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#### TGSRTC ready to handle rush during Sankranti festival

the heavy demand for transport facilities during Sankranti festival. In addition to running 6,432 special buses for the festival, the RTC has made arrangements for passengers to have access to additional travel options between January 10 and 12, when the rush will be at its peak. Arrangements are also in place to ensure that the travellers have access to buses in the return journey from January 19 and 20. The special buses will be operated from MGBS, JBS, Uppal, Aramgarh, LB Nagar, KPHB, Bowenpally, Gachibowli, etc.

#### Gold price rises by Rs 300 to touch Rs 80,300 per 10 gms, Silver touches Rs 93,000 per kg

New Delhi: Gold price climbed Rs 300 for a third consecutive day to touch the high of Rs 80,300 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid strong global cues, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Traders said the precious metal surged, following news that People's Bank of China (PBoC) increased its reserves for the second consecutive month. In the previous session, the yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity ended at Rs 80,000 per 10 grams. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity rose Rs 300 to Rs 79,900 per 10 grams on Thursday. Silver rose by Rs 500 to Rs 93,000 per kg from the previous close of Rs 92,500 per kg on Wednesday.

#### CM Revanth Reddy **Extends Greetings on** Pravasi Bharatiya Divas



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Hyderabad: Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy extended warm wishes to Indians across the globe on the occasion of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas. In his message, the Chief Minister emphasized the significant role of the overseas Indian community in national development and underscored their essential participation in the Telangana Rising initiative. Highlighting the historical significance of the day, he recalled that January 9 marks the return of Mahatma Gandhi to India in 1915, after earning acclaim as a lawyer in South Africa. Gandhi's decision to dedicate himself to the service of his countrymen and the struggle for independence is a source of pride for all Indians, he noted.

The Chief Minister stated that Telangana offers an excellent platform for investments and innovative ideas from Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). He also mentioned the state government's commitment to the welfare of Gulf-based workers and others through initiatives like the "Pravasi Prajavani" program, which addresses their concerns effectively. Revanth Reddy reiterated that the Telangana government values the contributions of NRIs and aims to strengthen ties with the diaspora to drive progress and pros-

#### AP Govt Announces Ex-Gratia for Victims of Tirupati Stampede



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

The Andhra Pradesh government has responded to the tragic stampede that occurred during the Vaikuntha Ekadashi celebrations, announcing an ex-gratia payment of Rs. 25 lakh for each family affected by the incident. Revenue Minister Anagani Satyaprasad made the announcement, emphasizing the government's commitment to providing better medical services for the injured. In a show of solidarity, Ministers Anagani Satyaprasad, Anita, Parthasarathy, and Anam Ramanayana Reddy visited the family members of the deceased at Ruia Hospital, followed by a visit to injured individuals receiving care at SWIMS Hospital. The ministers reassured the victims that the government is dedicated to their welfare.

Home Minister Anita announced that authorities are investigating the possibility of a conspiracy relating to the stampede, promising strict action against those found responsible for the tragedy. She also warned of potential consequences for individuals whose negligence may have contributed to the chaos. Minister Anam Rama Narayana Reddy confirmed that the bodies of the deceased would be transported to their native places following the completion of postmortems. He also stated that efforts are underway to ensure the best possible treatment for the injured.

The stampede, which resulted in the deaths of six people and caused numerous injuries, occurred at the token centers set up for devotees wishing to participate in the

#### Game Changer Ticket Rates Under Scrutiny in Telangana High Court

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Game Changer Ticket Rates Under Scrutiny in Telangana High CourtThe Telangana High Court on Wednesday took up the issue of ticket pricing, additional shows, show timings, and audience turnout for Ram Charan's much-anticipated film Game Changer. The court is set to issue directives on the matter tomorrow

The case, which highlights concerns over the hike in ticket prices, was brought before the court amid growing public attention. The High Court has decided to club the hearing of this case with the ongoing Pushpa-2 proceedings, which also deal with similar concerns regarding ticket rates and cinema regulations.

### PM Modi flags off Pravasi Bharatiya Express, a special tourist train for NRIs

GNS News Agency

Minister

Narendra Modi on Thursday remotely flagged off the inaugural journey of the Pravasi Bharatiya Express, a special tourist train for the Indian diaspora. The train will travel to various tourism and religious destinations across India over three weeks. This initiative is part of the Pravasi Teertha Darshan Yojana of the Ministry of External Affairs.The Pravasi Bharatiya Express is a special state-of-the-art tourist train, exclusively designed and built for the Indian diaspora, and that too for the age group between 45 and 65 years. Starting from its launch day, January 9, the train will travel to multiple destinations across the na-



tion, including prominent tourist and religious places, for three weeks. The date for flagging off the special train has also been deliberately chosen by the Modi-led government. The date January 9, 2025, commemorates the return of Mahatma Gandhi from South Africa to India on this date in the year 1915. The departure of the

way Station in New Delhi and the route is - New Delhi - Ayodhya - Patna-Gaya - Varanasi Maĥabalipuram Rameswaram - Madurai -Kochi - Goa - Ekta Nagar (Kevadia) - Ajmer - Pushkar - Agra. The train can accommodate passengers. To connect the Indian diaspora to their roots, this tour is being

istry of External Affairs in collaboration with the Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation

Indian Embassies across the world had invited applications from participants, giving a preference to Persons of Indian Origins (PIOs) belonging to the low-income category who would otherwise not be able to afford to visit India on their own.A statement of the ministry said that it will bear all expenses for the aforesaid conducted train tour besides also bearing 90 per cent of the return airfares for the eligible people from their countries of origin to India. The participants need to bear only 10 per cent of their return airfares. The travellers will be accommodated at 4-star or similar category hotels

#### Governor Approves Telangana's "Bhoo Bharati" Act



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

The Telangana government's "Bhoo Bharati" Act, aimed at providing a permanent solution to land-related issues, has received approval from Governor Jishnu Dev Varma. The bill was introduced in the Assembly on December 18, 2024, by Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy. Following discussions in the Legislative Assembly on December 20 and the Legislative Council on December 21, the bill was passed and subsequently sent to the Governor's office for approval.

Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy expressed his gratitude to all those who contributed to the formulation of the Act. He stated that the government would take steps to implement the law at the earliest to ensure improved revenue services for the people of Telangana. He also instructed officials to focus on framing guidelines and policies related to the Act.On Thursday, Revenue Department Principal Secretary Naveen Mittal handed over a copy of the Governor-approved Bhoo Bharati Act to Minister Srinivas Reddy at the Secretariat. The government is expected to roll out the necessary measures for the Act's implementa-

#### Democracy ingrained in our lives: PM Modi at PBD convention



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention on Thursday in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, and commended the Indian diaspora for serving as the nation's "ambassadors to the world."Highlighting the significance of India's democratic ethos, he remarked, "India is not just the 'mother of democracy, but democracy is ingrained in our way of life. "PM Modi also remotely flagged off the inaugural journey of the Pravasi Bharatiya Express, a special tourist train under the Pravasi Teertha Darshan Yojana. Departing from Nizamuddin Railway Station in Delhi, the train will take Indian diaspora members to various religious and tourist destinations across the country over three weeks. The event was attended by External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar, Odisha Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Union Ministers Dharmendra Pradhan, and Ashwini Vaishnaw, among other dignitaries. It began with a performance by three-time Grammy Award winner Ricky Kej.EAM Jaishankar emphasised that hosting the PBD in Odisha reflects the Modi government's "Poorvudaya" policy, showcasing the development and cultural richness of eastern India. Welcoming the Indian diaspora, PM Modi said, "In this sacred land of Lord Jagannath and Lord Lingaraj, I wel-

come the Indian diaspora from across the world. This is a time of vibrant festivals in India, from the upcoming Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj to Makarsankranti, Lohri, Pongal, and Magh Bihu. "January 9 also holds historical significance as it marks the day Mahatma Gandhi returned to India in 1915 after a long stay abroad. Your presence here adds to the festive spirit of this occasion," he said. The Prime Minister acknowledged the contributions of former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee in establishing the PBD, which has evolved into a vital platform to strengthen bonds between India and its diaspora. "Together, we celebrate India, Indian-ness, our culture, progress, and our roots," he said.Highlighting Odisha's heritage, PM Modi said, "This land reflects India's rich legacy, with sites like the Udayagiri and Khandagiri caves, the Konark Temple, and ancient ports such as Tamralipti and Manikpatna. These treasures evoke immense pride. "Expressing gratitude to the diaspora, he added, "I have always considered diaspora members as our nation's ambassadors. The love and respect I receive from you worldwide remain unforgettable. "PM Modi underscored the role of Indian values in global respect for the diaspora."In the last ten years, I met several leaders of the country. Every leader of the world lauds the Indian diaspora. One of the main reasons for this is the social values, that you embed in the societies of the world. We are not just the 'mother of democracy,' but democracy is a part of our life; our way of living. We do not have to teach diversity, but our life goes along with diversity," he said. During the event, PM Modi will also inaugurate four exhibitions: Vishwaroop Ram: The Universal Legacy of Ramayana by ICCR; Diaspora's Contribution to Technology by MEA; Bharat Bharatiya: Swadesh Pardes - Abhilekhiye Virasat by the National Archives of India; and Heritage and Culture of Odisha by the Odisha government. He also visited promotional stalls showcasing contributions by Union Ministries and state governments. The convention featured a virtual address by Chief Guest Christine Carla Kangaloo, President of the

### Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. KTR Appears Before ACB in Formula E



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

BRS leader and former minister K. T. Rama Rao (KTR) appeared before the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) today for questioning in the ongoing Formula E car race controversy. The ACB investigation into the case lasted for over seven hours, with KTR cooperating fully throughout the process.After the lengthy interrogation, KTR addressed the media, stating that he had informed the ACB officials that the case was baseless. He reiterated that he had provided all the information he knew to the authorities and would be willing to appear again for any future inquiries. KTR also mentioned that he was questioned about certain issues raised by Revanth Reddy, clarifying that he had answered all questions and fully cooperated with the investigation. He also expressed doubts about the corruption allegations, asking where the evidence of money transfers or corruption was in the case. During the

press interaction, KTR further questioned the police's fear of the media, wondering why such an attitude was being displayed. Meanwhile, after completing the questioning, KTR was seen leaving the ACB office and was expected to head towards Telangana Bhavan. As he made his way out, BRS party leaders and supporters gathered in large numbers near Banjara Hills Road Number 12, chanting slogans in opposition to Revanth Reddy's stance.KTR's legal counsel, Ramachandra Rao, was also present during the questioning. Several key aspects of the case were reportedly discussed, with KTR providing detailed responses on the matter.

#### Kejriwal to fight polls only from New Delhi; shoots down BJP's claim



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Quashing BJP leaders' claims that he would contest the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections from a second seat out of fear of losing from New Delhi, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday (January 9, 2025) said he will contest the polls from one seat only.Mr. Kejriwal also asserted that the Assembly polls are not an INDA bloc affair as there is a direct contest between the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Delhi. A three-time sitting MLA from New Delhi since 2013, Mr. Kejriwal this time is locked in an intense triangular contest against the sons of two former Chief Ministers of Delhi. While the BJP has fielded former Chief Minister Sahib Singh Verma's son Parvesh Verma, Congress has given ticket to Sandeep Dikshit whose mother Sheila Dikshit was a three-term Chief Minister of Delhi."I am contesting one seat only," Mr. Kejriwal said at a press conference when asked about BJP's claims that he was going to fight from a second seat out of fear of losing from New Delhi. The AAP leader's clarification came after BJP's IT cell chief Amit Malviya claimed in a post on X that fearing his imminent defeat from New Delhi, Mr. Kejriwal is making "baseless allegations" about voter list in his constituency and "talking" about contesting from two seats. The AAP leaders have accused the BJP of filing applications in bulk from different constituencies, including New Delhi, for the deletion of thousands of AAP supporters' names from the electoral roll. At the presser, Mr. Kejriwal said a meeting of AAP leaders with officials of the Election Commission is due Thursday (January 9, 2025) evening, in which all the issues, including deletion of voters' names, will be discussed. The AAP supremo also thanked INDIA bloc members, including the Samajwadi Party, Trinamool Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT), for extending support to AAP for the Assembly elections.

#### BJP may pitch for free power in its manifesto

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

New Delhi: Amidst the Aam Aadmi Party offering freebies one by one ahead of the February 5 voting for Delhi Assembly polls, and Congress already announcing a Rs 2,500 monthly benefit for women to counter AAP's increasing welfare schemes, the BJP is also likely to come out with sops and freebies to counter them. The Bharatiya Janata Party is prepared to match these offers with new initiatives aimed at appealing to a wider section of Delhi's electorate. One of the key proposals the BJP is likely to introduce is a free electricity scheme, sources said. The

party is likely to announce that Delhi consumers will receive up to 300 units of electricity free of charge each month, sources added. The AAP-led Delhi government currently provides free electricity for up to 200 units a month. Under the existing free electricity scheme, the Delhi government provides free electricity to consumers with a monthly consumption of 200 units. Whereas, a 50 per cent subsidy is given to people with a consumption of 201-400 units of electricity. In a bid to further win over religious communities, the BJP is considering extending this electricity benefit to religious places such as temples and gurudwaras.

### Indian Chronicle

English Daily

#### Politicising VCs

The University Grants Commission (UGC) Draft Regulations 2025, released on Monday for public feedback, herald significant changes in higher education. While outed as reforms aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, several provisions appear to dilute academic standards and invite undue politicisation into university administration. Most troubling is the removal of estrictions on contract teaching appointments. Under the previous guidelines, such appointments were capped at 10 per cent of an institution's total faculty. The removal of his cap risks turning critical academic positions into temporary, cost-cutting measures that prioritise convenience over quality. Contract positions, while expedient, undernine long-term institutional stability and the career prospects of the faculty.

Equally contentious is the restructuring of vice-chanellor (VC) appointments. By granting chancellors — of en state governors — the authority to appoint search comnittees, the draft centralises power in a manner that could compromise university autonomy. Moreover, opening VC ositions to industry experts and public sector professionals, while potentially bringing fresh perspectives, risks sidelining academics who understand the nuances of nigher education. This redefinition of eligibility dilutes the cademic integrity of university leadership. While the draft bolishes the outdated quantitative Academic Perfornance Indicator (API) system, replacing it with qualitative ssessments, the implementation remains opaque. Crieria such as innovation, societal contributions and digital ontent creation are commendable but lack clear evaluaion mechanisms, opening the door for favouritism.

It is argued that these changes will foster flexibility and inclusivity, yet the draft's rushed timeline for feedback — 30 days — raises concerns about genuine stakeholder engagement.

#### Bengaluru's water resilience project: World Bank lays down disbursement-linked indicators for 3,500 crore loan



The water resilience project now approved for the city will be carried out during a five-year period (2026-31) and the money will be disbursed in three to five installments and each installment is linked to these DLIs

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

The World Bank, which is giving a loan of \$426 million (3,500 crore) to Bengaluru for its water resilience project, has imposed nine disbursement-linked indicators (DLIs), including service benchmarking, digital governance, climate financing, and mobilisation of own resources, for the loan. The loan is being given under the World Bank's Programfor-Results Financing (PforR), where the grant of loans are linked to outcomes. The water resilience project now approved for the city will be carried out during a five-year period (2026-31) and the money will be disbursed in three to five installments and each installment is linked to these DLIs, sources said.

Under the project, totally worth around ?5,000 crore, with the World Bank loan component being ?3,500 crore and the rest financed by the State government, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) and the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) will take up the work of fortifying storm-water drains (SWDs) and building sewage treatment plants (STPs). Recently, the civic agencies and representatives from the World Bank held a stakeholders consultation meeting, where the Bank's representatives briefed them of the project and spelt out the DLIs, sources said.

"The DLIs imposed are good in intent, but these need to have specific targets. For instance, the BWSSB is building new STPs and sewer lines using these funds and the BBMP is building SWDs. Ideally, the DLI should be the quality of water in the lakes rejuvenated through these STPs," a lake conservation activist, part of the meeting, said. The World Bank has insisted on focusing on the reuse of treated water in the city as part of a circular economy, installation of sensors in SWDs to create an advanced alert system for flooding in the city, and proper operation and maintenance works. The civic body will also install sluice gates at lakes, sources said.

The international monetary agency has also insisted on climate financing in the city, for which the civic body has pointed towards the Climate Action Plan and that the civic agencies should raise its own resources. While the BBMP has pointed towards its property tax reforms, the BWSSB is all set to increase water tariff. The BWSSB has recently written to all city MLAs seeking suggestions on a tariff hike and the hike is expected to be implemented in 2025. One of the other mandates by the World Bank has been to implement disaster-risk governance in the city. A state-of-theart control room to manage climate risks for the city will come up at the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre at a cost of ?350 crore, sources said. A senior city official said that most of the DLIs mentioned by the World Bank had already been implemented in the city in some form or another. "We will soon submit all documentation for the same," the official said. Meanwhile, all the DLIs will be adhered to while implementing the projects taken up under the World Bank loan, the official added.

