulfilling and harmonious life. By integrating mindful practices into our routines and prioritising mental well-being, we can build a self-care journey that feels meaningful and deeply rooted in well-being.

Q. Do you feel we speak enough about mental health and take it seriously?

Sara Ali Khan: As a society, we're finally taking mental health seriously and discussing it more openly—a huge step forward. However, there's still a long way to go. Many people continue to struggle in silence, and breaking down these barriers takes time. The Feel Good with Fiama Mental Wellbeing survey sheds light on this vital issue every year, encouraging open conversations. The brand partners with Minds Foundation to offer therapy at a subsidised rate, making mental health resources more accessible and empowering people to seek help without hesitation. I'm hopeful we're moving closer to a future where mental health is treated equally as physical fitness.

Q. How did your perception of the industry change once you became an intrinsic part of it?

Sara Ali Khan: Growing up around films, I had a certain image of the industry—a world filled with glamour, creativity, and larger-than-life stories. But stepping into it myself, I quickly realised it's also a space of immense hard work, resilience, and constant learning. From the outside, it's easy to see the glitz and success, but being on the inside reveals the intense dedication, long hours, and emotional investment into each project.

I've come to appreciate the industry as a place where passion and perseverance truly drive everything, and I've developed a deep respect for everyone involved—from the crew members working tirelessly behind the scenes to my fellow actors who constantly push their boundaries. This journey has taught me that while the spotlight can be rewarding, it's the journey, growth, and collaborative effort that really makes this profession meaningful.

Q. Being an actor has ups and downs, including rejections and failed projects. How do you take it, especially when so much competition surrounds you?

Sara Ali Khan: I've learned to see rejections and setbacks as opportunities to grow rather than failures. When a project doesn't work out, or a performance doesn't resonate as hoped, I remind myself that every experience adds value and teaches me something new. Instead of focusing on what didn't go right, I try to shift my attention to how I can

improve, how I can approach things differently. Having said that, it can be challenging, given everyone is constantly pushing to evolve and do their best.

Q. You are active on social media. While it helps reach out to your fans, it has many negatives. How do you ensure to dim the noise and prioritise yourself?

Sara Ali Khan: Social media has become a space where I can see what resonates with the audience. I truly believe we need to be open to feedback. Constructive feedback helps me understand what works and how I can improve, which I'm always striving for.

That said, trolling and harsh criticism can be challenging. It's tough to face negativity, especially when it's personal. But over time, I've learned not to let it affect my sense of self. I have come to accept that not everyone will love everything I do. Prioritising myself means staying grounded, focusing on my growth, and allowing feedback to be a tool for improvement rather than a source of self-doubt.

Q. We all know about your love and commitment to staying active physically. What do you do for your mental well-being?

Sara Ali Khan: I like to keep things balanced and enjoyable. Meditation and deep breathing help me manage stress and stay focused. Journaling is another go-to of mine—it's a great way to sort through my thoughts and feelings. I also love gratitude journaling, where I jot down things I'm thankful for each day. I carve out time for activities I love, like diving into a good book. And let's not forget the importance of connecting with friends and family—those moments of laughter and support are essential for keeping my spirits up!

Q. How do you approach physical fitness?

Sara Ali Khan: My fitness goal is to wake up every morning and dedicate at least an hour to some form of exercise. I've found that this routine helps me become a stronger and happier version of myself. There's something irreplaceable about the rush of hormones after a good workout—the satisfaction and confidence I feel are incredible. That surge of feel-good serotonin is exactly what I aim for.

Q. We would love to know what your gym day looks like.

Sara Ali Khan: To keep my workouts engaging and effective, I do friction training. It adds diversity to my routine. I incorporate a dynamic variation of squats, including sideward leg movements, half push-ups, and a Pilates-inspired version of mountain climbers. By mixing strength, cardio, and flexibility exercises, I ensure that my workouts not only enhance my physical health but also boost my overall well-being.

Q. Are you someone who sticks to a strict diet? What are the dos and don'ts you follow?

Sara Ali Khan: I think it's important to keep an eye on what I eat because it affects so much more than just my appearance—it's all about maintaining that hormonal balance, which is essential for feeling good overall. As for my diet, I've made a big shift—I've completely ditched junk food and focused on eating clean. My meals are packed with a colourful variety of fruits and veggies, lean proteins, and whole grains. Portion control has become a crucial part of my approach, too. It's all about finding that balance and enjoying what I eat while still taking care of my body.

Q. You have been remarkably candid about your weight-loss journey. How challenging is it when you have PCOS? Any tips and tricks you swear by?

Sara Ali Khan: Maintaining weight requires constant vigilance and commitment. I focus on a balanced diet and prioritise regular exercise. Some tips I swear by include keeping a food diary to track what I eat, staying hydrated, and listening to my body. Mindful eating helps me enjoy my meals without overeating. Lastly, I believe in the power of self-love and positivity, which is essential in this journey. Balancing my mental health with my physical health has been a game-changer.

