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Army Public School in Bolarum receives bomb threat mail

Hyderabad: Panic prevailed at the Army Public School (APS) in Bolarum and its surroundings when a bomb threat mail was received by the school authorities on Wednesday.Following information from the management, the Army personnel, local police and bomb squad reached the school and took up checking for presence of any explosive substances.As per available information, the management received a threat email on its official ID from an unidentified person claiming there was explosives planted in the school premises.The teachers and the staff immediately evacuated the school building and shifted the students to safety. The parents were informed about the situation.

Hyderabad man studying in Chicago killed in road accident in USA's Massachusetts

Hyderabad: A Hyderabadi NRI, identified as Mohammed Wajid, 28, died in a road accident in the rural Plymouth County of Massachusetts in USA on Wednesday.

According to reports on local news websites, Wajid, a resident of Chicago, was driving a Freightliner near Chatsworth when he failed to stop at the stop sign at an intersection following which he hit a grain trailer. He was rushed to a local hospital where he died later. According to posts of some of his friends on X, Wajid was studying in Chicago. It may also be noted that he was a Youth Congress leader of the Khairatabad division in the city.

Tragic Stampede At Maha Kumbh Claims 10 Lives During Mauni Amavasya Holy Bath

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

A tragic incident unfolded early Wednesday at the Maha Kumbh festival when a stampede claimed an estimated 10 lives during the crucial Mauni Amavasya ritual. The disaster occurred as massive crowds gathered for the holy bath at the Sangam, where devotees found themselves trapped with no exit route after their ritual immersion.

Multiple witnesses described a chaotic scene marked by severe overcrowding. Vinay Kumar Yadav, present during the incident, cited the absence of adequate police arrangements for managing the flow of devotees at the holy site. The situation deteriorated around 12:30 AM when newly opened gates led to an overwhelming surge of people, resulting in the deadly stampede.Personal accounts from survivors paint a picture of the tragedy's scope. A man from Bihar's Aurangabad, accompanied by 12-13 family members, reported being caught in the crush during the Shahi Snan. Sarojini, a pilgrim from Karnataka who traveled with a group of 60 people, described how her party of nine became trapped in the sudden crowd surge, with many falling in the chaos.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath attributed the stampede to some devotees breaching barricades.



He assured that the situation was under control and cautioned against spreading rumors. According to his statement, the festival had already hosted nearly six crore devotees for the holy dip, with the stampede occurring between 1 AM and 2 AM.Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath attributed the incident to barricade breaches and assured the public of the situation's containment. The event, which began on January 13, is expected to host 40 crore pilgrims until its conclusion on February 26, marking it as the world's largest spiritual gathering.

ISRO celebrates 100th successful launch of navigation satellite

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

Sriharikota: ISRO on Wednesday celebrated its 100th mission with the textbook launch of a navigation satellite that would aid in terrestrial, aerial and maritime navigation and precision agriculture, among others, with a GSLV rocket injecting the payload in the desired orbit.

The early morning launch was the first under ISRO Chairman V Narayanan's leadership—he assumed office on January 16— and also the space agency's maiden venture in 2025. A beaming Narayanan was hugged and greeted by fellow scientists post the launch. "I am extremely happy to announce from the spaceport of ISRO, that the first launch of this year, 2025, has been successfully accomplished, with GSLV- F15 launch vehicle precisely injecting the navigation satellite NVS-02 in the intended required (GTO) orbit," he said from the Mission Control Center. "This mission is the 100th launch from our launchpads, which is a very significant milestone of India," the ISRO chief added.

Further, all the vehicles systems have performed a



1,500 km beyond the Indian land mass. Its predecessor, NVS-01, the first of the second generation navigation satellites was launched on May 29, 2023. The key applications of the NVs-02 satellite are terrestrial, aerial and maritime navigation, precision agriculture, fleet management, locaervices in mohile devices, orhit det for satellites, Internet-of-Things (IoT) based applications and emergency and timing services, ISRO said.NavIC comprises five second-generation satellites-NVS-01/02/03/04/ 05 envisaged to augment NavIC base layer constellation with enhanced features for ensuring continuity of services. The NVS-02 satellite designed and developed by Bengaluru-based U R Rao Satellite Centre weighs about 2,250 kg. It has navigation payload in L1, L5 and S bands and employs a Tri-band antenna. The heart of the navigation payload is the Rubidium Atomic Frequency Standard (RAFS), an atomic clock which acts as a stable frequency reference for the navigation payload.