### Special education teachers: When ikigai takes a toll



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Yaazhini had been dyslexic as a child so helping children like her became the purpose of her life. After completing her Masters in English and Psychology and a diploma in Child Counselling and Psychology, Ms. Yaazhini became a special education teacher. And today she runs the Bubblee institution in Chennai for children with learning disabilities.Ms. Yaazhini has built a strong connection with the children she educates. Some children confide in her and share their personal experiences, which they may not share with their parents. She says her job satisfaction from being a special educator is immense. Ms. Yaazhini also feels professions such as hers inculcate the value of humanity. But the picture isn't rosy through and through. Educators and trainers for children with special needs battle several challenges in their professional lives. While most of them enter the profession to help children and their parents to enable them to cope with everyday challenges, their own lives are affected. Unfortunately, many educators drop out from the profession as they struggle to maintain a work-life balance, and handle pressure from some parents.

Ms. Yaazhini, for instance, recalls interacting with parents who are in denial of their child's special needs, or those who overthink and label an otherwise normal child as one with ADHD or autism. Both types of parents need to understand their child and get the correct diagnosis before making judgments. "Some parents do not accept that their child could be like this (with disability). Some are impatient. Within two or three months, they want their kids to be perfect, like other kids", explains Jutika Boro, a private practitioner at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur. Both Ms. Yaazhini and Ms. Jutika are concerned about parents' hesitancy regarding sending their children to a special school as it might reveal their child's disability to society.

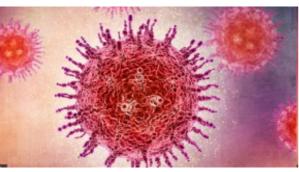
"Most of the parents do not accept their children's condition and compare their children with the performance of other (neurotypical) children. The parents start guiding the special educators what to teach. Parents blame teachers for not bringing easily discard all the efforts and blame for not bringing changes immediately", remarks Chitra Kaliappan, who runs Bhairavi Child Development Centre in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.Ms. Chitra flags safety of special educators who sometimes experience dangerous situations while handling children with behaviour issues. Educators

do undergo special training to handle such situations. This includes developing patience while training a child and the ability to walk, run, or move with them to catch up with their pace. While younger special educators might not find it difficult, it is exhausting for the older ones. "Most special educators lose interest in their profession and opt for early retirement. This could lead to a dearth of experienced special educators, "warns Ms. Chitra. Saradha Easwaran is a specialist in education and rehabilitation, and is a founder consultant at the Sarvae Jana Suki centre in Coimbatore. Nearly 26 years ago, when she was a fresher in rehabilitation, she would train a boy with autism from her neighbourhood and engage him in educational activities. While she trained other children, for this boy the teacher was his world. "After getting married, I moved to my in-laws' place. He (the boy) was very upset. I visited them and tried explaining the transition to him but all in vain. They decided to relocate elsewhere. I have learnt to handle the family and the children with special needs for such twists and turns using visual supports and a strategy of diverting activities to keep them emotionally strong", recalls Ms. Saradha. While attachment with children can be helpful, it can also be very difficult emotionally, as it directly affects educators' personal lives.

Possible solutionsEducators mention they need to learn to break complex tasks into small parts to make the learning process easy. Children with special needs may not grasp their lessons at the very first attempt. It takes several attempts to get a child's attention on the task at hand, whether it is related to language, communication, activities for daily life, or play. In case of a break in routine due to vacations, or illness, educators need to start all over again, as many children with learning disabilities fail to retain and recall information. While training, some children are required to be continuously prompted for tasks such as climbing stairs or jumping. All of these require patience from the special educator. Ms. Chitra suggests, "Teaching strategies must be creative and innovative. They can be tailored to suit the student's needs. Our children are very smart. They do what they like and neglect whatever they are un-

Despite the challenges, educators take special care of their own mental health. Support from their family members goes a long way. Apart from activities for mindfulness, they also recommend investing time and effort in personal and professional growth. "I am a special educator, but I know need to gain additional knowledge. Many special educators do not know about speech or occupation therapy", adds Ms. Jutika who also learned speech therapy. Many educators conduct training programs and workshops for parents and other educators. They run short online courses for parents and professionals on relevant topics. Some trainers and volunteers also go for home visits as may be required. The challenges and health risks special educators face do not deter them from helping children with special needs. "I feel complete when I am in service. I believe I am destined to do more for the community in need. Whatever I have done so far, is not enough", exclaims Ms. Saradha

### 3-month-old tests positive for HMPV in Ahmedabad, third case in India



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

A three-month-old baby tested positive for the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) Monday in Ahmedabad – the third case to be reported from the country. This comes hours after two confirmed cases were reported from Bengaluru. A baby boy tested positive in Ahmedabad's Orange Children Hospital. According to doctors, the baby's parents belonged to Dungarpur, Rajasthan. The three-month-old had been admitted to the hospital a week ago with a cough, cold, and fever. Dr Sagar Patel, a neonatologist, said while the paediatric hospital usually reported 2-3 HMPV cases every year, they reported the latest case to the state government due to the panic being spread over a virus "that is endemic to India".

"We conducted a viral panel which came positive for HMPV. The child was admitted about a week ago and was on a ventilator. Four days ago, we sent the samples to a private laboratory and they came positive for HMPV. But by the time the report arrived, the condition of the child had already improved, and was off the ventilator support," the doctor said. In a statement issued Monday morning, the Union Health Ministry said the virus was already in circulation in India as well as globally, "and cases of respiratory illnesses associated with HMPV have been reported in various countries."

"Furthermore, based on current data from ICMR and the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) network, there has been no unusual surge in Influenza-Like Illness (ILI) or Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) cases in the country," the statement said. Stating that there was "no need to panic", Gujarat Health Minister Rushikesh Patel said the state government was ensuring that testing facilities for the HMPV virus are available in government hospitals across the state and did not see it "as a challenge". Speaking in Vadodara, where he was on a visit to inspect facilities at the civic-run SSG hospital as well as the Gujarat Medical Education and Research Society (GMERS) Gotri hospital Patel said "A case of a two-monthold child from Dungarpur in Rajasthan had arrived in Gujarat for treatment and tested positive for HMPV. Even a challenge like Covid-19 was handled by the entire country under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This is not even a challenge. It is an infectious disease that has symptoms of cold and fever. It is a contagious virus but it has been prevalent since 2001."Minister Patel said that the state government's priority was to ensure testing is available in all hospitals. "There is no need for panic as the symptoms are the same as flu and the treatment is also meant to alleviate specific symptoms. It affects young children and

those with compromised immunity," he said.

"The Gujarat state government will do whatever is needed when it is needed. Dos and Don'ts have been issued as a precautionary measure. Right now, there is no need to make wearing masks mandatory," the minister added. Fielding a question on the need to screen foreign travellers, Patel said that the Central government would make appropriate decisions. "Whenever there is an outbreak or a threat like Covid-19, the Central government will swing into action along with scientific and medical agencies, who will monitor the country-wide situation and then issue guidelines that will be applicable to all the states," the health minister added.

#### Mumbai's new cable-stayed bridge at Reay Road set to open in February

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

cable bridge, reay roadWorkers put the finishing touches on the new iconic cable-stayed bridge at Reay Road, set to be inaugurated next month. This impressive 385-meter structure boasts two ramps and six lanes, supported by six pairs of cables. The Maharashtra Rail Infrastructure Development Corporation is overseeing the re-construction of the aging British-era ROB. The city of dreams is all set to welcome its second cable-stayed bridge—the first of its kind built entirely on a landmass. The cable-stayed road overbridge at Reay Road, located in South Mumbai on the harbour railway line, is poised to open next month. It promises not only to improve connectivity but also to become a significant architectural addition to Mumbai's landscape.

The construction of the overbridge began in February 2022 and has been progressing steadily under the supervision of Maharashtra Rail Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (MahaRail). At an event in Nagpur on Sunday, MahaRail CEO Rajesh Kumar Jaiswal announced that the bridge's work was almost complete, stating that the structure would be ready for vehicular movement by February. A first on land, a second for MumbaiWhile Mumbai is already

home to the iconic Bandra-Worli Sea Link, the Reay Road overbridge sets itself apart as the city's first cable-stayed bridge built entirely on land. Spanning 385 m, including two ramps, the six-lane bridge is equipped with pedestrian footpaths and has been constructed at a cost of Rs 175 crore, up from the previously estimated Rs 145 crore. Its design incorporates cutting-edge technology featuring a central pylon system with stay cables extending from the structure's spine. The old road overbridge was built in 1910 and had only 1.5 lanes on both sides. The bridge's design prioritises functionality and innovation. By employing limited piers and cable-stayed technology, the construction team minimised the need for extensive foundations. This approach also reduced interference with underground utilities, speeding up construction and minimising inconvenience to traffic. The bridge's long span provides a seamless connection between Barrister Nath Pai Road and the Eastern Freeway while maintaining the required vertical clearance for vehicles passing beneath it. To further enhance the bridge's visual appeal, MahaRail has integrated architectural LED lighting, promising to transform the Reay Road bridge into a striking feature of Mumbai's nighttime skyline.

## A comprehensive plan to control sewage flow into Vrishabhavati valley to be drawn up



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

The city administration will shortly draw up a comprehensive action plan to control sewage flow in the Vrishabhavati river valley. The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), and the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) will jointly carry out this exercise. Chief Civic Commissioner Tushar Giri Nath, who chaired a multi-agency review meeting on the subject on Saturday, highlighted the growing pollution caused by untreated sewage entering the valley and instructed officials of these agencies to formulate an integrated action plan.

He emphasised the need to identify all points where sewage enters the valley and compile a comprehensive list. He also called for a detailed inspection of apartments along the banks of the valley to verify whether sewage is being directly discharged and whether sewage treatment plants (STPs) in these complexes are functioning effectively. The BWSSB was instructed to provide an update on the number of operational STPs, plans for constructing new STPs, and to ensure that all sewage flowing into the valley is redirected to these facilities via pipelines.

Action against encroachmentsWith 42 lakes being linked through the Vrishabhavati valley, Mr. Nath urged officials to identify and clear encroachments in the region. He suggested conducting land surveys with the assistance of revenue officials and taking strict action to reclaim encroached areas. To prevent waste from being dumped into the valley, precautionary measures like installing fences were suggested. He also ordered the deployment of earthmovers for removing silt to ensure smooth flow of water in the valley. The Vrishabhavati valley spans 28.08 km within BBMP limits. The BBMP has also taken up beautification of the entire valley on the lines of the K-100 project. The V-100 stretch covers 14.04 km from Sankey Tank to Bangalore University, while the V-200 stretch extends 14.04 km from Goraguntepalya to Bangalore University.

# BJP's Hardik Patel slams Nirma chairman of 'dividing Patidars' following his remarks on 2015 Patidar agitation



In a video Karsanbhai Patel of the Nirma group is purportedly heard saying that only those who led the protests reaped political benefits. BJP MLA Hardik Patel slammed the statement saying 'a billionaire like Karsanbhai wouldn't know'

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Purported statements by leading Patidar industrialist and Nirma group Chairman Karsanbhai Patel over the 2015 Patidar quota agitations have heated up the political atmosphere in Gujarat, with the leader of the agitation, BJP MLA Hardik Patel, accusing the businessman of attempting to "divide" the community. In a video being circulated on social media, Karsanbhai, while speaking to media persons at a social function Sunday, is purportedly being heard saying that "nothing" came of the protests. The authenticity of the video has not been independently verified In August-September 2015, the Patidars launched a protest demanding reservation in government jobs and educational institutions. The protests eventually turned violent, leading to 14 deaths.

"If you remember, we had this quota agitation. Patidars were the ones who did it. What happened in that? Nothing. Our youths got martyred and those who did the agitation reaped political benefit out of it," Karsanbhai is heard saying. "A daughter of Patidar, that too Leuva Patidar's daughter, who was the CM (Chief Minister) had to leave. So, was it an agitation to get reservations or to remove someone... It is not possible that Patidars themselves remove Patidars. So, this is a subject to be researched upon." Anandiben Patel, who was Gujarat's chief minister at the time, stepped down from her position as the protests intensified.

Karsanbhai's remarks drew criticism from Hardik Patel, a BJP MLA from Viramgam, who said that the industrialist wasn't aware of what the community managed to get from the protests "because he is a billionaire and this agitation was for the poor Patidar families". "Because of the agitation, not only the Patidars, but more than 50 communities that were not getting reservations got Yuva Swavlamban Yojana of Rs 1,000 crore, got a commission and a corporation for non-reserved communities, and the economically poor Patidars got 10% reservation. Due to this scheme, in the last three to four years, thousands of youths are studying free of cost and have got jobs," Hardik said on social media. He further said: "There are a number of leaders like Karsanbhai who are dividing the Patidar community on the lines of Leuva-Kadva (the two major sub-castes of the Patidar community). There is a need to identify such leaders because they can't see the community united. If the community is united then the status of such leaders gets

#### In the poorest district of Bihar, an openair classroom teaching Indian Constitution



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

The roads of rural Kishanganj district in Bihar are lined with heaps of stubble -- fuel for cooking stoves for nearly six months. Most of the fields in Kishanganj are covered with stubble as the tea picking and cutting season has just concluded. It is a chilly afternoon in Nayatolla settlement of Besarbati village and the women are returning home carrying this. In the middle of Nayatolla Prakashnagar, under a tree, on a red tarpaulin, a group of six youth, five of them women, from neighbouring villages have gathered for a discussion. They are surrounded by temporary huts from which a few curious children are stepping out to see what is going on

The question engrossing the discussion group – What are Constitutional rights?

"The right to step out of the house," respond the gathered young women immediately. "That freedom virtually doesn't exist for many of us even when we are adults over the age of 18," says Reshma, a 21-year-old from a neighbouring village. "The freedom to marry whom we want and when we want, and definitely not below the age of 18," says Rita, who has recently joined a private school as a teacher. For 19-year-old Khusbhu who is fiddling with a frisbee in her hand, it is the right to step out to play. For some it is the right to be free of the rampant injustice of caste hierarchy. "The right to education," answers 24-yearold Bablu, and after a pause, adds, "which this girl here is being deprived of because she does not have an Aadhar card." He is pointing to Bhumika, a seven-year-old who has quietly joined the gathering. Bhumika belongs to one of the two hundred families, mostly Santhal, of Nayatolla which were displaced two years ago due to government's land acquisition for a highway. He says, "The people of this settlement have the right to education, to ration as well as healthcare but in the past two years that they have shifted here, they have not been able to access them." Shantana Devi, a 26-year-old who is moderating the gathering with an attendance sheet in hand, says, "It is our right to participate in gram sabhas but in most of Kishangani, they exist only on paper. Besarbati is one of the exceptional villages which had one meeting and some of us brought up the issue of Nayatolla Prakashnagar there."These are some of the over 450 youth who have been gathering in Kishanganj since 2023 as part of a programme on political education and active citizenship called the Rural Youth India Leadership program. While there exist sections on the Constitution in school textbooks and the preamble is recited in school assemblies every day, they say it is an experiential learning programme like this that has been transformative both for their own lives as well as their communities. A docu-

According to the Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021, Kishanganj, with nearly 65% of its population living in poverty, is the poorest district of Bihar, the poorest state in India. Located at the border of Nepal and separated from Bangladesh by a narrow strip of West Bengal, Kishanganj in 1990 was carved out of Purnia, the district with the lowest literacy rate in the state. In popular imagination, Kishanganj gets associated with poverty, low literacy, smuggling, trafficking, child marriage, a history of naxalism and, tea production For the youth here the are everyday realities to push through for a better life. "When you grow up seeing a certain kind of violence and hierarchy as normalised, then you do not realise you can even change it," says Bharti Thakur, a 28-year-old from Bhatgaon iving within a 21-member joint family below the poverty line (BPL). "But the Constitution is the law of the land and learning about it gave me the courage to recognise that the inequality and injustice I had always felt to be wrong is actually wrong. Not only can I resist it, I can also turn to legal recourse. This has transformed the dynamics within my own family where

my mother now has the freedom to step outside without being berated for it." I used to think that the Constitution is just a book of laws but now I have learned that it is much more than that," says Akriti Bharti, a 25-year-old from Chhattargachh village, whose father runs a a mall hardware shop. "It lays down the values with which one should live in this country. Having familiarised with this, I knew which places I can turn to for more information on legal possibilities for a property dispute my father is facing. I was also able to figure out what kind of harassment we could be subjected to."The RIYL program run by the NGO, Project Potential has become one avenue for the youth to not just get exposure to opportunities and political awareness but learn digital and communication skills, as well as project or financial management abilities while also gaining networks of support and peer groups.