Q. When not busy shooting or promoting a film, what are we most likely to find you doing?

Sara Ali Khan: You'll probably find me curled up with a good book or exploring new places. I love getting lost in a story; it's such a great way to escape and see things from different perspectives. Travelling is another passion—I enjoy discovering new cultures, trying different foods, and finding hidden gems in every city I visit. Of course, I also cherish spending time with family and friends.

Q. What does 'me-time' entail for you?

Sara Ali Khan: "Me-time" is all about finding comfort and rejuvenation, especially after a long, hectic day. On days when I have a little more time, I dive into an extended shower routine with my favourite lavender and tangerine shower gel that feels like a spa day at home. There's something truly soothing about indulging in a warm bath that washes away the stress.

Q. What is your take on fashion, and how has it evolved?

Sara Ali Khan: While I don't believe my confidence solely comes from how I look, I've found that experimenting with different silhouettes and styles genuinely boosts my spirits. Now, I see fashion as more than just comfort and authenticity; it's also about having fun and experimenting. I'll always cherish a classic white salwar kameez, but I don't want to limit myself. After all, fashion should be an enjoyable journey of self-expression, allowing me to showcase different facets of who I am.

## Guess the mind boggling price of this simple 'snake chain' Ritika Sajdeh owns

Ritika Sajdeh, married to Rohit Sharma, is known for her understated style, effortlessly blending contemporary trends with timeless classics. Ritika's preference for subtle sophistication is evident in her curated jewellery collection, which often features iconic designs that add charm to her look. Her latest standout choice—a vintage Cartier Retro snake chain necklace in 18-karat gold—reflects her penchant for high-quality craftsmanship and enduring style, encapsulating her love for refined, versatile luxury. The necklace, crafted by Cartier London circa 1945, is a collar-length snake chain with a boxed design, characterised by its sleek, fluid lines. Its incised barrel-form clasp adds a touch of detail, ensuring that the piece transitions effortlessly from daywear to evening glamour. The necklace embodies the Retro style, a movement from the 1940s-50s that celebrated bold, geometric forms and luxury materials.

This particular piece is the epitome of versatility. As Sajdeh has demonstrated, its elegant simplicity works as a standalone statement or layered with other jewellery for a contemporary twist. Craftsmanship and value

Made in the United Kingdom, the necklace reflects the



high standards of craftsmanship synonymous with Cartier. 18k yellow gold ensures durability and richness, making it an authentic investment piece. This rarity and historical significance come at a price, with the necklace valued at ₹13,36,033 (approximately \$15,750). Such pieces are not only a fashion statement but also a collector's delight, blending historical allure with modern style. Founded in 1847, Cartier is renowned for its luxurious and innovative jewellery designs.



## Baby John movie review: Bloated and incoherent, Varun Dhawan film among the worst of 2024



**Baby John Movie Review & Rating:** At a late stage in the film, Rajpal Yadav's character, who plays a side-kick to the hero, gets the best line of Baby John: comedy is serious business. It was about the only time I heard a ripple of laughter in the preview theatre. It is the kind of punchline that masala movies use to bring the house down. And it says a great deal about Baby John, which weighs in at a punishing 164 minutes, that a comic's dialogue gets more taalis than the hero's 'taqia kalaam' line: 'par main toh pehli baar aaya hoon'.

After sitting through this bloated, cacophonous, derivative, incoherent mess, you feel like like telling lead actor Varun Dhawan, who is all wrong for this kind of film — cameras can help him do the slo-mo swagger thing, but his delivery is fit only for low-fi comedies — that he needn't have bothered. Baby John bids fair to claim the title of the worst film of 2024, a year when big, starry Bollywood tanked well and truly. Actually, making masala movies is serious business too, especially when you see the baap of all masala, Pushpa 2 still reeling in the punters. That one is even longer, but there the hero feels organic, and the set-pieces have a rhythm to them, and the Sukumar-Allu Arjun duo throw everything — the kitchen sink, the dishwasher liquid, and the spuds — at us, and some of that stuff sticks. The trouble with Baby John, a remake of Vijay's 2016 hit Theri, with which Varun Dhawan, gets his big fat South masala film, is that very little sticks. The difference between good and bad masala is the novelty factor. Baby John feels like it is cobbled together from several sources: what's with this endless fas-

ination with ships and docks and containers, and heroes hanging upside down? First Pushpa, now Baby John. The relationship between cutesy Khushi (Zyanna) and Baby John (Vaun Dhawan) reminds you of Shah Rukh Khan and the little girl in Jawan, and several other father-daughter duos. The placid pace of Alappuzha in Kerala is ruffled when these two get entangled with a flesh-trading gang, run by the evil Babbar Sher (Jackie Shroff). Yes, that's his name, not kidding. There's a backstory, of course there is, when we discover that the lungi-wearing regular joe Baby John used to be a cop in his past life, with a sweetheart (Keerthy Suresh) and mother (Sheeba Chadha, Bollywood's new favourite mommy).