PM Modi reiterates AAP'da attack at poll rally, says 'Delhi wants double-engine government'

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday launched a scathing attack on the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as well as Congress party and accused them of ruining two generations of the capital over past 25 years. Addressing a poll rally in North-East Delhi, PM Modi urged the people to vote for a BJP-led doubleengine government in the upcoming Assembly elections, scheduled for February 5. Criticising both Congress and AAP, PM Modi said, "You have seen the first 14 years of twenty-first century under Congress, and then you gave 11 years to the 'AAPda' government, yet Delhi's problems remain the same. In 25 years, these two parties have destroyed two generations."He urged voters to give the BJP a chance. "You did not give me the opportunity to work for you in the last 25 years. You have seen Congress and AAPda for 25 years; now, give the lotus a chance. Just like the head of a family takes care of his loved ones, I will take care of you. The BJP's track record shows that we deliver on our promises," he asserted.Assuring swift action on BJP's election promises, PM Modi declared, "After February 8, the BJP government in Delhi will fulfill all its promises in a time-bound manner. This is 'Modi ki Guarantee'. Today, 'Modi ki Guarantee' means the guarantee of completion of all guarantees."He promised to bring relief to Delhi's residents by addressing key issues.

"Delhi wants a government that builds homes for the poor, modernises the city, ensures water supply to every household, and frees them from tanker mafias. That is why the entire Delhi is today saying, 'AAPda jaayegi, BJP aayegi' (AAPda will go, BJP will come)," he added.Highlighting the vision of a 'Viksit Bharat', PM Modi said, "Every citizen is working towards making India a



GNS News Agency, Jan 29

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has announced that the state's comprehensive social, economic, educational, employment, political, and caste enumeration (Integrated Household Survey 2024) has received national acclaim for its success. Speaking at a high-level review meeting, the CM commended the meticulous efforts involved in conducting the caste enumeration in the state. The





developed nation. For that, it is crucial that the capital city becomes a model of development. But looking at the condition of Delhi today, do you think it can achieve that? I don't even need to say anything; Delhiites themselves express their suffering every day."Addressing the massive rally in Ghonda constituency, PM Modi also expressed grief over the Maha Kumbh stampede."We lost some beautiful souls in today's incident, and some were critically injured. I offer my sympathies to the affected families and hope for the speedy recovery of the injured," he said. The Prime Minister assured that he is in constant touch with Uttar Pradesh govt and that the 'Amrit Snan' at the Maha Kumbh has now resumed as normal. In a heartfelt moment at the rally, BJP candidate from Patpargani Assembly, Ravinder Singh Negi, touched PM Modi's feet, and in response, the Prime Minister did the same, winning the crowd's applause. Thanking the massive gathering, PM Modi said, "This sight reflects the mood of Delhi and the message of its mandate. Delhi is changing. Fake promises will no longer work. The loot and lies will not continue. The people of Delhi want a double-engine BJP government that ensures both the welfare of the poor and

expected in today's mission. Earlier, as the 27.30-hour countdown concluded, the 50.9 metre tall Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) rocket with an indigenous cryogenic upper stage, emanating thick fumes on its tail lifted off majestically from the second launch pad at a pre-fixed time of 6.23 am on Wednesday. After travelling for about 19 minutes in dark and cloudy skies, the rocket successfully separated its payload into the desired Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO). The satellite is the second in the series of the Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) aimed to provide accurate position, velocity and timing to users in the Indian sub-continent as well as to regions about

Telangana farmers agitated over sharp decline in crop prices, switch to protest mode

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

Hyderabad: The plight of farmers, especially those growing groundnut, chilli and red gram crops, in the State highlights the vulnerabilities faced by the agricultural community.

Tensions are mounting as they intensify their protests over the sharp decline in prices. Enmeshed in a web of severe financial distress, in the absence of support due for them under different heads, including Rythu Bharosa and the prevailing price mechanism far from being remunerative, the farmers are on protest mode organising widespread demonstrations. Telangana CM Revanth Reddy goes back on his word, says farmers to get Rythu Bharosa amount by March 31 onlyWhile market dynamics play their part in determining prices, the crucial support expected from the Telangana government in ensuring fair pricing and efficient procurement is missing.As February unfolds, the fate of farmers growing key crops hangs in the balance, with thousands of them anxiously awaiting solutions to their escalating problems. Dharnas and demonstrations continued for the second day on Wednesday in Mahabubnagar where they ventured to stop even trains on Tuesday.Groundnut farmers are in fact facing a severe crisis as prices have plummeted. Currently trading between Rs 5,600 and Rs 6,050 a quintal, groundnut prices are considerably below the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of Rs 6,783 per quintal. The surplus production in recent seasons, coupled with declining export demand, has resulted in an oversupply, causing prices to drop drastically.