This kind of political education has been leading to various community action projects from surveys on menstruation to Ayushman Card drives, support with making Aadhar Card, bank accounts as well as awareness about government scholarships and health schemes. Uposi Kumari, a 22-year-old from Janglabhitha village, has been conducting a survey in her local communities about attitudes and awareness related to menstruation. She insists on interviewing not just women and girls who are often shy but also men and boys who are often appalled by the idea of a conversation on the topic. "I believe it is a topic which affects everyone and is important to engage over," she says.

For girls like Uposi, Bharti and Akriti, education beyond eighth standard comes with resistance from families due to an all-pervasive fear of trafficking which the border district is infamous for. The only high school, inter and degree colleges for many in these villages is in the main town of Thakurganj block. This kind of political education has encouraged several girls to not only resist forced marriage but also spread this awareness among their peers in their localities who are at risk of child marriage. According to data gathered and presented by United Nation's Population Fund (UNFPA) in September 2023, the incidents of child marriage are quite high in Bihar but have a close connection with education. While in out-of-school girls the likelihood of child marriage is 57%, it comes down to 12% if they have completed their matriculation. Around 41% of the women in the age group of 20-24 marry before 18. Mohammed Imtiaz from Dallegaon comes from a settlement that is surrounded by a river on all sides, right on the border of Nepal. For years, they have not had a bridge to cross the river. For Imtiaz, Constitutional rights are as important as the struggle towards them. He says, "One way is the writing of letters, approaching the government officials and going up to Patna; however for a long time we have not had this awareness. I am one of the first few graduates in the tolla. Another way to make ourselves heard was boycotting the elections. The last time we did that, half a bridge was constructed for us within months." The other half still remains. Imtiaz surveyed two wards of the village and figured that ration cards were one area he could make meaningful intervention as over 70 families out of 200 did not have one. The picture never remains rosy as the gaps between the promises of the Constitution and the social realities of the region often crystallise.

Constraints imposed by local realities Even as 22-yearold Uday Saha sought out to make the National Means cum Merit Scholarship scheme more accessible to young students, his efforts met with some constraints as several of the schools were themselves not registered with the National Scholarship Portal. Even though the youth raised the matter of documentation of the recently displaced population of Nayatolla at the gram sabha, the issue remains unaddressed as the people have to leave a day's work for every visit to the offices. Not only that, these kind of initiatives have sometimes ruffled the feathers of the local communities, whether it is due to girls stepping out or because of inter communal and inter caste mingling. One of the youth mobilisers shared, "It is very natural that this kind of a space brings up the fears and doubts of people. In one off Hindudominated areas, it has been difficult for say a Muslim mobiliser to build a youth club. Caste has been another major barrier and because we have been majorly engaging with youth who have completed class tenth at least, we lose out on engagement with Santhal and other communities where literacy is much lower. Such political education at the grassroots becomes crucial thus to overcome divi-

#### Bishnoi gang targeted Baba Siddique for being close to Salman Khan, says Mumbai police's chargesheet

GNS News Agency,

Baba SiddiqueThe police chargesheet said the accused chose Siddique as a target on claims that he was close to actor Salman Khan, who has been on the radar of the gang for allegedly shooting a black buck considered holy by the Bishnoi community. The Mumbai police Crime Branch completed its probe into the murder of former Maharashtra minister and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Baba Siddique and filed a chargesheet against 26 people, including Anmol Bishnoi, brother of gangster Lawrence Bishnoi, on Monday. The police investigation concluded that the Bishnoi gang plotted the murder to establish their dominance in Mumbai

An officer said they filed a 4,590-page chargesheet in the Special Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) court. The chargesheet named three people – Shubham Lonkar, Yasin Siddique, and Anmol Bishnoi – as the accused in the case. The US immigration authorities detained Bishnoi on charges of using



The police chargesheet said the accused chose Siddique as a target on claims that he was close to actor Salman Khan, who has been on the radar of the gang for allegedly shooting a black buck considered holy by the Bishnoi community.

Siddique as a target on

a forged passport, and he is currently in their custody. Siddique was gunned down on October 12 in Bandra East outside the office of his son Zeeshan Akhtar. While two men were arrested from the spot, the main shooter fled from the scene of the crime and was eventually arrested later by the Crime Branch. The police made 26 arrests in the case.

The police chargesheet said the accused chose

claims that he was close to actor Salman Khan, who has been on the radar of the gang for allegedly shooting a black buck considered holy by the Bishnoi community. Apart from that, the chargesheet said the accused chose Siddique because they thought he was close to the Dawood Ibrahim gang.

gang.

The Crime Branch found no evidence on claims that Siddique was murdered

on account of some dispute over Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) projects in the city.

A police officer said, "The investigation revealed that the shooting was orchestrated by Anmol Singh Bishnoi, a key member of an organised crime gang. The accused are believed to have conspired to establish the dominance of their criminal operations, using violence and terror to further their goals."

## Food courts in containers at 11 locations: temporary relief for commuters on Samruddhi Mahamarg



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Commuters travelling along the 701-km Mumbai-Nagpur Samruddhi Mahamarg will soon benefit from temporary food courts housed in containers at 11 strategic locations. This innovative solution, implemented by the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) via its selected contractors, aims to provide essential amenities until the completion of permanent facilities. According to an MSRDC official, contractors have been given 18 months to develop fully functional wayside amenities. In the interim, the container-based food courts will be set up in two months, with operations expected to begin by April. The idea of wayside amenities along Samruddhi Mahamarg faced initial setbacks. The Indian Express previously reported that MSRDC had to cancel a bid awarded to a single contractor named APPCO due to its failure to deposit the requisite Rs 275 crore for developing wayside amenities at 16 locations, along with other reasons for cancelling the initial bid. A revised tender process followed, with multiple agencies now appointed to handle the project at different sites. This change aims to expedite the development of essential facilities and ensure smoother execution. Addressing commuter safety

The absence of refreshment areas along the Samruddhi Mahamarg has raised concerns about commuter safety, particularly with the phenomenon of highway hypnosis. This condition—a state of drowsy disconnection caused by monotonous long drives—has been a growing

issue since the highway's first phase opened in December 2022. To mitigate risks, MSRDC has implemented measures such as colourful flags placed every 10 kilometres and rumbler strips every 25 kilometres to create vibrations that help drivers stay alert. Officials believe establishing food courts will further enhance safety, offering much-needed breaks for drivers on this expansive stretch. Final stretch from Igatpuri to Amane set to open

Meanwhile, MSRDC is preparing to open the final 76km stretch of the highway from Igatpuri to Amane in Thane in February. This phase, which bypasses the challenging Kasara Ghat, promises to significantly reduce travel time between Amane and Igatpuri from 90 minutes to just 40 minutes. Completing this phase will also enable seamless travel from Mumbai to Nagpur in just eight hours. This newly constructed segment features India's widest tunnel, measuring 17.5 meters, as well as the state's longest tunnelan 8-kilometer stretch in Igatpuri. Additional highlights include 15 viaducts totalling 11 kilometres, with the tallest viaduct in Shahapur rising to an impressive 84 meters, equivalent to a 28-storey building. Three interchanges at Igatpuri, Kutghar in Shahapur, and Amane in Thane will further streamline connectivity. MSRDC also oversees the expansion of the existing old Mumbai-Nashik Highway, upgrading it from four lanes to an eight-lane expressway between Vadape and Majiwada in Thane. This 21.6-km stretch poses significant engineering challenges, including constructing two creek bridges at Kalwa and Kasheli and a rail overbridge. A 17-km service road from Thane to Kasheli is also under development to ease traffic flow. Heavy traffic along this route, fueled by numerous warehouses in Bhiwandi and merging traffic from the Mumbra, Ghodbunder, and Pune highways, underscores the need for the upgrade. The project, costing approximately Rs 1,182 crore, is being executed under the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM), where MSRDC and the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) share costs, with the latter repaying MSRDC over 15 years. While construction faced delays due to forest clearance requirements, work is progressing steadily. Officials anticipate the expansion to be completed within four months, easing congestion and improving connectivity in the region.

### After surprise drizzle sweeps Mumbai, IMD forecasts dip in temperatures

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Pockets of Mumbai experienced unseasonal drizzle late on Sunday, resulting in the minimum temperature dipping below normal by Monday morning. In light of the showers, the weather bureau also issued two nowcast warnings indicating "light spells in isolated pockets" of Mumbai as well as its neighbouring districts like Thane, Palghar, and Raigad. Data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) showed that by Monday morning, IMD's Santacruz observatory had logged 16.8 degree Celsius, which is 0.2 degree Celsius below the normal, while the Colaba coastal observatory registered 19.6 degree Celsius. In its bulletin for the upcoming week, the IMD has forecast a dip of minimum temperatures up to 15-16 degree Celsius until Wednesday, following which the temperatures will record another spike.

Meanwhile, the maximum temperatures are also forecast to remain in the range of 32-33 degree Celsius until Wednesday, marking a significant drop from last week when the day-time temperature soared to 36 degree Celsius on Friday. Records from the MET bureau showed that it was the city's bettest January day since 2016 Indoors



dent weather forecaster Athreya Shetty said, "The drizzle was a result of the western disturbance affecting Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. Owing to the western disturbance, there was an upper-level trough that dipped to Mumbai's latitude, which even led to cloudy skies on Sunday evening. This trough led to the incursion of moisture, ushering in rain in the city." "Now that the western disturbance has moved away, the northerly winds will gush in, resulting in a drop of not only minimum temperatures but also the maximum temperatures up to 30-32 degree Celsius," he added.

#### To counter AAP's cash-scheme guarantee, Congress launches Pyari Didi Yojana

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections, the Congress unveiled its first guarantee of a direct cash transfer scheme called Pyari Didi Yojana — that will provide a monthly allowance of Rs. 2500 to women. This surpasses the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)'s Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana, the cash-scheme guarantee of providing Rs. 2100 monthly to women in the national capital. Speaking to the press, AICC in-charge of Delhi, Qazi Nizamuddin, said, "The Congress party is launching its first guarantee of social welfare and women empowerment today. People trust Congress and its leaders, and wherever it has been in power, Congress has always worked for the welfare of society, especially for women's empowerment. Everyone remembers the false promises of the BJP, whether it is about promising Rs. 15 lakh or providing employment to unemployed youth. Congress does not lie like the BJP."

Drawing comparisons, Congress leaders criticised the current governance in Delhi as the party pledged significant financial relief for women if voted to power. A launch video accompanying the announcement highlighted this. "In the last 10 years, the life of women in Delhi has gone from bad to worse. On one hand, there is the burden of inflation, and on the other, an ineffective government. The Congress party understands the pain of every woman in Delhi. The Congress party knows the difficulties faced in getting two meals a day and cooking food. That is why we have decided that as soon as we form the government, every woman in Delhi will be given Rs. 2,500." Delhi Congress Chief Devender Yadav said, "The compulsion of inflation will be removed, and women's expectations will be fulfilled with Rs. 2,500. The money will be provided to women through a direct bank transfer, just like it's being done in Karnataka. Be it Jharkhand, or before this in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, whatever election promises we had made, we fulfilled them. This is why people have full faith in the Congress."Karnataka Congress Chief and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, who was also present at the event, highlighted the schemes that have been launched in his state when the Congress came to power, including a Rs. 2000 cash scheme for women. "Congress' strength is the country's strength, and Congress' history is the country's history, so whatever Congress promises, it will always deliver. I'm here as the president of the Karnataka Congress Committee and as the Deputy Chief Minister of Karnataka to launch a very loved programme," said Shivakumar.

"In Karnataka, first we launched the Gruh Jyoti Yojana to provide free power, followed by a cash scheme for which Priyanka Gandhi had asked me and Siddaramaiah to sign a cheque. A big Rs. 2,000 cheque was distributed to every woman, and we assured them that in the first cabinet meet-



Drawing comparisons, Congress leaders criticised the current governance in Delhi as the party pledged significant financial relief for women if voted to power.

ing, we would make decisions on these guarantees. After taking the oath, we passed all these programs, and within three months, all the guarantees were being implemented,"

he added. Shivakumar highlighted the success of Karnataka's welfare schemes, including free bus travel for women, distribution of 10 kg of rice to every family member, and monthly payments of Rs. 3,000 to unemployed youth. Under the Gruh Jyoti scheme, free electricity is being provided, while the Gruh Lakshmi scheme deposits Rs. 2,000 monthly into the accounts of women. "Around 1.22 crore women have been receiving Rs. 2,000 in their accounts every month, and this financial aid has brought noticeable changes in families, with Rs. 4,000 to Rs. 5,000 reaching them monthly," Shivakumar added. While announcing the Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana, AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal said the scheme would provide financial support to women from families with an annual income of less than Rs 3 lakh. Under the scheme, eligible women will receive a monthly stipend of Rs 1,000, which will be increased to Rs 2,100 if the AAP is re-elected. According to the ruling party, women must be residents of Delhi and registered voters as of December 12, 2024. However, those already benefiting from government social security schemes, such as pensions for senior citizens, widows, and disabled persons, as well as tax-paying women or those employed by the government, will not be eligible.

#### 'Bengaluru in a good position to become the deep-tech hub of the country'



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

The International Institute of Information Technology-Bangalore (IIIT-B) has been at the forefront of research related to digital technologies and promoting innovation for the larger public good. Backed by the research prowess of the Institute, the IIIT-B Innovation Centre has been bringing together academia, innovation and entrepreneurship while also fostering collaborations with the government and the industry.Dr. Lakshmi Jagannathan, CEO at the Innovation Centre, believes incubation doesn't happen inside the four walls of an incubator, but outside where connections are built. "If start-ups can find market, everything else will fall into place," says Jagannathan who feels incubators can play a crucial role in this.

With The Hindu she shares her views on how the Innovation Centre differentiates itself, why Bengaluru is poised to become the deep tech hub of the country and how corporates can help by opening up their R&D labs for deep tech startups. How does IIIT-B Innovation Centre bring together IIIT-B's strengths to build a robust deep tech ecosystem? The Innovation Centre's mandate is to support start-ups that have innovative ideas, bring in mentors and market access for them, and facilitate IP within the campus for translational research possibilities. It is not called an incubation centre, because we also believe in innovating and working with corporates to facilitate innovations. Anything to do with digital is IIIT-B's sweet spot. Innovation Centre is very focused on supporting innovations and startups in the digital space. That is one part. Secondly, IIIT-B has about 8-10 research labs/centres of excellence, managed by faculty and supported by various governments including the Government of Karnataka and the Government of India. We want to work closely with them to see how we could align with their work, get them to mentor startups, and commercialise research. Incubation at the Innovation Centre falls into three buckets. One is pre-incubation, a sixmonth-long customer discovery programme for early-stage startups. The second is incubation, which is for two to three years. It offers deeper engagement where we help startups with mentorship, technology support, customer access and investor connections, small funding through grants and government programs, and so on. Acceleration is for late-stage startups. We help them to get more business and money.

A bit about some of your programmes We are an incubation partner for the RBI Innovation Hub, and we are running a pre-incubation programme for about 30 fintech start-ups for them. We are also doing a pre-incubation programme for 6-7 start-ups that are building digital solutions for Farmer Producer Organisations (FPO) in Karnataka. With Nimhans we are trying to do incubation. We launched a programme called the Deep Engagement and Enrichment Program for Agile Startups (DEEPAS) in the area of mental health and brain health. We are now onboarding about 5 to 6 start-ups who will closely work with Nimhans. They have agreed to bring their clinicians to work with the startups for testing and validating ideas. Some of these solutions are going to be validated in the Karnataka Brain Health Initiative (KABI) clinics. In the next stage, we want to get problem statements from Nimhans and identify innovators who can build solutions for them.

We did two acceleration programmes last year. One is on digital health where we supported about 12 start-ups. Another one was on machine intelligence and automation and was called Industry 4.0. This may be one of the first few industry-led programmes of this kind. We have partnered with the Bangalore Chamber of Industry and Commerce for the same and all the members including TVS and Bosch among others agreed to mentor startups. Startups come to the Innovation Centre for primarily two thingsmoney and market. We at the Innovation Centre see if we can bring in market for them. This market could be companies like TVS to Bosch or hospitals like Nimhans. If startups can find the market, everything else will fall into place.