But all those plot points are just an excuse to get Baby John aka DCP Satya Varma to get into his stride, and pulverize the baddies, using guns, swords, fists, anything that can turn into a weapon. The director, who has assisted Atlee, chucks in as many fight sequences in as many locations as he can find. Humans are carved, burnt, trampled, body parts are strewn about, blood spurts, and who cares if we are totally desensitised by the ugliness on display? If you want to watch Jackie Shroff seriously being bad, catch him in the rollicking 2010 Aranya Kaandam, from where he began his villainous journey in Southern cinema. Here, he shakes his straggly locks, and slits throats, with a thick coat of 'haldi' on his face (ours not to ask why), and listens to a little girl, who knows he did something terrible, call him 'daadu'. Yes, that's right. How does she know? Right, we're not asking. And no, children haven't been protected in this film. Keerthy Suresh has a vital presence but zero connection with Dhawan; Gabbi, who plays a teacher-with-a-secret, gets just enough screen time to justify her presence. Before you know it, Sanya Malhotra comes and goes in a blink-and-miss part. When Varun Dhawan, channelling his inner Salman Khan for all he's worth (shirts and vests come off here and there), shares a climactic moment with the latter, very 'Pathan' style, you instantly know two things: Baby John can try all he might, but even an ageing Bhai Jaan ups the ante. And that there will be another from where this came. Groan. It feels apt that this is literally how this dismal year ends. What does Bollywood have in store for us in 2025? I'm not holding my breath. Baby John movie cast: Varun Dhawan, Zara Zyanna, Keerthy Suresh, Jackie Shroff, Wamiqa Gabbi, Sheeba Chadha, Rajpal Yadav, Sanya Malhotra

## 3 Idiots turns 15: Omi Vaidya aka Chatur gave up role in How I Met Your Mother for audition of Aamir Khan film, was pranked by Rajkumar Hirani

Omi Vaidya aka Chatur Ramalingam or Silencer remains one of the most memorable characters from Rajkumar Hirani's 3 Idiots. The American actor is also famous for his Hollywood stints in The Office, From Embers, and Shameless. Starring Aamir Khan, R Madhavan, Sharman Joshi, Boman Irani, and Kareena Kapoor Khan in lead roles, Omi takes us down the memory lane recalling his audition, first day on set, rapport with the team, and much more, as the timeless film completes 15 years of its release. In an exclusive conversation with SCREEN, he expresses, "It feels great, it doesn't feel like that long. People keep watching that film and they keep it alive. Movies keep coming and going, but not with this one. I always knew it would be a good film, but never thought it would resonate with the audience 15 years later."

The actor begins to tell that he wasn't really interested in doing 3 Idiots, but he got the offer nevertheless. "I was working with my Hollywood roles, on the development of The Office. They were looking for newcomers in America at that time. None of the roles were cast and half the script wasn't even written, they were only looking for people, and American-Indian actors at that time. I was in India for a wedding, and one of my friends in Ohio said that I should audition as she was assisting the co-writer of the film, Abhijat Joshi, at that time. She asked me to go to their office in Bombay. I said that I had watched only 2-3 Hindi films my entire life, and I don't think I have any interest in this," he shares.

Omi further adds, "I have always focused on American projects, never on Bollywood films. She said that you probably won't get it but I am going to send your The Office stuff to them, let's see what happens. Even my mother said that it's a good experience to audition for a Bollywood film. When I went, they gave me Raju Rastogi's lines. I sat there for about four hours, practicing two pages of lines. The casting director said you don't speak the language, thanks for coming in, you can go. I never auditioned for the role." However, he was called back and was given Sanjay Dutt's Lage Raho Munna Bhai's script this time. "But, they called me back again and said that we will give you a script which you can go home and practice. It's from a movie called Lage Raho Munna Bhai. I hadn't watched the movie, I knew nothing about it. But, the script was about Sanjay Dutt talking about injustice. I told them that I won't be able to do justice to it, he is doing it so seriously. I'll just have fun, like I don't know what he is saying. I knew I won't get the role and I was doing it for fun, so I was extremely confident in that audition. I was purposefully making mistakes. They were laughing, I left and went back to America, didn't think about it at all," he tells us.

The 42-year-old had to decline a great offer in a famous Hollywood series to go for the next round of auditions. "Then, I almost got this role for How I met Your Mother. But, these guys also said that we liked your audition. That video has gone around and they all loved me, Aamir was cast by then. They asked me to come to New Mexico for another audition, I had to give up that very good call for HIMYM. After the audition, Raju called and said, 'You are getting better at Hindi, don't do better. We want your Hindi to be weak. Keep yourself away from it, don't learn it,'" Omi reveals. The actor finally decided to take up the role, going against his American agents. "I did many stereotypical roles in my Hollywood projects, I didn't read the script but I knew it was going to be a decent role, so I thought I'll do one Bollywood film in my life and this will be that. All my American agents thought that it was a terrible idea to break my career here and do that movie. I lost out on a lot of stuff here because of that, it was sort of the big Indian wave of projects here," he shares, adding, "But, I really enjoyed doing that film. I had to lose weight, gain weight, shave my head so that I could look old, and many other adjustments to be made. I saw the script three days before the shoot. They did that on purpose because they wanted me to be raw with the language."