Farmers who rely on groundnut as a primary source of income are particularly hard-hit, finding it increasingly difficult to cover their rising costs of cultivation. As the cost of seed, fertilizer and labour has soared, the financial strain on groundnut farmers has intensified.Groundnut has been sown in around 22,107 acres in the State as on September 25, 2024. Among the districts, Gadwal stood first in the groundnut-sown area with 10,752 acres, followed by Wanaparthy (7,241 acres), Warangal (1,194 acres), Nagarkurnool (376 acres) and Suryapet (286 acres).The



MSP for groundnut has been increased by Rs 406-6,783 per quintal for the 2024-25 marketing season from Rs 6,377 per quintal in 2023-24. But they continued to fetch much less.Red gram, another staple crop, has not fared any better. The prices of red gram are currently fluctuating between Rs 6,429 and Rs 7,272 per quintal. Market instability and inefficiencies in procurement processes have contributed to the drastic price variations.

AP secures third place in Republic Day Parade, UP and Tripura claim top spots

In a vibrant display of cultural heritage and creativity, Andhra Pradesh secured third place in this year's parade, with Uttar Pradesh and Tripura taking the first and second positions, respectively. The Andhra Pradesh team showcased the Atikoppaka Bommala parade, which captivated audiences and judges alike. The results of the annual parade were announced by the Ministry of Defense.Among various participating groups, the Jammu and Kashmir Rifles and the Delhi Police parade groups were recognized as the best marching contingents in the Central Forces category. meeting, held at the Integrated Command Control Center, was attended by Deputy CM Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, Ministers Uttam Kumar Reddy, Damodar Rajanarsimha, Dhanasari Seethakka, Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy, Government Advisor K. Keshav Rao, former Minister Jana Reddy, Chief Secretary Shantikumari, and senior officials from various departments. The CM highlighted that the household survey conducted across the state had captured the attention of the nation. He appreciated the officers involved for successfully completing the survey and confirmed that data entry for the survey had been completed and a draft report is now ready for review

The CM instructed the Cabinet Subcommittee, led by Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy and consisting of six ministers, to submit a report by February 2. The Chief Minister emphasized that the statistics gathered through this survey would significantly aid the BC Dedicated Commission established by the government.Revanth Reddy further noted that the caste enumeration would not only support social empowerment but also aid in the development of backward classes, SCs, STs, minorities, and marginalized communities in the future. He reaffirmed that this survey was a demonstration of the government's commitment to the promises made to the people.The survey, which was



launched on November 6 last year, was completed across all districts by the first week of December. The survey was carried out under the supervision of the Planning Department, with nearly 100,000 enumerators, supervisors, and data entry operators involved in this massive undertaking. The survey covered approximately 1.16 crore households, with enumerators visiting each house to collect detailed data. Over 96% of household data was successfully gathered, and the data entry process has been completed. However, officials reported some challenges, including families refusing to participate, homes being locked, or certain families being unavailable, which led to a small number of households not participating in the survey.Following the formation of the new government, the decision to conduct the caste enumeration through the household survey was taken in a meeting chaired by the CM on February 4. On February 16, the government passed a resolution in the state assembly to officially begin the sur-

MLC Election Schedule Announced for Telangana and Andhra Pradesh

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has announced that the state's comprehensive social, economic, educational, employment, political, and caste enumeration (Integrated Household Survey 2024) has received national acclaim for its success. Speaking at a high-level review meeting, the CM commended the meticulous efforts involved in conducting the caste enumeration in the state. The meeting, held at the Integrated Command Control Center, was attended by Deputy CM Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, Ministers Uttam Kumar Reddy, Damodar Rajanarsimha, Dhanasari Seethakka, Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy, Government Advisor K. Keshav Rao, former Minister Jana Reddy, Chief Secretary Shantikumari, and senior officials from various departments. The CM highlighted that the household survey conducted across the state had captured the attention of the nation. He appreciated the officers involved for successfully completing the survey and confirmed that data entry for the survey had been completed and a draft report is now ready for review. The CM instructed the Cabinet Subcommittee, led by Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy and consisting of six ministers, to submit a report by February 2. The Chief Minister emphasized that the statistics gathered through this survey would significantly aid the BC Dedicated Commission established by the government.Revanth Reddy further noted that the caste enumeration would not only support social empowerment but also aid in the devel-



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Indian ChronicleNEnglish DailyRam Rahim's parole

If a poll comes, can Ram Rahim's parole be far benind? The Dera Sacha Sauda chief has been released rom jail after being granted a 30-day parole — just a week before the Delhi Assembly elections. He has been finally allowed to visit his dera in Sirsa; this privilege has been given to him for the first time since he was awarded a 20vear jail sentence in 2017 for raping two of his disciples. t is not uncommon for the dera head, who continues to vield influence in the region, to be freed on parole or furough whenever Punjab, Haryana or neighbouring states to to the polls. He was granted a 20-day parole in Octoper last year ahead of the Haryana Assembly elections. The move had triggered allegations that the ruling BJP vas pulling out all the stops to dent the Congress' prospects. And we all know which party had the last laugh.