Bengaluru is in a very good position to become the deep tech ecosystem for the country. Deep tech requires a lot of intensive R&D, academia, patents, and is a long haul. Due to this, academia is slowly coming to the limelight. Startups understand that they need research scholars and academia who can work with them to develop the IP required to build deep tech. The kind of ecosystem in Bengaluru for deep tech is vibrant. There is pro bono mentorship available which you do not see elsewhere. And with digital pervading every aspect of life, IIITB is probably the only institute in Bengaluru which can leverage it to its full extent.

At the Innovation Centre, we are talking to corporates interested in innovation and wanting to work with startups. If we have to differentiate and add value to startups, it will be only through finding business for them. Capital is not a major problem today. Market access, market validation, customer connect and the ability to do real business are going to matter. So can we bring these markets to incubators is what we are looking at broadly.

What's the share of IIIT-B startups at the Innovation Centre and how do you look at translational research opportunities?

IIIT-B start-ups at the Centre would be around 1-2%. We also map research from IIITB to external start-ups.

Start-ups want money, and business, they want to scale fast. On the other side, maybe a professor who's predominantly interested in research and not business-savvy. It's an ideal fit to bring them together. If there's research available within the campus at a POC or MVP stage, why reinvent the wheel?

Today there are VCs who are looking at co-creation opportunities. There is increasing interest in academia among startups and investors. Such opportunities were not available for academia years back. With deep tech gaining prominence, research-to-commercialization is picking up. We are now looking at corporates who want to work with us for digital technology innovation in areas which can create societal impact. That could be health, education, sanitation, hygiene, women empowerment... Around 70% of India is in the rural areas. And there are fundamental problems to be solved around water, health, sanitation, hygiene, women, then environment, pollution, sustainability, and so on. This also makes it a very good market for society-centric technological solutions. MSME is another interesting area for us. A lot of MSME companies are building smart solutions for smart manufacturing, but they may not be very good at communication, PowerPoint or Excel. Whereas start-ups are very tech-savvy. We wanted to marry the two. So that is one more thing on our priority

What are some areas for improvement for startups and incubators?

One big challenge is early validation and traction. Today, a lot of government money is available for start-ups at a very early stage. Grants from DST, DBT, Elevate and so on cumulatively add up to ?50 lakhs. With that you build till the MVP stage, but after that money becomes scarce and a lot of startups struggle. So, you need to make sure that in the early stage itself, you talk to the customer and validate your idea. For example, many are building healthcare solutions without even talking to doctors or clinicians. Finally, when they take it to market, it will be rejected. Out of the 60 solutions we ran by NIMHANS for validations, they said only eight were relevant to them. That means there are 52 guys who have been building something that is not going to be used by those in mental health or neuro fields. A lot of time and resources are wasted. The second part is making use of existing infrastructure and research facilities. The government of Karnataka has now come up with a very good GCC policy. Of the 1700-plus GCCs in India, many are in Bengaluru, and they have very good research capabilities. If these GCCs and corporate R&D labs can open up their research capabilities for start-ups, the latter's design, prototyping, small batch manufacturing and so on can happen at these facilities. One of the biggest challenges today for deep tech is access to R&D facilities. They don't need capital infrastructure; they need access to capital infrastructure. A huge portion of money from government schemes for incubators is marked for creating capital infrastructure. This is not required. Instead of everyone creating a lab, we must have a centralized facility which all startups can use: Or reach out to corporates who are ready to open up their facilities. I believe corporates are ready to open up, and with this, a large problem of deep tech startups could be solved. Many of them, especially those building products or hardware, go to either China or Taiwan for chip designs, small-batch manufacturing and so on. But these facilities are available with corporates here. A lot of corporates are also now looking at how they can work with start-ups as it aligns with their business. We must make

### Commuters hit by 15% bus fare hike, demand better services, more buses

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

The 15% hike in bus fares across Karnataka's four bus transport corporations, implemented at midnight on Sunday, has sparked discontent among commuters on its first day. The fare hike, approved by the State Cabinet earlier this week, was formalised through a Government Order issued on Saturday. The Order cited increased fuel costs, rising employee salaries, maintenance, and the need for fleet expansion as justifications for the decision. Most affectedDaily wage workers felt the pinch of the hike the most. "I travel from Bidadi to Bengaluru every day for work. Even a slight increase in fares impacts my already tight budget. The buses are also less in number and crowded. The government should increase the number of buses too," Pradeep K., a construction labourer said. Unfair and unjust'The fare revision has been criticised as ill-timed by several passengers, who argued it burdens commuters already grappling with inflation. The Bengaluru Bus Prayanikara Vedike (BBPV) has called for an immediate withdrawal of the bus fare hike announced by the Karnataka government, deeming it "unfair and unjust." In a press release issued on Sunday, the vedike criticised the decision, arguing that it disproportionately burdens the working class, who rely heavily on buses as a lifeline for daily commutes. "This fare hike discourages the use of public transport at a time when we need more buses and free public transport to tackle Bengaluru's traffic woes. Penalising those who use public transport is a step in the wrong direction." the statement read. The vedike proposed alternative revenue-generation methods, including implementing parking and congestion fees for private vehicle users, particularly during peak hours, and introducing a traffic cess for private companies based on their employees' private transport use. The BBPV urged the government to reallocate funds earmarked for large infrastructure projects, such as

tunnel roads and flyovers, to strengthen Bengaluru's bus

system. "These projects have proven ineffective in solving traffic congestion. Instead, priority should be given to creating bus lanes and expanding the capacity and coverage of bus services," the BBPV stated, also suggesting making car travel expensive through a congestion tax.

Exact change remains a problemWhile the fare increase has affected all passengers, male commuters faced the additional challenge of handling cash transactions. Many passengers expressed frustration over difficulty in providing exact change to conductors following the revision. With women benefitting from the Shakti scheme that provides them free bus travel on State-run buses, conductors primarily rely on male passengers for cash payments."I usually carry exact change for my daily commute from Majestic to BTM Layout, which earlier cost ?25. Now, I have to pay ?28, which is ?3 more," said Praveen Kumar, a resident of BTM Layout. "If I pay ?30, conductors often don't have ?2 change. It's very difficult now with the revised fares, and I'm constantly searching for small denominations, especially during peak hours. It's frustrating," he reiterated.CM defends bus fare hikeChief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday, however, defended the fare hike saying that it has become necessary for the smooth functioning of the Staterun transport undertakings. "Bus fares have been revised from time to time, during the rule of all parties. It is required to ensure optimal revenue flows to the State-run transport undertakings for employee salaries revisions, absorbing diesel price hike, buying new buses and to beat inflation. The last revision was done several years ago and the corporations are suffering losses due to high operational costs. The recent revision will help them stabilise their finances, he told mediapersons in Belagavi"Why are the Opposition parties targeting us? Were the fares not increased during the BJP or Janata Dal(S) rule? Has the Centre not increased railway fares," he questioned.

### Symbolism must not become misplaced showmanship



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Symbols have an intangible value as they represent some important facets of life. Leaders use the resulting symbolism smartly to message their views. It is for this reason that the recent removal of a painting, a symbol of an iconic moment in modern India's military history, from the Indian Army Chief's office complex, in New Delhi, generated a nationwide surge of emotions. The painting, of the surrender of the Pakistani Army to India in the 1971 war, has been relocated to a conference centre named after Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw. But the incident highlights the importance of valuing symbols for their quality and effect; this is vital, considering the ongoing 'drive' in the military to induct-in learnings that are connected to a distant past. In this drive it must be remembered that history is truth, taken as a whole, and any segmented adoption will lead to skewed learning. As the dust settles on the angst raised by the removal of the painting, some facets of symbols and the associated symbolism need evaluation. Five important ones stand out - identity, leadership, direction, faith and competency. A few examples would suffice. Other examples

When Israel was established, the swearing-in of military recruits took place after a gruelling desert march to Fort Masada where they took a vow to protect their country. It symbolised a 'never give in' attitude born from the spirit of a group of 960 Jews who, in 73 CE, fought to the end against the Romans. 'Masada' has become a symbol of the identity of an Israeli soldier. On April 17, 2012, The Washington Post wrote: "An aerial art show pulled thousands of Washingtonians out of their offices, vehicles and homes on Tuesday morning [April 17] as NASA'S space shuttle Discovery blew into town atop a modified 747, the battered space veteran taking a final victory jaunt [after finishing its useful life] before landing at Dulles International Airport... There were costumes, there were cheers and, of course, there were tears." That 'flypast' was symbolic of national pride in the leadership position of the American space programme. Sometimes, leaders remind themselves of the import of their position. U.S. President Harry S.

Truman had a table placard that read, 'The Buck Stops Here'. And, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had the famous lines of 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' by Robert Frost on his table: 'The woods are lovely dark and deep, but I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep.' They were reminders to the two heads of state but, symbolically, had another purpose — the 'knowledge' of the positioning of these placards on the leader's desk was a subtle direction to their countrymen of their duty too. Duty is visible, in a unique way, at the Base Camp of Siachen Glacier (the highest battlefield in the world) where there is a shrine of 'OP Baba'. Who O.P. Baba was is not known but the tale of him beating back the enemy, single handed, at Malaum post is legendary. The battalion moving up the Glacier reports to the Baba and seeks his blessings for a safe time on the treacherous glacier. On its de-induction, the battalion reports to him again and thanks him. O.P. Baba, thus, is a symbol of faith in the almighty by soldiers of all religions and a conviction that all will be well. The importance of 1971

In independent India's history, December 16, 1971 is a red-letter day when India won a resounding victory against Pakistan. Measured against any parameter, the painting of the surrender ceremony is iconic and has come to represent the pinnacle of India's military and political competency For sure all services were deeply involved but it was the Army jawan who led the foray, resulting in the surrender of 93,000 Pakistani soldiers. The iconic scene is seared in the memories of all Indians - and, rightly so, a huge blowup adorned a room in the Army Chief's office complex. It is where the Army Chief meets heads of foreign armed forces and dignitaries and the message each one of them would have carried would have been of India's, and the Indian Army's, finest hour. The replacement painting (whose quality is debatable) is touted to represent the future vision of the Indian Army — in a way it is a toss-up between a subtle communication of a spectacular politico-military success and that of an imagined future. Which is more suited to be in the Indian Army Chief's office? Well, one cannot dictate how someone furnishes his office — one can only have an opinion. But would the painting have a view? Alas, if only it could speak. The statue in Ladakh The post script. Even as the controversy over the removal of the painting seemed to ebb there is another one now, raised by the recent installation of Shivaji's statue on the shores of the frigid Pangong Tso (lake) in Eastern Ladakh. There have been disapproving views, including those by the local councillor, of an inappropriate choice having been made. Having operated extensively in the area, one cannot but rue the fact that if any symbol was required to link valour with local history, it should have been that of Zorawar Singh, the legendary Dogra general, whose forays took him deep into Tibet. Symbolism is about linking the viewer to a 'feel' that he can connect with in his surroundings. Else, it is misplaced showmanship.

## What are the rules with regard to pharma companies giving 'gifts' to doctors in India?



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

The Apex Committee for Pharma Marketing Practices, under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers, recently found pharmaceutical company AbbVie Healthcare India Private Ltd, a subsidiary of the U.S.-based AbbVie Inc,. guilty of sponsoring international trips to the tune of nearly ?1.91 crore for 30 doctors, a breach of the Uniform Code for Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (UCPMP), 2024. The case came to light based on an anonymous complaint accompanied by documents supporting the claims concerning unethical marketing practices, where doctors were offered the freebie for 'professional development'. The tip-off gave details about the travel tickets and hotel accommodation offered to doctors under the guise of a conference (The Aesthetic and Anti-Aging Medicine World Congress 2024) in Monaco and Paris, said the Union Health Ministry. So what do the rules in India say about pharmaceutical companies offering "gifts" to doctors? The rules Both the UCPMP 2014, and now 2024 version, clearly forbid pharmaceutical companies from offering travel and hospitality to any healthcare professionals. The UCPMP was brought in last year by the Health Ministry, in a bit to promote transparency and ethical conduct within the pharmaceutical sector. On March 12, 2024, the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP) issued a policy communication to all pharmaceutical associations, enclosing the UCPMP 2024. .

The UCPMP 2024 is a framework that regulates how pharmaceutical companies and medical device companies interact with healthcare professionals (HCPs) in India. It aims to prevent undue influence on prescription practices, ensure fair practices, and protect public health. The Code prohibits companies from offering gifts, benefits, or pecuniary advantages to HCPs or their family members. It also restricts companies from offering travel facilities or hospitality to HCPs, unless under specified programmes. The UCPMP 2024, however, allows companies to offer informational and educational brand reminders, as well as free samples, subject to certain conditions. The UCPMP 2024 replaced the UCPMP 2014. It applies to both pharmaceutical and medical device companies.

What is the doctor-pharma company relationship in India?

An article, 'The pharmaceutical company-healthcare relationship: much ado about something', published recently in the Indian Journal of Medical Ethics, notes that the relationship between pharmaceutical companies and the healthcare profession, especially doctors, has always been fraught with conflicts of interest (COI). Personal, intellectual, financial or commercial COI can affect one's judgement and actions, sometimes even inadvertently, it notes. "There is evidence to suggest that financial "gifts", however they may be packaged, can influence a doctor's prescribing practice. Despite popular thinking, there is no "dose-response" — no direct link between the "size" of the financial gift and the degree of influence. Even a "small" gift can create a "network of obligation" as doctors are also social beings, affected by the "rules of social reciprocity". This is why it is critical that doctors become self-reflective and aware of this risk of bias, so that they can actively counteract it themselves, and encourage their academic peers to do so too," points out the article.

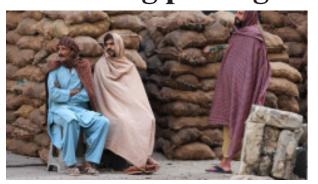
'Acceptable industry practice'In the AbbVie Healthcare India Private Ltd case, the company attempted to justify its breach as an 'acceptable industry practice'. The company added that it had entered into a professional service agreement with these doctors to compensate them for their services. Following this, the company also rejected the option for remedial action where it was asked to provide support to underprivileged patients in government hospitals for an amount equivalent to the violations computed by the special audit team. The company was subsequently reprimanded for unethical marketing practices and the Central Board of Direct Taxes has been asked to evaluate the tax liability of the company along with that of the 30 doctors and act in accordance with the provisions of the Income Tax Act, 1961. Additionally, the National Medical Council has also been asked to act against the 30 doctors as per the Indian Medical Council (Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics) Regulations, 2002.

Need for strong implementationExperts point out that a strict implementation of the code and penalising of violators is essential to keep conflicts of interest at bay, and nurture trust in the medical community. India's pharmaceutical industry is a global leader, with a strong domestic market and a reputation for low prices and high quality. The national pharmaceutical industry is the world's third largest by volume and fourteenth largest by value. In 2021, the domestic market was valued at USD 42 billion, and is expected to reach USD 120–130 billion by 2030. India is the world's largest supplier of generic drugs by volume, and exports to over 200 countries and territories. In 2022–23, India's pharmaceutical exports revenue was USD 25.3 billion.

## Researchers discover virus defense system in marine bacteria

Jerusalem: Israeli researchers have discovered a unique mechanism in marine bacteria that protects them from virus attacks, the Israel Institute of Technology (Technion) said in a statement. A new study published in Nature Microbiology focused on the battle between bacteria and phages, viruses that infect bacteria. This constant struggle leads to the mutual evolution of these two populations in marine environments, Xinhua news agency reported. In some areas, viral infections drastically reduce large bacterial populations, and without resistance mechanisms, the bacteria would be wiped out. The study revealed that bacteria use a passive defense mechanism against viruses, involving extremely low doses of molecules in protein creation during genetic translation. The research examined the relationship between Synechococcus, a marine bacterium, and the phage Syn9. Synechococcus is crucial because it produces oxygen through photosynthesis and is a key contributor to the food chain, making it vital to marine ecosystems. The researchers found that Synechococcus resists Syn9 by lowering the levels of transfer RNA (tRNA), a molecule essential for gene translation. When tRNA levels are normal, the bacteria are more susceptible to the virus, but when tRNA levels are reduced, resistance increases. This pattern of resistance is passive, with the loss of certain intracellular functions boosting the bacteria's ability to survive viral infection. The researchers noted that this resistance does not stop the phage from entering the bacterial cell but prevents new virus formation, allowing the bacteria to survive.