Ask him about the shooting of Silencer's famous Chamatkar (Balatkar) speech scene in the college, when he was the wrong one on stage, and he replies, "I never



**Omi Vaidya aka Chatur Ramalingam goes down the memory lane while talking about Rajkumar Hirani's 3 Idiots, as it clocks 15 years of its release**

see the comedy in it, I even never tried to play up the comedy in the film. For me, it was just a tragic character that can't speak Hindi well, that's it. If he spoke Hindi properly, I don't think he would be funny. When I saw the speech, I only thought about the lens of the character. For me, it's a wonderful speech that he has written and he doesn't know that the words have been changed. It's his chance to shine, that's how I read the script! However, he goes on to reveal that he always knew the meaning of the speech. "I speak Marathi, it was very easy to understand. But, my character doesn't know it. There is a small rumour that I don't know what I was saying, but that's not true." He continues addressing the jokes around it — "Memes are a part of the culture now and that's cool. I live in America so I never really come across these things, but people do send it to me sometimes. I see them and it makes me feel happy about the potency of Chatur and how he is all over the place."

Omi also shares that the director Rajkumar Hirani pulled off a hilarious prank on him, on the first day of shooting 3 Idiots. "We were shooting the ragging scene on first day of shoot. I am a really dedicated actor, I trust my director. They said that I will wear the American flag underwear, but when it was time to shoot, they brought in a shiny gold thing. I was already uncomfortable wearing so little clothing and now it was a thong, but I wanted to be the best actor for my director," he tells us. The actor laughs and continues, "I just talked to Rajkumar and said, 'I am not sure if it's good for the character, I think the American one is a better idea'. He was like, 'Oh no, that was just a joke. It's funny that you were actually going to wear it'. It was Raju's prank and everyone apparently knew about it."

Omi opens up and says, "I have worked with a lot of directors and they seem very serious, stressed and focused while shooting. But with him, he was just so effortless. He seemed as if he was so prepared that he was able to relax. For making something so timeless, it seemed like an uncle who is having a good time, but very present. Chatting and having some tea, he even used to play badminton with Aamir in the morning. He also trusted his characters like he has cast the best people, he lets them do their work." How was the experience of working with the perfectionist Aamir Khan? Calling him a "great actor", he reveals that he never shied away from giving his suggestions. "Of all the actors, he was the one who gave the most suggestions. When we did rehearsals, he would have the most questions. That was great to have somebody so involved, not only with his role, with other's roles as well. He didn't want to change anything, but just to make the whole thing better. Many times, his suggestions weren't used, other times they were very beneficial. He didn't have any issue with them not going through, there was no ego involved. He was just interested in making sure that the movie came out well," he ends.

## Barroz movie review: Can't blame the kids if they feel offended by Mohanlal's film for children



**Barroz movie review:** Mohanlal creates the impression that his creativity knows no bounds and there are moments where the visual marvel he aimed for comes through. Barroz movie review: Mohanlal creates the impression that his creativity knows no bounds and there are moments where the visual marvel he aimed for comes through.

**Barroz movie review:** No matter how much you try to downplay a project or urge audiences to keep their expectations in check, if you are an artist with a proven track record, people will have high hopes. It's only natural — and the only way to avoid it is by consistently producing subpar work. Hence, it is natural for people to be excited about the directorial debut of Mohanlal, a towering figure in Indian cinema for over four decades and a longstanding icon of the Malayalam film industry, no matter what the genre is. At the same time, his decision to make his debut with a children's fantasy film, and that too in 3D with heavy visual effects, rather than a surefire mass masala entertainer aimed at drawing larger audiences, is undeniably a bold choice. However, although the Mohanlal film, based on Jijo Punnoose's novel Barroz: Guardian of D'Gama's Treasure, is ambitious in scope, it is far from good.

Centring on Barroz, a ghost who has been guarding da Gama's treasure in Goa for 400 years, waiting for its rightful heir so that he can finally be freed from his duties, the movie opens with a voiceover narration by Malayalam megastar Mammooty. Mohanlal wastes no time introducing the titular character (played by himself) along with his voodoo doll companion. The intro sequence, set in 1633 AD, briefly establishes the backstories of the characters and their purposes, while also showing Barroz fending off a group of looters attempting to steal the treasure.

The narrative then transitions to the present day where 13-year-old Isabella da Gama (Maya Rao West) arrives in Goa with her father, who is gearing up to bid on the Gama palace at an auction, intending to convert it into a casino. Barroz soon discovers that Isabella is the rightful heir to the treasure he has protected for centuries. He begins trying to connect with her, inform her about the inheritance and convince her to believe in its truth. However, their initial encounters are fraught with misunderstanding, complicating things. Meanwhile, a couple of others conspire to steal the treasure and Barroz must ensure their plans are thwarted, which is his duty. The rest of the movie follows Barroz and Isabella's intertwined journeys as they face their respective challenges.