Ram Rahim's advocate has rightly said that every prisoner has the legal right to apply for parole. However, he devil is in the timing. The dera head is known for his covert ways of telling his supporters whom they should rote for. He might be a convict in rape and murder cases, but there is no dearth of his followers who are convinced hat he has been framed.

The BJP has been out of power in Delhi for the past 26 years. Looking to turn the tables on AAP at long last, he saffron party is going the whole hog in wooing voters. Ram Rahim can do his bit by working behind the scenes. His repeated paroles and furloughs have invited criticism rom political and religious leaders of Punjab, where he continues to be reviled for his alleged role in sacrilege ncidents. But Punjab is not a priority in the BJP's current scheme of things. The party has no qualms about antagonising Sikhs because Ram Rahim's release holds he promise of electoral gains in Delhi.

The hidden and apparent dangers of spending 70-90 hours every week at work

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

A Pandora's box has been opened, with recent opinions of a few stalwarts of our multi-national companies recommending that employees work 70 to 90 hours at work every week. What they have ignored are the health implications of undertaking such long hours of work -- there are both physical and mental health issues associated with marathon work sessions.

The total number of people working long hours is gradually increasing globally. The number stands at 9% worldwide. Obviously, it is significantly higher in India, China and other-third world countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has blurred the boundaries of work and home. The health consequences of long working hours depends on the length of working hours, nature of the job, socioeconomic strata and the overall health of the individual. Long working hours through the night routinely is even worse than working long hours, studies have shown.

Health impacted deeplyThe physical and mental strain of an overworked society starts with acute physiological responses such as fatigue, stress, depression, impaired sleep and unhealthy lifestyle changes in response to stress. Epidemiological studies have shown the negative effects of long working hours on the risks of cardiovascular diseases and strokes.

A U-shaped relationship between the risk of suffering from heart attacks and working hours has been well documented among Japanese workers. Those working less than 7 hours or more than 11 hours per day were at greatest risk of experiencing heart attacks than those working between 7-11 hours. There are also several peer reviewed articles published from Europe, Japan, Korea and China documenting increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, myocardial infarction and coronary artery disease in people who work more than 50 hours a week. On the other side, it might not even truly help increase productivity -- research from the Stanford economist John Pencavel documents that productivity per hour declines sharply when a person works more than 50 hours a week. After 55 hours, the decline is steep. Countries with long working hours like Greece and Mexico, essentially do not have higher GDPs per capita compared to countries with shorter working hours like Germany and Norway Non communicable diseasesLong work hours and work-related stress leads to increased risk of suffering from elevated systolic blood pressure. In contrast, a Norwegian study documents decreased incidence of hypertension in people working around 8 hours a day. Diabetes is also a very high risk factor associated with long work hours. People tend to sit at their work desks for hours together. As we know, 'sitting is the new smoking', longer hours lead to poor mobility, fewer steps taken every day, lesser time for people to exercise or go for walks even if they want to.Working long hours leads to extremely poor eating habits as well. The timing of food becomes extremely erratic. The quality of food becomes very unbalanced, with food rich in carbohydrates and fat with scarce proteins. Stress eating is a well-known concept. To add to this complexity is the IT culture of pampering the workforce with late night pizzas and biryanis with sugar-rich fizzy drinks to extract work targeting deadlines. Mental health issues related to long work hours is a problem frequently being overlooked by corporates, or at least, not adequately addressed. In India it is well known that seeking help for mental health issues, fearing the stigma associated with it, is very poor. There are plenty of Japanese studies which document the sharp increase in the incidence of depression when work hours exceed 60 hours per week. In contrast, workers who work between 40-52 work hour weeks had a decreased risk of suffering from depression and anxiety. Female workers have a higher risk of experiencing depression and anxiety compared to male workers with the same number of hours spent at work. In countries where women have to shoulder the entire household chores apart from the work at office, this takes a huge toll on them.Sleep and fertility Every individual needs 7-8 hours of peaceful sleep a day. Lack of sleep is a huge health hazard of its own and needs much more attention than it is currently getting. With an increasing work burden, not only does the duration of sleep get affected, but the quality of sleep is also very poor. Late night heavy dinners after an eventful unhealthy day with poor quality and quantity of sleep are a health bomb awaiting to explode.