### World Bank to approve \$20 billion lending package for Pakistan: report



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

The World Bank is set to approve a \$20 billion indicative lending package for Pakistan – a pioneering 10-year initiative to protect its funded projects from political transitions and focus on six targeted areas, according to a media report. The programme, titled "Pakistan Country Partnership Framework 2025-35", aims to improve social indicators in the most neglected but important areas, The Express Tribune newspaper reported, citing official documents. It will focus on reducing child stunting, combating learning poverty, enhancing climate resilience, decarbonising the environment, expanding fiscal space, and boosting private investment to improve productivity. These areas have broad support across the political spectrum and are expected to remain unaffected by government changes during the 2025-2035 period, which is anticipated to include at least three general elections

This 'Country Partnership Framework' is scheduled to be approved by the World Bank board on January 14, following which the global lender's Vice President for South Asia Martin Raiser is also expected to visit Islamabad. According to the World Bank's assessment, the planning framework "will help shield the programme from the country's volatile polity and frequent swings in priorities and requests that follow government changes." The requests arising from government changes have caused 'fragmentation of the World Bank portfolio and diluted impacts,' it said. A key Pakistani official, who was part of the framework development, said that the World Bank picked Paki-

stan as the first country where it would introduce the 10year partnership strategy.

"The World Bank's total indicative lending envelope for fiscal year 2025 to 2035 will total around USD 20 billion," reads a draft of the framework.Out of the \$20 billion, the World Bank's concessional arm, the International Development Association (IDA), will lend \$14 billion and the remaining USD 6 billion is projected to be provided through the relatively expensive window - the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)."However, these indicative loans will depend upon the evolution of the IDA funding over the years, Pakistan's standing and performance, including with respect to the Sustainable Development Finance Policy and its debt vulnerability indicators," reads the document.

In addition to the USD 20 billion loans to the government of Pakistan, the new framework also aims to support another USD 20 billion private lending by the World Bank's two other arms - the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA). This brings the total package to USD 40 billion but the official loans will be equal to USD 20 billion, according to the newspaper. The new lending will focus on six areas that "currently enjoy strong support across the Pakistani political spectrum", according to the documents. However, it will phase out lending from 10 less-impactful sectors, such as transport, power transmission, telecoms, tertiary healthcare and higher education.

The World Bank's concessional and expensive lending will be meant for "larger projects on average, more frequent scale-ups and expansions, and less pilots and one-off operations", according to the planning document. The Washington-based Bank's new strategy marks a shift from "short-term macro-fiscal adjustment programmes and often small investments scattered in a wide array of sectors, to more selective, stable and larger investments in areas that are critical for sustained development and growth". The documents stated that the World Bank would still be supporting reforms to spur growth and investment and build more fiscal space. The implementation of the 10-year framework will be supported by two-year rolling business plans that both sides will agree upon, according to the paper.

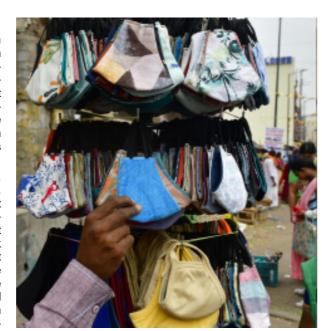
### HMPV is not a mysterious virus, we see it every year: paediatricians

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

With growing concerns about the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV), following viral reports of an outbreak in China, Hyderabad-based paediatrician are attempting to calm residents: the virus is neither new nor unusual, they say. "HMPV is not a mysterious virus. We see it every year, typically from around July or August to December or January," said paediatrician Sivaranjani Santosh. She explained that the virus commonly causes symptoms such as cough, cold, and fever, but can lead to severe illness requiring oxygen support or ventilation in rare cases.

While there is no definitive antiviral treatment for HMPV, she said management focuses on symptomatic care. Dr. Santosh urged residents to avoid unnecessary alarm but advised vigilance, particularly in light of uncertainties surrounding the nature of the outbreak in China. "We do not know if China is experiencing its regular seasonal outbreak or if a new mutant strain of HMPV is causing significant disruption," she noted. The pediatrician also highlighted the importance of preventive measures, especially during the season when respiratory viruses like Influenza, RSV, and Adenovirus are prevalent. She advised parents to refrain from sending sick children to school, citing the risk of severe illness in vulnerable individuals.

"What may be a mild illness for your child could turn into a serious condition for others," Dr. Santosh warned. She called for adherence to cough etiquette, mask usage when needed, and good hand hygiene practices to curb the spread of respiratory infections. Prabhukumar Challagali, president of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) Banjara which causes the elderly an respiratory in vised," he not your child could turn which causes the elderly an respiratory in vised," he not your child could turn which causes the elderly an respiratory in vised, "he not your child could turn which causes the elderly an respiratory in vised," he not your child could turn the elderly an respiratory in vised, "he not your child could turn the elderly an respiratory in vised," he not your child could turn the elderly an respiratory in vised, "he not your child could turn the elderly an respiratory in vised," he not your child could turn the elderly an respiratory in vised, "he not your child could turn the elderly an respiratory in the elderly an respiratory in vised," he not your child could turn the elderly an respiratory in vised, "he not your child could turn the elderly an respiratory in vised," he not your child could turn the elderly an respiratory in vised, "he not your child could turn the elderly an respiratory in th



Hills, highlighted that the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV), which causes cold and flu-like symptoms, primarily impacts the elderly and children during the winter season. "Currently, respiratory infections are under control, but caution is advised," he noted. Dr. Challagali also urged individuals to refrain from self-medication and to consult a doctor if symptoms persist.

## Winter storm hits central U.S., barrels toward Washington



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

A winter storm brought snow, ice and freezing temperatures to a broad swath of the U.S. on Sunday (January 5, 2025), with some 60 million people across more than a dozen states from Kansas to New Jersey under winter weather warnings and advisories. The storm was moving toward the mid-Atlantic, where Washington, D.C. was bracing for heavy snow and bitter cold on Monday (January 6, 2025), the same day the U.S. Congress is set to meet and formally certify Republican Donald Trump's election as president.Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson told Fox News on Sunday (January 5, 2025) the weather would not prevent lawmakers from carrying out their duties. But federal offices in the nation's capital will be closed, the Office of Personnel Management announced. Kansas and parts of northwestern Missouri were enduring blizzard conditions, the National Weather Service said. Roadways were blanketed in snow and ice, and officials urged residents to avoid travel. Much of the main artery in Kansas, Interstate 70, was closed throughout Sunday due to heavy snow and ice.In Missouri, the state police were sweeping a shut-down stretch of more than 50 miles on Interstate 29, searching for stranded motorists. As of late Sunday afternoon, troopers had responded to nearly 600 stranded drivers and 285 crashes, the agency said on X.Total snowfall of between six and 12 inches (15 to 30 cm) was expected from southern Ohio to Washington. Hundreds of schools announced in advance that they would not open on Monday due to the storm, including public schools in Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Washington and Philadelphia.In northern Kentucky and southern West Virginia, freezing rain and sleet will produce "hazardous ice accumulations," the service said. The back

end of the storm system, meanwhile, was producing severe thunderstorms capable of spinning off tornadoes in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. A snow-covered stretch limousine sits parked on January 5, 2025 in downtown Louisville, Kentucky. Local forecasts called for heavy snowfall followed by significant accumulation of freezing rain and ice. A snow-covered stretch limousine sits parked on January 5, 2025 in downtown Louisville, Kentucky. Local forecasts called for heavy snowfall followed by significant accumulation of freezing rain and ice. |The storm forced the cancellation of hundreds of flights, including more than 275 in both Kansas City and St. Louis, according to the aviation tracking website FlightAware. Governors in several states, including Kansas, Kentucky, Arkansas, West Virginia and Virginia, declared states of emergency. The storm will move offshore on Monday night, but bone-chilling arctic air is set to move in behind it, with daytime temperatures on Monday and Tuesday predicted to be 10 to 20 degrees F below average from the Great Plains to the East Coast, according to the weather

# 3 killed, six injured in shooting attack on bus carrying Israelis

Jerusalem: A shooting attack on a bus carrying Israelis in the occupied West Bank has killed at least three people. Israel's Magen David Adom rescue service said at least six others were wounded in the attack on Monday. Violence has surged in the West Bank since Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack out of Gaza ignited the ongoing war there. The attack occurred in the Palestinian village of Al-Funduq, on one of the main east-west roads crossing the territory. The identities of the attacker and those killed were not immediately known. Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war, and the Palestinians want it to form the main part of their future state. Some 3 million Palestinians live in the West Bank under seemingly open-ended Israeli military rule, with the Palestinian Authority administering population centres. Over 5,00,000 Israeli settlers live in scores of settlements,

### Top U.S. Republican eyes swift passage of Trump priority mega-bill



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

The speaker of the U.S. House said on Sunday (January 5, 2025) he was pushing an "aggressive" timeframe for getting a multi-trillion-dollar bill addressing immigration, tax cuts and more to Donald Trump's desk by April, within his first 100 days in office. Speaker Mike Johnson and fellow congressional Republicans are eager to help the incoming president enact his campaign promises, including unprecedented border security spending, business deregulation, boosting energy production and raising the U.S. debt ceiling.

But with a new razor-thin majority in the House of Representatives and similarly tight Senate margins, Democratic opposition could stymie the efforts.Mr. Johnson said he has strategized with Trump about combining several priorities into one gigantic piece of legislation that could move through Congress under rules of so-called reconciliation.Such a tool allows budget-related bills to clear the 100-member Senate with a simple majority, rather than a typical 60-vote threshold.

"We can put it all together, one big up-or-down vote, which can save the country, quite literally, because there are so many elements to it," Johnson told Fox News."That's why we're going to be so aggressive about getting this through in the first 100 days," he said.Mr. Johnson said he aimed to have an initial House vote on the bill as early as April 3. He envisioned it then clearing the Senate and being signed into law by the month's end.According to Johnson, the bill would include funding for securing the US-Mexico border and deporting undocumented immigrants.Mr. Trump focused much of his 2024 presidential campaign on immigration and, after his victory in November, said he could use the military to deport millions of people."Members of Congress are getting to work on one powerful Bill that will bring our Country back, and make it greater than ever before," Trump posted on his Truth Social platform Sunday evening.

Mr. Johnson also said the mega-bill would "restore American energy dominance," extend tax cuts enacted during Trump's first term and slash red tape "that has smothered our free market. "He also pledged to include a provision extending US borrowing authority. The United States routinely runs up against a legal constraint on paying for bills already incurred, and Congress is called upon to either formally raise the so-called debt ceiling or suspend it. A suspension of the debt limit reached by lawmakers in 2023 has since ended, and the country is expected to tackle the issue again this year, possibly by June. During December budget negotiations in Congress, Trump insisted the debt ceiling be raised or even eliminated altogether, but he was unsuccessful.Mr. Johnson on Fox defended the apparent paradox of wanting to increase the limit on government borrowing while boasting of seeking to reduce the deficit. "We're the team that wants to cut spending," he said. "But you have to raise the debt limit on paper so that we don't frighten the bond markets and the world's economy."Mr. Trump meanwhile called for even bigger tax cuts, including repeating a

### Apple CEO Tim Cook to donate \$1 million to Trump's inaugural committee

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Apple CEO Tim Cook will be donating \$1 million to the inaugural committee of president-elect Trump in a personal capacity, reported the Axios outlet, citing anonymous sources. Apple is yet to officially confirm or deny the matter. The donation is meant to symbolise unity and contribute to the new president's official incoming ceremony, reported Axios. In December, AP reported that Trump hosted Cook for dinner at the former's Mar-a-Lago resort. Trump said they spoke about Apple's legal and tax-related issues in the European Union. Trump and Cook have also spoken over the phone, reported AP.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg too met with Trump, while billionaire Elon Musk is slated to co-lead a new department for government efficiency from this year. More Big Tech leaders have been praising or endorsing Trump in recent months, as it appeared highly likely that he would return to the White House. This marks a break from when several social media platforms, including Meta, temporarily banned



Trump's accounts in the aftermath of the Capitol riots on January 6, 2021. However, these platforms loosened their policies in order to let Trump campaign in the run-up to the November 2024 election. Trump appeared to acknowledge his awareness that more industry stakeholders were trying to establish a good relationship with him.

### U.S. taking steps to clear hurdles for civil nuclear partnership with Indian firms: Jake Sullivan

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

United States National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on Monday (January 6, 2025) that the United States is finalising necessary steps to remove barriers in India-United States civil nuclear cooperation. The United States is finalising steps to remove roadblocks to the civil nuclear partnership with Indian companies, he said during in New Delhi on Monday (January 6, 2024) He said the formal paperwork for this will be done soon. The move will allow India access restricted technology in the US. Washington and New Delhi have been discussing the supply of U.S. nuclear reactors to energy-hungry India since the mid-2000s. But a longstanding obstacle has been the need to bring Indian liability rules in line with global norms which require the costs of any accident to be channelled to the operator rather than the maker of a nuclear power plant.

The deal was signed by then President George W. Bush in 2007, a major step toward allowing the United States to sell civilian nuclear technology to India.Mr. Sullivan is on a visit to India two weeks ahead of Donald Trump's inauguration as the 47th president of the US. Washington expects the impact of Chinese upstream dams, artificial intelligence,



space, military licensing and Chinese economic overcapacity to be discussed while Mr. Sullivan is in New Delhi, a U.S official said on Saturday. The two countries agreed in 2019 to build six U.S. nuclear power plants in India. India's stringent nuclear compensation laws have previously hurt deals with foreign power plant builders, subsequently deferring India's target to add 20,000 MW of nuclear power from 2020 to 2020.

## Why has Trump called the Panama treaty 'foolish'?

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

The story so far: On December 22, 2024, Donald Trump threatened to take back the Panama canal, calling the transfer treaty "foolish". He said, "Our Navy and Commerce have been treated in a very unfair and injudicious way....we will demand that the Panama canal be returned to us, in full, and without question." Panama's President José Raúl Mulino rejected Trump's threat, and said, "I want to express precisely that every square metre of the Panama canal and its adjacent area belong to Panama, and will continue to belong to Panama."

Why is Trump upset with Panama?

The first and major reason for the U.S. President-elect's upset is the high transit fees applied on U.S. vessels by the ACP (Panama Canal Authority). In 2023, Lakes Gatun and Alhajuela experienced severe drought affecting the shipping and navigation of the canal as it relies on these reservoirs to operate its locks. Therefore, the ACP reduced the number of slots for crossing ships by 36%. This led to the increase in transit fees. The second cause of worry has been the increased Chinese presence in the Panama canal. In 2017, Panama became the first Latin American country to sign a Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) agreement, and ever since then, Chinese investment has increased significantly. Hutchison Ports PPC, a subsidiary of a Hong Kongbased company, operates two ports near the canal's entrances, igniting concerns over Chinese influence on logistical operations and surveillance over the U.S. Navy.

What is the U.S.-Panama treaty?

The Panama canal is an artificial 80-kilometre canal connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, reducing cost, time and distance for international shipping. The canal is

crucial for the global supply chain, and 6% of maritime world trade goes through it. The canal also symbolises U.S.'s technological prowess and economic power. It opened in 1914 after the U.S. finished construction, and was controlled by the U.S. until December 31, 1999. The canal was handed over to Panama in 1999 under the Torrijos-Carter Treaties. The first, called the Panama Canal Treaty, cancelled the Panama Canal Zone and turned the canal over to the Panamanians on December 31, 1999. Under the second, the Permanent Neutrality Treaty, the canal was declared neutral and open to vessels of all nations. Under this treaty, the U.S. has the right to defend the neutrality of the canal and have priority passage in military emergencies.

What has been Panama's response?

Panama's President José Raúl Mulino has rejected Mr. Trump's accusations. He addressed the accusations by defending the transit rates and clarifying the concerns about external influence over canal operations. He stated that the transit rates are set according to international standards and decided by a procedure. He denied any involvement of external powers such as China or the European community while emphasising the importance of sovereignty for Panamanians. He responded to Mr. Trump's accusation of Chinese soldiers operating the canal, saying, "There is not a single Chinese soldier in the canal, and on the other hand, there will not be".

What next?

The concerns over fee hikes and operations logistics will likely be discussed diplomatically, despite Mr. Trump's threats. While the U.S. might attempt to influence Panama and pressure the latter with renegotiations.

### Textile clusters receiving higher enquiries amid Bangladesh crisis; order conversion by early 2025: AEPC



Amid the ongoing economic and political tensions in Bangladesh, Indian exporting firms, particularly in the Tirupur clusters, are receiving higher enquiries from several global apparel brands, including Primark, Tesco, Decathlon, Duns, JCPenney, GAP, Next, and Walmart, with order conversion expected for shipment by early 2025, Mithileshwar Thakur, Secretary General of the Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) said. Due to a record surge in the US dollar's value, Bangladesh has faced a sharp depletion in its foreign exchange reserves, which fell below \$40 billion for the first time in two years in July last year. With foreign exchange reserves sufficient to cover only four to five months of imports, Bangladesh has faced challenges in importing cotton and fabric, which it traditionally sources from India. This comes amid tightening economic conditions in the neighbouring country.