From the very beginning, Mohanlal creates the impression that his creativity knows no bounds and there are mo-

## Vivek Oberoi recalls being 'shattered' after 'childhood sweetheart' died of cancer at 17: 'I refused to accept she was gone'

Vivek Oberoi has often spoken openly about overcoming heartbreaks and enduring emotional struggles before meeting and marrying his wife, Priyanka Alva Oberoi. In a recent interaction, the Saathiya actor shared a deeply personal story about a challenging phase early in his adult life when he lost his childhood sweetheart to cancer.

Speaking to MensXP, Vivek recalled his love story with his "childhood sweetheart" and shared that they started "dating" each other in the early teens. He shared that he had already planned their life but when she was diagnosed with cancer at 17, it left him shaken. "Very early in my life, my childhood sweetheart—she was 12, I was 13, and we were dating. We entered a relationship when I was 18, and she was 17. I thought, 'This is it. She's the one.' I envisioned us going to college together, getting married, and having kids. I had my life planned out in my mind," he shared. Vivek recounted how her untimely death left him heartbroken. "I kept trying to call her, but she wasn't answering. She had mentioned earlier that she wasn't feeling well, and I thought it was just a cold. When I couldn't reach her or her family, I called her cousin, who told me she was in the hospital. I rushed there. We had been in a relationship for 5-6 years, and she was the girl of my dreams. Then I found out she was in the final stage of acute lymphoblastic leukemia. It was a complete shock. Despite everything we tried, she passed away within two months. I was broken and shattered."

He added, "Her death affected me so deeply that, for

## 'Anil Kapoor didn't bathe for 2-3 days after shooting for his first film, would do pull-ups to increase his height': Boney Kapoor

Producer Boney Kapoor recently underwent hair transplant and in a chat to speak about his transformation, the producer shared that when he was younger, he often wondered why he didn't become an actor. Boney then went on to speak about his brother, actor Anil Kapoor, and his passion for acting and how he sincerely worked towards becoming an actor. He shared an anecdote where he recalled that when a young Anil got his first opportunity as an actor, he didn't bathe for 2-3 days because he didn't want to wash off his make up. Boney shared with ABP, "Anil always wanted to become an actor, when he was in school he played the role of Shashi Kapoor's child version, he was so passionate at that time that he didn't bathe for 2-3 days. He didn't want the makeup to come off so that everyone would come to know that he had become an actor." Boney further added, "He struggled a lot, played a role in Ek Baar Kaho where he

ments where the visual marvel he aimed for comes through, like the animated underwater song "Bambooziya" and the scenes featuring the voodoo doll. However, it also becomes clear from the outset that he lacks a firm grasp of filmmaking, as Barroz unfolds as a series of disjointed scenes with no consistent rhythm or cohesion. The narrative jumps from one poorly executed moment to the next and even B Ajithkumar's editing fails to salvage the disjointed storytelling. While Santhosh Raman's art direction is exquisite and intricately detailed, often leaving viewers in awe of the visuals, this is, unfortunately, one of the film's few redeeming qualities. The writing of Barroz is so lacklustre that no moment truly stands out, with much of the content feeling like filler. Despite featuring only a handful of characters, none, including Barroz himself, are developed or their dynamics explored in any meaningful way.

Watch Barroz trailer here: In the pursuit of fantastical visuals, it seems that Mohanlal and his team overlooked the necessity of a cohesive script to tie everything together. It's no surprise, then, that Jijo, who initially penned Barroz, distanced himself from the project, while reportedly stating that Mohanlal and TK Rajeev Kumar, credited as the creative head, reshaped the story and screenplay. While the dialogues occasionally rise above mediocrity, they fail to sync with the sluggish scenes, making the two elements feel like they belong to entirely different projects.

Although it's refreshing to see Mohanlal step out of his comfort zone and showcase his undeniable screen presence, the weak writing leaves little room for him to shine as an actor and his amateurish direction, only worsens the film's issues, turning what could have been a bold experiment into a missed opportunity. While Santosh Sivan's cinematography is impressive at quite a few junctures and the makers have utilised 3D effectively to provide a decent visual experience, the lack of emotional depth in the narrative prevents these elements from being truly enjoyable. Moreover, the subpar performances by most of the cast only add to the frustration, leaving viewers exasperated. The film also ventures into problematic territory by reinforcing harmful stereotypes, associating indigenous people with black magic and portraying them as antagonists, which is both reductive and insensitive. Although the music and its placement are well-done, Mohanlal occasionally overuses it, which can become rather off-putting. Barroz is undoubtedly a film designed for actual children and the child in each adult. While it might captivate infants who are just beginning to explore the wonders of the world and distinguish shapes and objects, expecting older children to be similarly enthralled by what Barroz has offered is unrealistic — especially in an era where they have instant access to far more imaginative and compelling content from around the globe. In the 2005 Mohanlal-starrer Udayananu Tharam, "Superstar" Saroj Kumar (Sreenivasan), after facing another major setback at the box office, tells his associate Pachalam Bhasi (Jagathy Sreekumar), "I also know how to make a movie directed, produced and acted by me." Bhasi quickly responds, "Of all the things you just said, forget direction — that's something only intelligent people can do." While this is an exaggeration, direction does require some preparation, determination and dedication — qualities that, unfortunately, Mohanlal hasn't shown here. If he were to take on another project in the future, let's hope he abandons his habit of approaching things unprepared, relying solely on gut instincts and intuition, as these aren't always the best approach.