"This crisis also presents an opportunity for additional employment generation. Capturing just 10 per cent of Bangladesh's global apparel exports could directly create 5,00,000 jobs and indirectly generate an additional 1 million jobs in the Indian apparel sector. To seize the opportunity presented by this development, India needs to urgently address issues related to capacity augmentation and skill development," Thakur said.

Most European brands sourcing from Bangladesh particularly in the cost-sensitive segment, are facing challenges in immediately shifting orders to alternative destinations, due to the distinct cost advantages offered by the country, such as low wage rates, duty-free access, and its Least Developed Country (LDC) status. However, several prominent brands have decided not to further increase their exposure to Bangladesh for sourcing, Thakur added. Notably, Bangladesh enjoys a 10-15 per cent cost advantage over India, as its apparel products benefit from duty-free access in the European Union, the UK, and Canada due to its LDC status. India can only bridge the duty disadvantage after it signs a free trade agreement with the EU and the UK. Currently, several Indian manufacturers have set up factories in Bangladesh due to India's labour laws, concerns about unions, and the cost disadvantage. Thakur further said that global investments are driven by the political stability index, and the continued instability in Bangladesh presents a significant opportunity for India to attract investments that might otherwise flow to neighbouring competing countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Indonesia.

"However, with a strong focus on improving and up-

grading infrastructure, capacity expansion, technology infusion, and compliance, India is well-positioned to capitalise on these redirected investments. We are also in talks with agencies and consulting firms to engage them in improving productivity and efficiency in the operations of garment manufacturing companies, which can unlock the underutilised production capacity in the apparel sector," Thakur said.On PLI 2.0:

To capture market share and seize the opportunities arising from the reorientation of supply chains due to Bangladesh's crisis and the China+1 factor, India must act swiftly to enhance its production capacity, shorten production cycle times, and improve speed to market, in addition to focusing on workforce skilling and developing a robust compliance architecture, Thakur said. "Accordingly, the PLI 2.0 scheme for all types of garments, irrespective of fibre, with a reduced investment threshold, should be introduced on an urgent basis. This scheme would foster investment and scale up production capacity exponentially. For microindustries, the Amended Technology Upgradation Funds Scheme (ATUFS) should be revived for technology upgradation, as PLI 2.0 will not cover micro-industries within its scope," he said.

On challenges in input material imports: Thakur stated that due to the unavailability of quality Man-Made Fibre (MMF) fabric from indigenous sources, garment exporters are often dependent on fabric nominated by foreign buyers. He added that the "existing scheme of special advance authorisation" for fabric import is "not suitable for garment exporters" due to ever-changing market dynamics, designs, patterns, shapes, sizes, geography-specific consumption norms, and fast-changing fashion. "India's garment export sector relies heavily on imported textile machinery to maintain quality and global competitiveness, as domestic machinery production is insufficient to meet demand. High import duties on machinery increase production costs, particularly following the withdrawal of most end-use duty exemptions, making Indian garment exports less competitive compared to countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam," he said.AEPC has therefore requested the Finance Ministry to reduce the current customs duties on textile machinery to zero, in addition to continuing the existing exemptions, to enhance the sector's efficiency. With the growing emphasis on ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) compliance in key overseas markets, particularly in the EU and the US, it is crucial for India to prioritise the upgradation of sustainability-compliance related infrastructure. On Bharat Tex & expansion of exports:

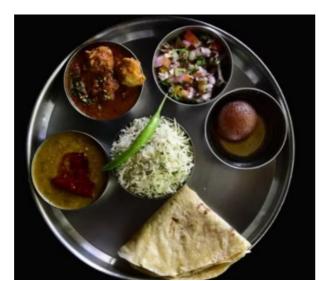
Bharat Tex 2024 has emerged as a pivotal event for India's textile industry, as this four-day event attracted 3,000 buyers from 111 countries, including renowned global brands such as Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, Vero Moda, Jack & Jones, H&M, Target, and IKEA, Thakur said. "The presence of these global giants underscored their growing confidence in India's textile sector. Deeper engagement of foreign buyers with the Indian textile industry during the event has contributed to the apparel sector's recent double-digit growth during this fiscal year, despite adverse global market conditions and geopolitical challenges," he added.

#### Non-veg thali prices rise by 12%

The representative cost of home-cooked vegetarian thali rose by three per cent and that of non-vegetarian thali by 12 per cent on a year-on-year in December, rating firm Crisil said. The increase in non-vegetarian thali cost was driven by an estimated 20 per cent on-year rise in the price of broiler, which accounts for 50 per cent of a non-vegetarian thali cost. The sharp surge in broiler prices is attributable to a low base of last year, when production was high, Crisil said.

Crisil said the rise in vegetarian thali cost was driven by an increase in tomato and potato prices, which collectively account for 24 per cent of the cost of a thali. Tomato price rose 24 per cent to Rs 47 per kg in December 2024 from Rs 38 per kg in December 2023. Potato price surged 50 per cent on a low base last year to Rs 36 per kg in December 2024 from Rs 24 per kg in December 2023 due to an estimated 6 per cent on-year December line in production, Crisil said. Adding to the cost was a 16 per cent on year jump in vegetable oil prices due to import-duty hike, coupled with higher demand during the festive and wedding seasons.

However, an 11 per cent on-year drop in LPG fuel cost (to Rs 803 per 14.2 kg LPG cylinder in Delhi from Rs 903 last year) provided a partial offset. A veg thali comprises roti, vegetables (onion, tomato and potato), rice, dal, curd and salad. A non-veg thali has the same elements except for dal, which is replaced by chicken (broiler). The average cost of preparing a thali at home is calculated based on input prices prevailing in north, south, east and west India. The monthly change reflects the impact on the common man's expenditure. The data also reveals the ingredients (cereals, pulses, broilers, vegetables, spices, edible oil and cooking gas) driving the change in the cost of the thali, Crisil said. On-month, the cost of a vegetarian thali declined 3 per cent in December 2024, while the cost of a non-vegetarian thali is estimated to have increased at a similar pace. Tomato prices fell 12 per cent on-month, helped by fresh sup-



plies from Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat, Crisil said. A 2 per cent and 12 per cent on-month drop in potato and onion prices, respectively, further supported the price December line. The cost of non-vegetarian thali grew at a faster pace due to an estimated 11 per cent on-month increase in broiler prices on a dip in production triggered by a cold wave in the north. This, coupled with a rise in festive-and wedding-season demand, along with an elevated feed cost, exacerbated the woes, Crisil said.

India's headline retail inflation rate accelerated to a four-month high of 5.69 per cent in December, according to data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation on January 12. This was due to an unfavourable base effect. The RBI's monetary Policy Committee (MPC) retained the Repo rate at 6.50 per cent in the December monetary policy. However, it slashed the cash reserve ratio.

#### Infosys defers annual salary hike



New Delhi: IT major Infosys has reportedly deferred the annual salary hike in the fourth quarter of FY 2024-25. The company last implemented a salary hike in November 2023. The delay in the salary hike, which is usually implemented at the beginning of the year, indicates that the domestic IT sector is still facing uncertainties.

The reason cited for slow-down is that clients are not increasing their IT spending due to macro-economic situations, including potential tariffs under the new Donald Trump administration that will begin working from January 20.Not only Infosys but some other large IT companies like HCL Tech, LTI Mindtree and L&TTech Ser-

vices also did not increase salaries in the second quarter this year to manage costs and profits. Regarding Infosys, Motilal Oswal Financial Services had said in its pre-earnings note that Infosys' margins may decline in the December quarter. This is owing to employees going on leave and fewer working days. How-

ever, this will be compensated by price increases, subcontractor optimisation, and 'Project Maximus'. 'Project Maximus' is Infosys' margin improvement plan and its goal is to reduce costs. In the second quarter (July-September) of the current financial year, the company's profit grew 4.7 per cent yearon-year to Rs 6,506 crore, which was Rs 6,212 crore in the same quarter a year ago. The company's income in the second quarter was Rs 40,986 crore. This figure was Rs 38,994 crore in the same quarter of the previous financial year. In the September quarter, Infosys increased its income growth guidance for the year from 3.75 per cent to 4.5 per cent. During this time, the IT giant also announced a dividend of Rs 21 per share.

### Can tomatoes trigger your smoking response? Let's find out



Tomatoes have been in the spotlight recently, with claims swirling around the internet about their potential nicotine content. This raises questions for anyone trying to quit smoking: Should I be avoiding tomatoes? Could tomatoes trigger cravings? To get to the bottom of this, indianexpress.com reached out to a health expert. Isha Lall, holistic health coach, clarified that "Yes, tomatoes, like several other vegetables, contain a very small amount of nicotine. Nicotine is a naturally occurring compound found in a group of plants called the Solanaceae family, also known as nightshades. This family includes tomatoes, potatoes, eggplants, and bell peppers. But to put it into perspective, the amount of nicotine found in tomatoes is minuscule."

According to her, a single 100-gram serving of tomatoes contains about 0.0008 milligrams of nicotine—roughly one ten-thousandth of what you'd find in a single cigarette, which has about 1 milligram of nicotine. So, while the presence of nicotine is scientifically accurate, the levels are ex-

tremely low and not likely to impact health in the way some fear.

Can tomatoes trigger smoking cravings?

Lall said that scientifically there's no evidence that consuming small amounts of nicotine from tomatoes or other foods would stimulate the same nicotine receptors in the brain as smoking a cigarette. "Smoking delivers nicotine directly to your lungs and bloodstream, creating a rapid, addictive hit. Eating tomatoes, on the other hand, doesn't provide nearly enough nicotine to elicit a similar response. The digestion process is different, and the trace amounts don't have the addictive potential," she added. However, cravings are not just about biochemistry—they're psychological too. If you associate the taste of tomatoes with the experience of smoking or if they somehow become a mental trigger, you might feel a connection. Lall shared that tomatoes are packed with nutrients like lycopene, vitamin C, and potassium, all of which support overall health and detoxification. Moderation is key, and enjoying 1-2 medium tomatoes per day is both safe and healthy.In conclusion.. There's no need to cut tomatoes out of your diet when quitting smoking cigarettes. Lall put emphasis on focusing on a diet high in whole foods, anti-inflammatory fruits and vegetables, and nourishing fats and proteins that support your body's healing process as you quit smoking. The real issue with quitting smoking lies not in tomatoes but in finding healthy habits and creating emotional and psychological support systems. Reducing smoking is about replacing behaviors, addressing cravings, and healing physically and mentally—not about eliminating healthy vegetables from your diet.

# Two HMPV cases detected in Karnataka, no link to China surge: Know the symptoms, how it is transmitted

Karnataka has reported two cases of human metapneumovirus (HMPV). While this virus may not be as widely known as influenza or COVID-19, it has been recognised as a significant cause of respiratory illnesses, especially in vulnerable populations. According to the Government of India, "Both cases were identified through routine surveillance for multiple respiratory viral pathogens, as part of ICMR's ongoing efforts to monitor respiratory illnesses across the country."The first case involves a threemonth-old infant in Bengaluru with a history of bronchopneumonia, who has since been discharged. The second case concerns an eight-month-old infant with a similar history, currently undergoing treatment. Both cases were reported from Baptist hospital-Bengaluru. Providing an update on the status of the virus, the Union Health Ministry issued a statement, saying, "HMPV is already in circulation globally, including in India, and cases of respiratory illnesses associated with HMPV have been reported in various countries." It further stated that neither case had a history of international travel, indicating no link between these infections and the reported increase in respiratory cases in China.Dr Ravi Shekhar Jha, director, Pulmonology at Fortis Hospital Faridabad, tells indian express.com, "HMPV belongs to the same family as respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), which typically circulates during the winter months. It's not limited to China but is prevalent across most Asian countries."

Dr Shivakumar K, MD Respiratory Medicine and chief consultant pulmonologist at Kauvery Hospital, Marathahalli, Bengaluru, adds, "HMPV is an RNA virus with a genome encoding nine proteins, including F (fusion) and G (glycoprotein) proteins. These are critical for viral entry into host cells and immune response evasion."Dr Jha informs that in most cases, HMPV causes mild illness, such as cough, cold, and fever. "However, like COVID-19 or regular influenza, certain high-risk groups — such as immunocompromised individuals, organ transplant recipients, the elderly, and children under 5 — may experience more severe symptoms. Even in these cases, it is rare for the infection to become fatal," he says. Severe Cases:



Wheezing, shortness of breath, and bronchitis. It may lead to pneumonia in severe cases, particularly in high-risk groups. "Rarely, patients may experience severe symptoms like coughing up blood, which is a warning sign requiring immediate medical attention," adds Dr Jha. Dr Jha says that the virus mutates very fast and keeps changing genetic structure, so there could be multiple strains. However, no specific strains have been identified or nomenclated yet.

How is HMPV transmitted, and what preventive measures can individuals take?

Dr Jha says that HMPV is highly contagious and spreads primarily through respiratory droplets, much like other respiratory viruses. "Transmission occurs when an infected person does not follow proper cough etiquette, or through contact with surfaces contaminated by respiratory secretions. Body fluids, such as saliva, can also facilitate its spread." "Preventive measures to reduce the risk of inction include practicing good hand hygiene by w hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, regularly disinfecting high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs, mobile phones, and countertops, and avoiding crowded places, especially during outbreaks," explains Dr Shivakumar, adding that wearing a mask in public spaces can significantly reduce droplet transmission, and it is essential to stay home and isolate if experiencing symptoms to prevent spreading the virus.

### How can having acidic burps late at night impact your sleep? Experts share tips for relief

Doctors recommend against having heavy meals right before falling asleep, and why not, that feeling of bile stuck in your throat can ruin even the most peaceful of nights! Want to know how to tackle late night bouts of acid reflux? Indianexpress.com spoke to a health expert and got more clarity.Dr Dattatray Solanke, Consultant, Gastroenterologist, Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hopsital, Mumbai explained that gastro-esophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a chronic digestive disease caused by recurrent regurgitation of acid from the stomach into the esophagus, the tube connecting the mouth and stomach.Acid reflux hurts the lining of the esophagus, and this acid reflux may occur with the following symptoms:

 Heartburn: Burning in the chest often happens after eating or lying down. • Regurgitation: A sour or bitter taste of acid coming back into the throat or mouth. • Chest Pain: Sometimes this may resemble heart-related problems. Dysphagia: Suspicion of food being stuck in the throat.. Chronic cough or hoarseness: More so at night or in the morning. According to Dr Solanke, GERD occurs when the lower esophageal sphincter (LES), that is, a muscular ring at the end of the esophagus is weak or abnormally relaxed, allowing for the escape of stomach acid. Factors influencing the development of this condition include obesity, smoking, some types of food, certain medications, and stress. "While occasional acid reflux is experienced by many, GERD usually involves frequent or severe symptoms that interfere with daily life and may lead to complications such as the esophagitis, strictures, or Barrett's esophagus, which is an early-stage, precancerous change in the esophagus,"

How can late night GERD impact your sleep?

Dr Solanke explained that when the stomach acid backs into the esophagus, it can cause symptoms like heartburns, regurgitation, and sometimes discomfort in the area of heart burns caused by the acid reflux. "Typically, GERD gets worse at night because of lying down, making it easier for acid to rise. If it persists, GERD also disturbs digestion and very much impairs sleep quality resulting in an exhausted and cranky experience the next day."Latenight GERD can lead to broken sleep patterns, since acid reflux can awaken you or bar you from achieving deeper sleep stages, such as REM, necessary for physical and

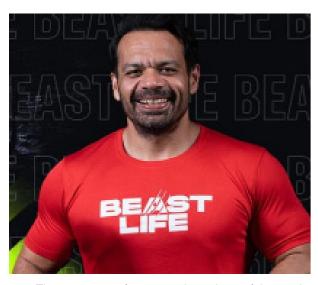


mental recharging. Symptoms like heartburn or coughing triggered by acid irritation may keep you awake or fail you to fall asleep. Poor sleeping patterns caused by GERD may increase cortisol levels, disrupting your sleep-wake cycle further.

How can you tackle this situation?

If GERD disrupts your sleep, Dr Solanke suggested some uselful tips to find relief:1. Elevate Your Head While Sleeping: Use a wedge pillow or elevate the head of your bed by 6-8 inches to prevent acid from flowing back into your esophagus.2. Avoid Late-Night Eating: Refrain from eating 2-3 hours before bedtime to allow your stomach to empty.3. Sleep on Your Left Side: Sleeping on your left side reduces pressure on the esophagus, minimizing acid reflux.4. Over-the-Counter Medications: Antacids or H2 blockers can provide temporary relief for mild symptoms. Consult a doctor for persistent GERD.

## Gaurav Taneja reveals why he's pitching to sharks after claiming he does 'Rs 1 cr sales in 1 hour', says 'if this fails...'



The stage is set for yet another edition of the muchbeloved business reality television series Shark Tank India and the teasers released so far suggest that season four, which premieres on January 6, will be even more intense and filled with high-stakes drama than previous seasons. Recently, the show's makers unveiled another promo video showing social media influencer and entrepreneur Gaurav Taneja, popularly known as Flying Beast, stepping onto the Shark Tank India floor to pitch his fitness brand named Beast Life. The Shark Tank promo video begins with Vineeta Singh, CEO and co-founder of SUGAR Cosmetics, asking her fellow sharks who the pext contestant is to which Kunal Bahl

co-founder of Snapdeal, responds, "It's Flying Beast, the influencer." Surprised, Singh asks, "Gaurav Taneja?! He's coming?" After Bahl nods in confirmation, the teaser cuts to Taneja entering the stage with a wide smile. "Sharks, these days all founders want to become influencers. Don't know where they get the urge from," he says, prompting Vineeta Singh to quip, "And influencers want to become founders!"Shark Tank India 4: Aman Gupta reacts sharply to entrepreneurs' claim their headphones outperform boAt's

Introducing Beast Life, Taneja explains that it is not just a health and supplement brand, but a "healthy way of life." During the pitch, a person from the company, accompanying Taneja, claims that Beast Life generated Rs 1 crore in sales within just one hour of launching, which stuns the sharks. "That is a dream for a lot of businesses," Aman Gupta, co-founder and Chief Marketing Officer of electronics brand boAt Lifestyle, points out. Concluding his pitch, Taneja can be seen asking the sharks "Rs 1 crore for 1 per cent of equity." Bahl, curious about Taneja's background, asks, "Generally, IIT-ians go to Google, Facebook etc or go for start-ups. How come your trajectory is different?" As Gupta points out, "These days a lot of influencers are floating brands," Peyush Bansal, co-founder and CEO of Lenskart, asks, "What is the kind of income an influencer can generate today?" "You earned Rs 1 crore in 1 hour then what are you doing here asking for Rs 1 crore (for 1 per cent equity)," asks Singh. In response to the questions posed by the sharks, Taneja says, "Just like the 'Beast' in the name 'Beast Life', my everything is in this. If this fails, I can't create another one (brand). This is my life." The promo video concludes on a cliffhanger, leaving viewers wondering if Flying Beast will secure a deal with the sharks.

### Aaman Devgn is obsessed with 'duniya ka sabse sundar ghoda' in period drama starring Ajay Devgn, Rasha Thadani

The much-anticipated trailer of Azaad starring debutantes Aaman Devgn and Rasha Thadani is finally out. The film, also starring Aaman's uncle and actor Ajay Devgn revolves around a horse named Azaad and how Aaman's character is hellbent on making Azaad his own with a parallel love story with Rasha Thadani. The trailer of the film begins with Aaman's character praising Azaad, calling it "smart". He says, "Vikram Singh ka ghoda hai Azaad". The next frame introduces Ajay Devgn as Vikram Singh, who is a baaghi (rebel) against the Britishers. The video moves on to introduce Rasha Thadani, and clips of various songs and Aaman Devgn's meeting with Vikram Singh.

Vikram asks, "Ghod sawari jaante ho? (Do you know horse riding?)" Aaman replies, "Ghudsawari ke pyaar mein hi toh apke jaisa daaku bane hai hum (I became a bandit like you only for my love for horse riding.)" Ajay Devgn corrects him, "Not bandits, baaghi."The next few frames show Aaman's failed attempt at riding Azaad. With frustration, he complains, "Iska daru, khana, paani sab dekh rahe hai, par yeh humein baithne bhi nahi deta hai (I have been his caretaker but he never lets me ride him)."

The dialogue follows with a dialogue by Ajay Devgn, "Rishwat se toh insaan kabu mein aate hai... ghoda paseene mein bahaduri aur wafa ke mehak se (Bribery can control people, horses are controlled with pride and loyalty)."The trailer then shows Britishers wanting to send Indian labourers to South Africa, with villagers pleading to stop the torture. How Aaman gets to ride Azaad and free his village is to be uncovered in the film releasing on January 17. Apart from Raveena Tandon's daughter Rasha, Aaman and Ajay Devgn, the film also stars actor Diana Penty, Mohit Malik and Piyush Mishra in important roles. Azaad, directed by the maker of Rock On, Kai Po Che, and Kedarnath, Abhishek Kapoor, is co-produced by the direc-



tor as well as Ronnie Screwvala and Pragya Kapoor.

The film written by Ritesh Shah, Suresh Nair, and Chandan Arora along with Abhishek Kapoor, is composed by Amit Trivedi. Abhishek Kapoor is known for directing films like Rock On, Kai Po Che, and Kedarnath among others. Previously, the teaser of the film had gained a wide recognition from the viewers also garnering praises for the newcomers. The trailer too has caught the attention of movie buffs who have flooded the comment section of the the trailer with comments like, "Congratulations Azaad team, superb trailer", "Ab toh dekhna padega Azaad", "January mein toh bahaut movie aayenge, but I think this will become the best movie." Other comments read. "The newcomers Aaman Devgn and Rasha Thadani look promosing... All The Best." Many even compared Ajay Devgn's role with his cameo in RRR.In a statement, Abhishek Kapoor said, "Azaad' is a long-held vision that has finally come to life, and I'm thrilled to share it with the world. This film is a testament to the transformative power of human-animal connections, and I firmly believe its universal themes will strike a chord with audiences of all ages.'

# Scam 1992 actor Paresh Ganatra recalls losing all his savings during Harshad Mehta market crash: 'My salary was Rs 5,000 in those days'

Paresh Ganatra is known for his comic roles in hit films like Welcome, No Entry, and Scam 1992, among others. The actor, who was last seen in Zakir Khan's TV show, is known for his iconic dialogues and unique sense of humour. In a recent interview with Digital Commentary on their Youtube channel, Paresh recalled his casting for the role in Anees Bazmee's Welcome (2007) and how he insisted on working in Scam 1992 The Harshad Mehta Story after losing all his saving during the market crash in 1992.

Recalling what inspired him to work in the Hansal Mehta show, the actor recalled, "I was working then and my salary was Rs 5,000 per month. I had Rs 75,000 in savings and it was a big amount at that time. I lost it all during Harshad Mehta scam. When I found out about Scam 1992, I insisted that I would play this role despite Hansal Mehta saying it was a small role. It was based on RK Damani who is the owner of D Mart and my personal story made me decide that I would definitely play it."During the conversation, the actor recalled the time when he got a call from director Anees Bazmee for the role in Welcome. "I had already worked with Anees in No Entry. When Welcome was being shot, my show Baa Bahoo Aur Baby was airing on Star Plus. Anees bhai called and said that there's an interesting character in the film for you and you will have to come to Dubai on so and so dates for 15 days," he shared.Paresh further added, "I told him that my show is going on and I shoot it for 25-27 days in a month. It will be difficult for me, I can't do it. He tried to convince me but I apologised and said that I won't be able to do it because this is my prior commitment."

However, Anees tried to get him on board again after some time, but this time, for a day's shoot. "After 6 months, he called me again and asked me to come for a one day shoot to Lonavala to shoot just one climax scene and you can't say no. I just asked him about the dates and went to the shoot at Tiger Point in Lonavala."

The Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3 director is known to give freedom to his actors for improvisation and that's what hap-



Recalling what inspired him to work in the Hansal Mehta show, the actor recalled, "I was working then and my salary was Rs 5,000 per month. I had Rs 75,000 in savings and it was a big amount at that time.

pened on the sets of Welcome. "He narrated the climax scene to me and wanted to improvise it. I had thought of a line, which is so iconic now, 'Mai sirf dikhne mai khatarnaak hu, lekin aadmi bahut acha hu'. I suggested and he agreed to use it for my character," Paresh elaborated.In fact, veteran actor Nana Patekar also partook in the final output of the scene. "By then, Nana sir came and asked to start the shoot. When we narrated the whole scene to him, he came up with another improvisation. 'Mujhe kyun toda, mai illegal nahi tha'. Anees bhai was so happy. Vo scene dhaancha tha and kahan pahuch gaya (It was merely a rough draft and went to another level). As an actor, he gives a lot of freedom to improvise, that's something really good about him, you don't get that in many directors," he ended.

## Payal Kapadia on taking All We Imagine as Light to Golden Globes, no win for film: 'A very small film made with the struggles'



Filmmaker Payal Kapadia made history after she bagged two nominations at the 82nd Golden Globes Awards for her film, All We Imagine As Light. Payal was nominated for Best Director and her film was in the running for Best Non-English Film category, however, the team missed out

on both awards. Yet, seeing her project during many other renowned films Payal Kapadia feels honoured. While at Golden Globes, she spoke about the recognition All We Imagine As Light received. She said, "It's absolutely incredible, ours is a very small film made with the struggles of a lot of people who put resources into making it. The fact that it is here with all these amazing people makes me feel really happy and honoured." Payal has been the second Indian filmmaker after Shekhar Kapur who has been nominated for the Golden Globes.

Payal's film All We Imagine As Light has had quite a glorious run in the festival circuits. The film has bagged awards in several parts of the world including the Cannes Film Festival. Though the film had a limited release in India and also missed out on the opportunity to be India's official entry to the Oscars, Payal Kapadia's film surely left a strong impression on the global stage on several occasions. All We Imagine as light stars Kani Kusruti and Divya Prabha in the lead roles. The film is an international co-production between companies from France, India, Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Italy. Other than Kani and Divya, All We Imagine As Light also stars Chhaya Kadam, Anand Sami, and Hridhu Haroon. The film revolves around the life story and struggles of two nurses Prabha and Anu

## Malayalam actor Honey Rose alleges stalking, sexually coloured remarks by unnamed person; one detained

Malayalam actor Honey Rose has come forward alleging that a person, whose identity she chose not to reveal, has been making disparaging remarks about her through innuendos and persistently stalking her. Taking to social media on Sunday, the actor explained that her decision to speak out stemmed from repeated potshot-like queries from people asking whether her silence meant she enjoyed such remarks or agreed with them. Rose also noted that the said person's sexually coloured remarks against her constituted prima facie criminal offences.

"The said person, as if taking revenge for my refusal to go to the events he invited me to, shows up at other functions I attend and makes derogatory mentions of my name in the media whenever possible. If you ask me whether one can insult any woman using the arrogance of wealth and the legal framework in India provides no protection against this, it is evident that the individual's actions prima facie constitute offences under the Indian Penal Code, involving making sexually coloured remarks and stalking a woman with such intent," she wrote on social media.

Don't Miss | Shark Tank India 4: Aman Gupta reacts sharply to entrepreneurs' claim their headphones outperform boAt's"Personally, I usually dismiss such rants from mentally disturbed persons with both contempt and pity. That does not mean I lack the ability to respond. The definition of one's personal freedom does not include the liberty to insult another's personal freedom," Rose concluded. She later told Asianet News that if the said person continues to do the same, she will initiate legal action. Meanwhile, a day after the Malayalam actor shared the post, a man has been taken into custody by the Kochi Central Police and at least 30 people have been booked for allegedly posting obscene comments on her social media pages, according to a re-



port by news agency PTI. The case was registered based on a complaint she filed on Sunday night. The accused were charged under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including Section 75 (sexual harassment) and Section 67 (punishment for publishing or transmitting obscene material electronically) of the IT Act. "Interrogation of the person in custody is going on," a police officer told PTI. Honey Rose, who began her acting career with director Vinayan's Boyy Friennd (2005), has featured in films across Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada, including Trivandrum Lodge, Hotel California, Thank You. 5 Sundarikal, Daivathinte Swantham Cleetus, Ring Master, 1 by Two, Kanal, Chalakkudykkaran Changathy, Big Brother, Monster, Pattaampoochi, Veera Simha Reddy and Ajantha. Despite being a frequent target of cyberbullying and offensive remarks on social media, this is the first time the actor has publicly addressed the issue so firmly.

## Rohit Roy recalls surprising daughter Kiara who is studying at Brown University in USA: 'I travelled for 20 hours... she started crying'

Actor Rohit Roy opened up about his daughter Kiara and the bond they share. Rohit, married to actor Mansi, said fathers rarely show their emotions or feelings to their children but he decided to break the pattern when he booked tickets to the US on an impulse and travelled 20 hours to surprise his daughter who is studying at the prestigious Brown University. "I missed her badly, I booked the tickets and surprised her", said the actor.

Recalling the incident, Rohit told Cyrus on his podcast, "I went to America to surprise my daughter. I just landed up at her door step. I think it was a Sunday morning, she looked at me and she was like, 'Are you here?' She started crying thinking she was hallucinating." He also spoke highly of Kiara who is in her final year at the university and is scoring near perfect grades. He said, "She is in the final year at Brown and I was missing her. For father, we can't tell anybody anything. I said, 'What do I do, I simply booked tickets and went to her. I was all alone. For once, Mansi didn't say a thing. I landed at night, but I waited. I love to take Uber in the USA. I booked one in the morning and reached her. We spent seven blissful days together. I haven't ever spent days like that. I regret I had nobody to record that moment."

The actor shared he wanted to involve his daughter's roommate in the surprise, so that she could at least record the entire thing, but he let it pass. "I thought, kids speak, and what if something slips out of her mouth. My whole 20-hour journey would have gone in waste. Also, Kiara is a kind of person who doesn't like too much of pictures and videos."

Though the actor couldn't record that moment, he said, "I will never ever forget that moment. It is now imprinted in my mind."Previously talking about his daughter on RiteBite



Max Protein TV YouTube channel, the actor said, "I feel like the luckiest man on earth to have Kiara in my life. She's a truly sorted individual. She lives her life, she studies hard. She goes to Brown, and her GPA is 3.9 on 4."The actor had also shared that his daughter was offered a role in Zoya Akhtar's The Archies, but she couldn't give it a thought due to her education. He told The Indian Express, "About a year and a half back, I was at a fashion event hosted by Shabana Azmi. There was a great amount of media and paps and of course many stars. Later, Excel called me for The Archies. I told them that she is studying at the Brown University but I will check. I did tell her but she couldn't give it a thought given the space she is in, where competition is intense. I have told her once you finish your education and want to give it a thought, we would wholly support you."

### Chiranjeevi shares life lessons with budding entrepreneurs

Hyderabad: Megastar Chiranjeevi had some words of inspiration for young entrepreneurs. "My journey from 'nowhere to somewhere' came from the qualities I developed over time. I believe sharing my success story would inspire others," he said while speaking at the American Progressive Telugu Association's (APTA) Global Business Conference, Katalyst, in Hyderabad on January 5.

Sharing lessons from his life and career, the actor said passion, discipline and hard work helped him succeed. "If we stay focused on our goals, work hard and persevere, success will inevitably follow."The megastar also revealed how he loved sports but had to give them up due to injuries.

He then joined the NCC, which taught him discipline. He remembered being part of the Republic Day Parade in New Delhi, which became a turning point in his life. Later, his love for acting led him into films. He also spoke about the challenges early in his career, including rejection and negativity. "People who mistreated me eventually returned to me with opportunities." Chiranjeevi advised entrepreneurs to focus on building trust and credibility instead of quick financial gains. "Your network is your biggest strength," he said, adding that his fans supported him not only in films but also in social causes like blood donation. Lauding the APTA for organising the event, he appreciated the efforts of the Telugu community in supporting entrepreneurship.

### Arne Slots in: Why poetic coaches need pragmatic prose to perfect their playing patterns



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

On a windy night in Stockholm, Jose Mourinho planted a red flag in the corner of Friends Arena, where his Manchester United had just toppled Ajax to hoist the Europa League title. After the revelry of the night, he delivered another caustic one-liner of his: "There are a lot of poets in football but they don't win titles."He was laughing, rather than ranting, at those managers that obsessed systems and structures, the Johan Cryuff and Marcelo Bielsas of the world, the romantics that never sacrificed their principles for functionality or trophies. Mourinho was the pragmatist, who would bend the team whichever way he wanted, depending on what suits the team best. If his Inter Milan brigade that stunned Pep Guardiola's tikitakaing Barcelona blended impregnable defending and needle-eye counterattacking, his first Chelsea iteration, played fluid and dynamic football. As did his Real Madrid.

The snide didn't age well, Mourinho has not won another major trophy yet. He has slumped from being one of the hottest managers in Europe to one that is pursued by the clubs from outside Europe's top five leagues. Men of systems captured the consciousness of football, Jurgen Klopp and Pep Guardiola, Hansi Flick and Xabi Alonso, even the modestly successful Roberto De Zerbi. So much so that every aspiring club wants not just titles with a clear and distinct identity, pushing the pragmatists to the lower echelons of the league. Another pragmatist manager Massimiliano Allegri is without a job, echoed by Mourinho who said that every club wants a philosopher, not a manager."