a long time, I would see her in random people walking by, even though I was there at her cremation. I had closure, but I refused to accept that she was gone. What helped me was working with children battling cancer." Vivek explained how this painful experience reshaped his outlook on life and relationships and since then, he made it a point to cherish every moment with his loved ones. In 2010, Vivek married Priyanka Alva. The couple is now parents to two children—Vivaan Veer and Ameya Nirvana—and they currently reside in Dubai.



played a sidekick of the second hero. He did films in Telugu and Kannada, he starred in Mani Ratnam's first film. He has been hardworking, during one Ramesh Sippy film, Anil shaved his entire chest hair to look like a 16-year-old.



## Sumit Antil – ‘My hands trembled when I came near a javelin... injury, expectations weighed me down’



GNS News Agency, Dec 30

As a hectic year of sports gallops to the finish line, India's top athletes pause and reflect; tell the stories of their podium highs, battered bodies and shattered dreams. In a special series, some look back with fondness, a few others with regrets. But all with the hope – and wish – of a better 2025. In this piece, SUMIT ANTIL talks about his 2024. About 20-25 days before the all-important Para World Championships in May this year, I was recovering from a back injury and it was so terrible that I was scared of even holding a javelin.

My hands trembled at the thought of holding it. I was in pain when I held it and it hurt even more when I threw it. You can imagine how frustrated I was. You train for the entire Paralympic cycle and suddenly, you're afraid of holding the equipment that brought you fame and laurels. When you have an injury, you lose the support of those muscles in your throw. That load moves to some other muscle and it disturbs your technique. What I was more afraid of was the injury reoccurring. The simple thought of the pain that the injury caused was enough to scare me. I guess that's why my hands trembled when I came near a javelin. This year was an important one since I had to defend my titles at both the Para World Championships and the Paralympics, and that was on my mind. People had high expectations from me, and I didn't want to let them down. In a way, it put a lot of pressure on me. I had a great support system but this injury was weighing me down. It became more of a mental battle. That's when I knew I had to do something to improve my thought process and be ready for competitions.

And so, I started talking only to a limited number of people. I met only those who motivated me. That was really important. I would even watch my old videos to remind myself that I am a Paralympic champion. It really motivated

me. When I changed my surroundings, I didn't feel that I was injured. Suddenly, I became more confident. It definitely changed me as a person too.

When I went to the Paralympics for the first time in 2021, I didn't feel the pressure as much as I did this year. I did feel anxious then but when you go to a big competition as a defending champion, there's a lot of added pressure. Everyone makes you feel that you are the defending champion. There are articles written about you and more than anything, you don't want to disappoint people. More than anything, you don't want to disappoint your team too. When I entered the ground, they announced my name and followed it with 'defending champion'. Fortunately, instead of making me nervous, it completely freed me. I stopped thinking too much, just focused on what I had trained for, and was able to concentrate. It was like everything around me went silent. I executed the first throw of 69.11m, breaking my Tokyo record (68.55m). The second one was even better – 70.59m. When the javelin flew out of my hand, I knew it was a special throw. I was so happy to defend the gold medal and felt a huge relief because of the expectations on my shoulders. For a para-athlete, it's difficult physically and mentally as it is but going through the journey from the gold at the World Para Championships to the gold at the Paralympics took a lot out of me. Everything was forgotten once I reached home from Paris though. There were celebrations in my village and a lot of fanfare.

The actual celebrations though were with my friends. We enjoy peace and just chat about mundane things. What's more important is that they don't treat me differently. To have friends who treat you like a normal person and not a champion is also a blessing which I'm very grateful for. The job may have been done for this year but there's a lot more I want to achieve in my career. 2025 is going to be very exciting because Delhi is going to host the World Para Championships. It's the only major competition and it's happening in my own country. Now, I'm not at all going to be intimidated by the 'defending champion' tag. I'm going to train extremely hard because I want to have a throw that will break all records and be remembered for many years to come. After a milestone year, Sumit Antil has a chance to make 2025 a special one given he'll compete twice on home soil, including at the World Championships. India's ambition of become a sporting destination for the next decade begins with the Para-Athletics World Championships in New Delhi. In front of the home crowd, Antil will have an opportunity to do something he couldn't at the Paris Paralympics – to better his own world record. Before the Worlds, he'll compete in New Delhi in March during a Grand Prix tournament in New Delhi, which will act as a test event.