At the heart of the function-ideal debate, caught in neither worlds, are some of the leading clubs. Like Manchester United. They hired Ruben Amorim because they were not only impressed by the unbeaten, title-winning streaks, but also by the dynamic brand of football Sporting CP embraced. But he came at the wrong club at the wrong time. The United team at his disposal possessed none of the virtues required to thrive in a threeman defence formation that the Portuguese adamantly clings to. Rather it had exactly the men ill-fitted for such a high-energy structure. Three-man defence thrives when the wingbacks are quick and robust, when the double midfield pivot are strong and strapping, when the forwards are incessant pressers and runners. In just a couple of practice sessions, Amorim would have realised that he cannot replicate a 3-4-3 or a 3-4-2-1 here. Yet, he remained religiously wedded to his drama, despite shuddering reality checks every week. Like for instance, starting with midfield pair of Cristian Eriksen and Casemiro against the muscular and faster trio of Bruno Guimaraes, Sandro Tonali and Joelinton. In the first 30 minutes, they

were run ragged. But Amorim would stick to his beliefs. "I was here because of my idea and I will continue to do my idea until the end. I have to sell my idea. I don't have another one," he said. He did make minor tactical tweaks or in-game alterations, but everything was frame-worked in an inflexible three-man defence. The consequence was a wholly incoherent and scattered bunch, sleepwalking through a game. The transition could have been smoother had Amorim arrived between seasons where he could have cajoled the club into buying players that would have suited the system as well as regimented them into the formation in the pre-season. The club's management too should apportion some of the blame because they knew the manager's profile when they hired him, they could have foreseen the struggles.

As unwilling to budge has been Tottenham Hotspur manager Ange Postecoglou. Come feast or famine, hell or high water, his teams spot a high defensive line, despite being burned repeatedly, even though most of his first-choice back four had been absent this season. Southampton's Russell Martin was similarly deluded by his expansive build-up before the club axed him. The Spurs manager would recently say: "I do not know what a Plan B or C is," he said. "If people want me to change my approach, it's not going to change. We are doing it for a reason."It is not to suggest that philosophy-slaved managers are living a delusional world. There are benefits if the team is guided by a definite theme. Movements become synchronised, hence more aesthetic, the roles are clear, everyone knows what everyone is supposed to do, the squad is unified by a guiding vision, the scouts and recruiters know what kind of players to hire. It promises sustenance and smoother inheritance, as Liverpool discovered in Arne Slot.

Arne Slot Liverpool Manchester City Mohamed Salah Liverpool's manager Arne Slot and Real Madrid's head coach Carlo Ancelotti, in the background, stand by the touchline before the Champions League opening phase soccer match between Liverpool and Real Madrid at Anfield Stadium, Liverpool, England, Klopp's successor is perhaps the best example of someone striking the balance of being flexible as well as idealistic. He has by and large stuck to Klopp's dogma, but made subtle changes too. Like, repurposing Mohammed Salah to centre-forward role (but on the right wing). He has lost a few yards, but sharpened his shooting skills even more. Trent Alexander Arnold is now the marauding orthodox full back rather than one who dropped into the midfield. Encouraged by the resurrection of Ryan Gravenberch, Liverpool progressed the ball through central channels. The great idealist Guardiola too has not been averse to change, though not of a radical nature. He changes functions within functions of the player. Like John Stones in the treblewinning season operating as sweeper-playmakers, or Joao Cancelo functioning as a full-back forward. Another fitting example is Carlo Ancelotti. In his first year at Parma, he refused to buy Roberto Baggio because he didn't play with No 10s (but twin strikers). Baggio went to Bologna and netted 22 goals that season (1997-98). He picked the essence of coaching from that incident. "After that season, I was convinced that I should plan my style according to the strengths of my team," he once said. Two years later, he joined Juventus and moulded one of the best no 10s in the world, Zinedine Zidane. The challenge, thus, is not about tearing the temple, but adding more practical layers so that the soul doesn't rot. A manager can be a poet, but a few lessons of prose would not do

### Why Manchester United's hard fought draw against Liverpool feels more like a win

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

"I'm pretty upset because if we showed this today against Liverpool, why can't we do this every week? Manchester United captain Bruno Fernandes said after grinding out an impressive 2-2 draw with league leaders Liverpool on their own turf, echoing the sentiments of every Red Devils fan around the world. This was the same outfit which had given up timidly in front of a buoyant Newcastle United side last Monday, albeit without Fernandes and midfield tank Manuel Ugarte. But just 6 days after that embarrassing defeat to end 2024, the new year saw a new United. How long that lasts remains to be seen. After taking charge at United in November, manager Ruben Amorim had warned of a coming storm. On Sunday, as the fans turned up to Anfield for the match which initially faced cancellation due to adverse weather conditions, United brought the thunder.

Manchester United vs Liverpool Manchester United's Amad Diallo, right, scores his side's 2nd goal against Liverpool during the English Premier League soccer match at the Anfield stadium in Liverpool, England, A far cry from the 'anxious' side which lost 2-0 at home to the magpies, United looked like a proper team, rather than a bunch of talented individuals. Pressing with all their might, Amorim's style of play was visible with favourites Liverpool struggling to keep their arch-rivals at bay. Even as the hosts created chances, United would not just sit back and defend as was expected of them during the days of Erik Ten Hag. Fernandes in particular looked like a player reborn as his creativity gave United the spark it was missing for so long.

Fernandes and Diogo Dalot, well aware of Trent Alexander Arnold's defensive frailties, concentrated most of their attacks through the left side. Arnold, who has been linked with a huge move to Real Madrid, would hope his potential buyers skipped Sunday's match as he dropped one of his most uninspired performances of the season. Roy Keane even went as far as to say Trent's form in this match would see him not at Real but at Tranmere RoversThe first goal for United came at the 52nd minute when he failed to keep up with a Dalot run which ultimately resulted in a later move where defender Lisandro Martinez gave Arnold the slip and scored from an acute angle. Liverpool's response was swift with Cody Gakpo equalizing in the 59th minute before talisman Mohamed Salah continued his blistering form by firing the hosts into a 2-1 lead from a penalty in the 70th minute.

Typically, in these situations in the past, United players would have let their shoulders slump as the fans prepared for another defeat. But not under Amorim's watch. This was a different monster, at least for the night, as Fernandes released substitute Alejandro Garnacho who got the better of Arnold and fizzed in a cross for Amad Diallo to level the score. In Ten Hag's time in charge, United fans would be accustomed to see the team then playing in their own half in order to secure the draw. Most of the time, that defensive mindset would cost United as teams with high press would inevitably get the ball and go on to score and win the match in the dying embers.



In Anfield though, Amorim's United completely flipped that script as they refused to sit on their laurels after equalizing. With both sides going for the kill in the fag end of the match, chances were squandered. But the biggest of misses for United came from an unlikely source. Lisandro Martinez Manchester United's Lisandro Martinez, center, celebrates after scoring the opening goal against Liverpool during the English Premier League soccer match at the Anfield stadium in Liverpool. (AP)

With Liverpool cut open in the last minute of the 7 added minutes of the match, Joshua Zirkzee found himself bearing on the opposition's goal but instead of shooting, he squared the ball to Harry Maguire. The central defender had the goalkeeper Alisson Becker at his mercy but he slammed the ball over the bar as the Merseyside crowd heaved a sigh of relief. Why Zirkzee, a striker himself, didn't go for the shot will remain a mystery but these are the issues Amorim will need to fix as his tenure wears on. Discounting that brain fade moment, United's draw in this match will feel more like a victory, with an assured performance which even eclipsed their smash and grab win against Manchester City last year. Here, United felt more like a well-oiled unit, responding to Amorim's tactics, something that will bode well for the future as the manager brings in more players that suit his style.

## West Indies Cricket team returns to Pakistan after 18 years for historic Test series

Karachi: The West Indies cricket team arrived in Islamabad on Monday for their first Test series in Pakistan in 18 years. The West Indies last toured Pakistan for a Test series in 2006 though they have been to the country for two white-ball rubbers in between. The visitors will play a three-day tour game against Pakistan Shaheens from January 10 in Islamabad before the first Test in Multan from January 17. The second Test is scheduled from January 25 at the same venue. The series will conclude their assignments in the current cycle of the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) with both teams finishing in the lower half off the points table.

### Ageing Novak Djokovic faces moment of reckoning at favourite Grand Slam



GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Twelve months ago, Novak Djokovic arrived in Melbourne to defend his Australian Open title with speculation over how many Majors the 24-time Grand Slam champion will end his career with. As he arrives there this week for the season-opening Slam, a reasonable query would be whether he will ever win another one. Time moves fast for professional athletes. For a 37-year-old all-time great trying to keep up with challengers that are closer to his kids' age than his own, it moves at hyperspeed.

Even so, a first Slam-less season in seven years and the retirement of his grand old rivals do not seem to have diminished the fire just yet. Djokovic is plotting and planning his schedule to peak at the Majors. He recently joined hands with former-rival-turned-friend Andy Murray in an audacious, eyebrow-raising, first-of-its-kind partnership that will last at least until the Australian Open. Yet, there is undoubtedly a mountain to climb, evidenced by his surprise quarterfinal defeat against big-serving Reilly Opelka in the ATP 250 tournament in Brisbane on Friday.

Opelka joins Alejandro Tabilo, Tomas Machac, Luca Nardi and Alexei Popyrin as some of the recent players to have beaten the Serbian legend. Anyone outside the world of tennis fanatics should be forgiven if they are not familiar with these names. As losses to lesser players pile up, Djokovic must reconcile to facing the issue all ageing top performers often do: consistency will elude him, and he will fail to produce his best all the time, all season long, the way he has done for most of the last decade and a half. More concerning. though, are recent defeats to top players. Djokovic was comprehensively dismantled by Jannik Sinner at the Australian Open last year, and Carlos Alcaraz at Wimbledon, in a way that showed that his best is no longer enough to keep up with the very best players in the world.

Re-seeking the edgeDjokovio's imposing superiority over the rest of the field was not merely due to specific

strengths or weaknesses. Instead, it was a product of the small, sometimes infinitesimal, ways in which he held the advantage over his opponents. Similarly, his recent slump is not due to an obvious failing, but a result of losing the edge in subtler areas. His aggressive baseline style still rules the game, but the defensive tactics do not. Redirection of pace – for so long, the bread and butter of Djokovic's game – is not reliable enough to prevail in baseline exchanges. Instead, it is the pace of a dead ball – the ability to produce powerful groundstrokes entirely on his own to push opponents deep behind the baseline – where success is being found.

For a player with an endless arsenal like Djokovic, he will need to find a game plan to counter these strategies being used by Sinner and Alcaraz, which are separating them from the rest of the field. According to him, that is where Murray's input is needed."I'm not looking to transform my game completely," the Serb told Australian Associated Press. "But I definitely am looking to improve, even if it's the slightest percentage, every single shot that I have in my game, and maybe something that people don't necessarily see is this court positioning, the transition play, the tactics.""Physically, mentally, as well and ready to compete, whatever it takes, however many hours it takes with the youngsters. The week before the Australian Open, (we will) do a lot of video analysis of my main opponents, top guys, trying to understand how my game matches up,' Djokovic said.

Good vibes and cultural similarities are among the surface-level reasons why Djokovic's partnership with Goran Ivanisevic was so successful. The monster server improved Djokovic's serve in a way that it became a reliable tool to fall back on when his baseline game was faltering or being overwhelmed. An expert at finding those razor-thin margins to improve, Djokovic is seeking those once again. If he fails to reach the semifinals in Melbourne, where he is a 10time former champion, the Serb risks falling out of the top 10 for the first time since 2018. It's a fact that seemed unfathomable 12 months ago, but is a reality of where his tennis is at the moment. Last year, Djokovic reached the Wimbledon final mere weeks after surgery on his right knee. He found, out of nowhere, the drive and the tennis to win the Olympic singles gold - the one achievement that had eluded him. Those signs show that he has the fitness and mental wherewithal to keep going. The Aussie summer will be key for him because he must now show signs of improvement that will prove that the recent setbacks are a mere blip, a form slump, and not the beginning of a reces-

#### Usman Khawaja on getting 'Bumrah'd', Travis Head on facing the 'best individual performance since I started playing Tests'

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Usman Khawaja Jasprit Bumrah Travis HeadIndia's Jasprit Bumrah celebrates the wicket of Australia's Mitchell Marsh during play on the day four of the fourth cricket test between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne, Australia, Travis Head recalled the moments soon after it became apparent Jasprit Bumrah would not be able to bowl on Day 3 of the Sydney Test. "I think there were 15 people (the Aussie squad) that were pleased Jasprit didn't bowl, but that is the way it pans out," Head told Fox Cricket host Mark Howard. It underlined just how jittery even the Aussies were right onto the last inning, even if they were chasing a spiffley target of 162 which they eventually reached comfortably.

Head had begun the series well getting Australia its first win after the Perth loss, but had tapered off subsequently before he found himself at the crease with Beau Webster after Sone early wickets. Still, the Aussies were far from panicking – and the only reason was Bumrah had a stiff back. The South Australian lauded the opponent stressing how difficult he had been to face through the series. "I think there were 15 people (the Aussie squad) that were pleased Jasprit didn't bowl today, but that is the way it pans out," he told Fox. "He has had a hell of a series. It has been probably the best individual performance I have seen in a series since I started playing Test cricket," he added.

Usman Khawaja who had found the Sydney pitch downright treacherous to navigate, too admitted he had been on the knife edge on the 'stinker' wicket, after being tormented by Bumrah throughout the series. "I felt like I had the right intent but I was just getting Bumrah'd. It was friggin' tough work," he told ABC Grandstand. "You never wanted



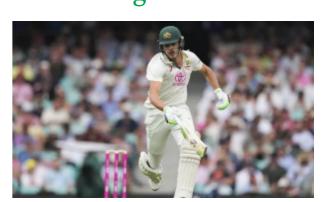
to see anyone injured, and it's a shame he was, but thank God for us because today would have been an absolute nightmare facing him on that wicket. Everyone felt it, as soon as we didn't see Bumrah out there we had this feeling that 'alright, now we've got a chance here'," he added. Khawaja joked he was glad now that he never had to face Bumrah again, but the unorthodox pacer was a recurring nightmare. "It just felt so hard.

It's easy to say now because I probably won't have to face him ever again, thank God. I've never actually found someone so hard to score off and get off strike as Bumrah, and then you always feel like he's got a wicket ball up his sleeve," he was quoted as saying by ABC.Good form, great form were all quite irrelevant when Bumrah ran into them. "It didn't matter how many runs you were on, if you got Bumrah in the wrong conditions, you needed a little bit of luck, show a bit of intent, hopefully you can get through his spell, but it was very tough," he ended, speaking to ABC Grandstand.

#### 'My cousin passed away with Leukemia and my grandpa with bowel cancer....hope we find a cure' – Sam Konstas on 'Pink Test' significance

GNS News Agency, Jan 9

Sam Konstas had an eventful Test in Sydney and ended up with 2 wins from 2 outings. (AP)Sam Konstas had an eventful Test in Sydney and ended up with 2 wins from 2 outings. (AP)Young Sam Konstas left a massive cricketing impact on the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after debuting in Melbourne. But it was the Sydney Test that was close to his heart. Speaking to Triple M after Australia wrapped up the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series 3-1, the youngster spoke of why the Pink Test at Sydney was important. "It's a special event for the McGrath Foundation, hopefully we spread more awareness and get the funds in because my cousin passed away with Leukemia and my grandpa with bowel cancer. So hopefully we can spread awareness and work towards a cure," he told Triple M.A total attendance of 8,37,879 was registered across the 5 Tests, while Day one's crowd at the Sydney Cricket Ground was 47,998, the largest individual day attendance at the SCG against India, breaking the 2003/04 Day One crowd of 44,901. The Sydney Test has been celebrated as the Pink Test since 2009, in honour of Glen McGrath's late wife Jane, who passed away after a battle with breast cancer in 2008, with the McGrath Foundation raising millions of dollars for the cause. Indian players too donned white shirts with pink features for Day Three, while the Aussies had worn pink numbers on the backs of their shirts throughout the entire



Test.Konstas had an eventful Test and ended up with 2 wins from 2 outings. "It's been quite special. To top it off with a win today was outstanding. I don't think it's kicked in yet, hopefully in the next few days it will, soak it in, reflect on it, but it's been awesome," Konstas told Triple M post the win. "The team's been outstanding to me, just letting me play my natural game. Pat Cummins is a great leader and hopefully we can keep going on."Konstas wasn't sure yet if he would get picked for the Sri Lanka tour. "But obviously, adapting to different conditions, maybe we'll find a new Sam. I think so, but time will tell," he said

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