## Bumrah equals Ashwin's record for rating points in ICC Ranking for Bowlers



GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah got a huge boost on the eve of the Boxing Day Test when he achieved the joint-highest rating ever by an Indian player, equalling the record held by spinner Ravichandran Ashwin in the ICC Ranking for Bowlers. The quick gained 14 rating points following his 9/94 in the drawn third Test at Brisbane, equalling Ashwin's highest-ever 904 rating

points and consolidating his position at the top of the rankings.

Bumrah has a chance to better Ashwin's rating points, which the now-retired off-spinner achieved in December 2016, when the fourth match of the Border-Gavaskar Test begins at the MCG on Thursday, December 26, 2024. South Africa's Kagiso Rabada (856) and Australia's Josh Hazlewood (852) are trailing the Indian pacer at the second and third place respectively. Charismatic Australian batter Travis Head's stellar run in the ongoing series against India helped him climb to fourth spot (825 rating points) in the Test Ranking for Batters. He is still behind the England duo of Joe Root (895) and Harry Brook (876), and former New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson (867). Head smashed a scintillating 152 at the Gabba to follow up his century in the second Test at Adelaide. Compatriot Steve Smith's century at the Gabba got him into the top-10 once again. Among all-rounders, India's Ravindra Jadeja continues to lead the lead the chart with 424 rating points, while Australia skipper Pat Cummins earned his place back in the top-10, following his four wickets and 42 runs in the third Test at Gabba.

## There's been a lapse in filing nominations, may be on my part: Manu Bhaker on Khel Ratna furore



GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Paris Olympics' double bronze-medallist Manu Bhaker on Tuesday (December 24, 2024) admitted that "there has been a lapse may be on my part" while filing nominations for this year's National Sports Awards amid a raging controversy over her exclusion from the list of Khel Ratna awardees. A day after the sports ministry had to step in to do damage control after the awards selection committee shockingly did not recommend her name, the

22-year-old pistol ace took to social media to clarify her position. "With regards to ongoing issue for my nomination for the most prestigious Khel Ratna award -- I would like to state that as an athlete my role is to play and perform for my country. Jaspal Rana slams Sports Ministry, NRAI for ignoring Manu's credentials for Khel Ratna award" I believe there has been a lapse, maybe on my part while filing for the nomination which is being corrected," Bhaker wrote on X. Bhaker said her aim is to perform for the country whether she gets an award or not. "Awards and recognition keeps me motivated but are not my goal," she asserted. "Irrespective of the award I shall remain motivated to win more medals for my country. It is a request to everyone, please do not speculate on this," she said. This was after her personal Jaspal Rana and father Ramkishan Bhaker lambasted the sports ministry and the selection committee for overlooking her despite her monumental achievements. The youngster is the first athlete from independent India to win two medals in a single edition of the Olympics. She won her bronze medals in the 10m air pistol individual and 10m air pistol mixed team (with Sarabjot Singh) events in Paris.

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## Sam Konstas on Virat Kohli's shoulder charge: 'It happens, it's cricket'

Darren Berry, former Australia first-class cricketer has slammed Virat Kohli for his deliberate shoulder-barging to 19-year-old debutant Sam Konstas, who idolizes the former India captain. "Such a shame as the kid absolutely idolizes Kohli. Never meet your hero," Berry wrote on X. If the ICC don't give Virat a holiday with his family in Sydney then we might as well pack up our bat and ball and go home. Changed his line and showed the world the kid has rattled him & his team. Such a shame as the kid absolutely idolizes Kohli.

Sam Konstas battered Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammad Siraj around the Melbourne Cricket Ground. After the end of the 10th over, when players were changing ends, Virat Kohli picked up the cricket ball and appeared to walk directly to Konstas who was heading toward batting partner Usman Khawaja and collided shoulder to shoulder as he walked past Konstas.

Konstas and former India captain Kohli exchanged words after the collision and Kohli started walking back towards Konstas. Australia batter Usman Khawaja hurried to stand between the pair, patting Konstas on the arm and then putting a friendly arm around the shoulder of 36-year-old Kohli in a bid to calm the situation. Konstas dominated the opening session before getting out to Ravindra Jadeja for a daring 60 off 65 deliveries in a memorable debut.

What did Konstas say?

While talking to 7 Cricket at the lunch break, the teenager opened up about the clash with his childhood hero. "Virat Kohli is your favourite player in the world and all of a sudden you are in the thick of battle out there, he throws a little shoulder. What was being said out there," asked Trent Copeland. Konstas replied: "I think the emotions got to both of us. I didn't quite realise, I was doing my gloves. And then a little shoulder charge. But it happens, it's cricket." On his debut on his memorable debut, the youngster said it is still a bit of a blur to him but he enjoyed his stay in the middle. Konstas, Sam, AUS vs IND Australia's Sam Konstas watches the ball after playing shot during play on the first day of the fourth cricket test between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne, Australia.



lia. (AP) "I think it was a bit of a blur, but a dream come true. Look at the turnout, full stadium," he said. "But yeah, the boys have been very welcoming, Pat Cummins, and it feels like home." Konstas also revealed what he was told by the captain Pat Cummins before he made his debut. "I think just being fearless, Cummins was telling me. We had our Christmas lunch yesterday, seeing the kids enjoy it, and yeah, you can tell it's a really family-united group, so yeah, very stoked," he said. On the ramp shots

Earlier, Konstas looked nervous as he played and missed four times in the opening over of the match, bowled by Jasprit Bumrah. But in a sign of the bravery of youth, Konstas played three audacious reverse scoops over slips in Bumrah's fourth over, hitting two fours and a six.

"It wasn't a plan yesterday. I was going to play good cricket shots, but Bumrah is obviously a world-class bowler, and yeah, just trying to put pressure on him, trying to change his tactics was the key thing," he said. After Konstas missed the first ramp shot, there was a smile on the face of veteran opener Usman Khawaja at the non-striker end. "Oh, he's a legend. He's very calm to bat with, and he said just to keep backing myself, so love batting with Uzi, great mentor, and yeah, great leader," said Konstas on Khawaja's reaction. The MCG crowd Konstas also revealed what he felt after acknowledging the crowd people at the MCG. "I actually had goosebumps when I raised my bat. Everyone was supporting me, so yeah, great atmosphere here," he said.

## Will Virat Kohli be sanctioned and suspended for Sydney Test by Andy Pycroft, the match referee for shoulder barging Sam Konstas?

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Konstas, Kohli, ICC, Boxing Day Test, MCG India's Virat Kohli, right, talks to Australia's Sam Konstas, second left, as Australia's Usman Khawaja, looks on during play on the first day of the fourth cricket test between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne, Australia. (AP) It looked bad. Virat Kohli, a former captain, cut across from his initial position on the leg side of play, with the ball in his hand, walked beside the pitch where Sam Konstas was returning back from the other end. And the shoulder barge happened. Konstas and Kohli would exchange words, before Usman Khawaja came in with a smile and put a hand over Kohli's shoulders.

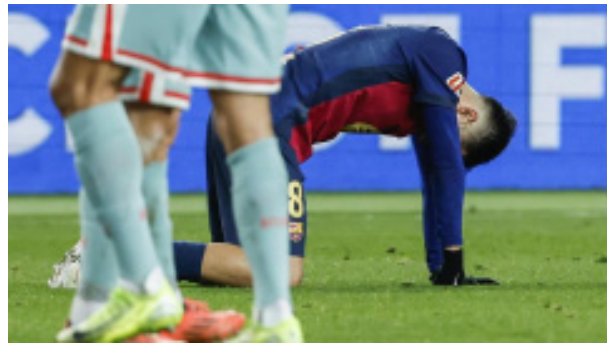
It comes under Law 2.12: Inappropriate physical contact with a Player, Player Support Personnel, Umpire, Match Referee or any other person (including a spectator) during an International Match. And it continues, thus: "Note: Any form of inappropriate physical contact is prohibited in cricket. Without limitation, Players will breach this regulation if they deliberately, recklessly and/or negligently walk or run into or shoulder another Player or Umpire. When assessing the seriousness of the breach, the following factors (without limitation) shall be taken into account: (i) the context of the particular situation, including, without limitation, whether the contact was deliberate (i.e. intentional), reckless, negligent, and/or avoidable; (ii) the force of the contact; (iii) any resulting injury to the person with whom contact was made; and (iv) the person with whom contact was made. Level 1? (Level 1 is available only in the case of contact with Players, Player Support ...)" It will come down the interpretation of the match referee Andy Pycroft, former Zimbabwean player. If Pycroft deems the Konstas-Kohli contact to be a Level Two offence against either player, that player would receive three or four demerit points. Four points can trigger a suspension for the next Test match in Sydney. A Level One offence would only result in some sort of a match fee fine.

Has Kohli done it before?

## Barcelona disappointed after Atletico loss but life goes on, says coach Flick

GNS News Agency, Dec 30

Barcelona extended their poor run of form and slipped off the top of La Liga by losing 2-1 at home to Atletico Madrid on Saturday (December 22, 2024) but coach Hansi Flick urged his side to move on and come back stronger after the winter break. Barca have now gone three games without a La Liga win having picked up five points out of a possible 21, suffering defeats by Leganes and Las Palmas in their previous two home games. They are three points behind Atletico having played a game more. Despite their first home defeat against Atletico in 18 years, Flick said they put on a good performance and expected the winter break to help them regain their early season form. "Today it was unbelievable how we played. Maybe this break came at the right time. I appreciate how we played. But we have to learn from these things. Losing nine points is not normal and we have to work on it," Flick told reporters. "The points lost against Las Palmas and Leganes are in the past. We will show after the break how strong we are. We are very disappointed with the



defeat, but life goes on." In spite of their latest setbacks, the former Bayern Munich coach said he was proud of his young team and will work to restore their confidence. "When I drive at 0630 to go to training I am happy because I can train with these players. Now there is not a good atmosphere in the dressing room, but that's football. We will be back for sure," he said.