NGT issues notices to NTTPS, other respondents in pollution case

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GNS News Agency, Jan 29

The Southern Zonal Bench of National Green Tribunal (NGT) in Chennai ordered that notices be served to Dr. Narla Tatarao Thermal Power Station (NTTPS) and AP Pollution Control Board (APPCB) in the case pertaining to pollution being caused by the State-owned power plant. Last week, the Principal Bench of NGT located in New Delhi registered the case suo motu on the basis of a report published in The Hindu about protests staged by the people on November 4, 2024 against the pollution, and transferred it to the Chennai Bench. NTTPS has been impleaded as a 'necessary party' to the proceedings. The NGT acknowledged the filing of a report on the issue by APPCB on January 10, 2025 and called for further action taken report by March 5, 2025 to which date the matter has been posted. APPCB said in its report that it was closely monitoring the situation and reviewed in the external advisory committee meetings held in December 2024 and January 2025 following the receipt of complaints.

Besides, the APPCB member-secretary stated that the Board issued certain directions to NTTPS on complying with the prescribed air and water quality standards. As per the APPCB report, AP Power Generation Corporation Limited (AP-Genco) sanctioned ?10 crore on December 6, 2023 for controlling the suspended particulate matter and rectification of Electro-Static Precipitator (ESP) fields and taking other steps to mitigate the pollution.AP-Genco sanctioned an additional budget of ?18 crore in April 2024 for improving the performance of the existing ESPs and fly ash evacuation systems and strengthening ash handling. Besides, AP-Genco requested Singareni Collieries Company Ltd. to supply high grade coal. APPCB officials inspected the power plant on November 5, 2024 and verified the compliance with its irections. Subsequently, the APPCB task force committee reviewed the status of implementation of the air pollution control measures in a meeting held on November 25, 2024. The committee recommended to the Board to obtain a plan of action from NTTPS within two weeks along with budgetary estimates for rectifying the violations within three months. AP-Genco had again sanctioned 31 crore for improving the ESPs' performance and fly ash extraction systems.

The importance of the critical review



GNS News Agency, Jan 29

The lit fest season is here, and like some migratory birds seen only in winter, books and authors are enjoying more conversational space, beyond the editorial equivalent of a wildlife sanctuary — the reviews section. A quarter century ago, when I got my first byline as a book critic, almost every respectable newspaper and magazine had at least one weekly page, if not more, devoted to book reviews. There was this exotic species of journalist known as 'Books Editor', now sadly nearly extinct, whose sole remit was to read books, commission reviews, and attend launches. They would be courted by publishers in the morning, authors in the afternoon, and colleagues at all times of the day begging to borrow a book from the growing pile of new titles on their desks. The books page had no overt links to politics or business, nor was it comparable to the op-ed pages in terms of influence. Yet it was closely followed, and drew attention disproportionate to its acknowledged importance in the publication's scheme of things editorially, commercially, or budget-wise. It was seen as adding intellectual heft to the publication's brand identity.

Over the years, a number of factors have combined to erode the prominence and space that books commanded, with The Hindu being one of the exceptions. The first was a general sense that people are spending less time consuming books. Another was the exit of many small, independent publishing houses that encouraged unusual, local talent. Lastly, a pronounced tilt toward commercial non-fiction and market-tested genre fiction on the part of the big publishers left little scope for controversial works that could spark elaborate debates. At the same time, authors (and not just publishers) began to think of a review as a publicity prop rather than as a journalistic form with its own literary attributes.

One outcome of all this was that the negative review, especially the one where the reviewer would, with justification, take the author to the cleaners, has become rare. The norm today is the favourable review. If the book is bad, the reviewer either gives a neutral synopsis of the book or does a balancing act by sandwiching the criticism between praise this way the reader is forewarned, the writer gets blurbworthy lines, and the reviewer is seen as 'objective'.But what I have learned over years of reviewing is that being objective is not the same as being fair. Those who confused the two often became susceptible to what the legendary film critic Pauline Kael termed "saphead objectivity". A fair response to a terrible book is a proper pasting, and there is nothing objective about it. But that's more likely in a literary culture where writers, critics, and publishers are attuned to a robust tradition of dishing it out as well as taking it on the chin and readers appreciate the exchange, as happened during my stint as books editor with a now-defunct daily.

I had commissioned the review of a novel to a freelancer who, I learnt only later, had some history with the novelist. When the review came in, I was stunned by how harsh it was. I had my doubts, but there was deadline pressure, and I decided to back the reviewer's judgment. We went with it. The writer, an influential figure, did not like it. But he was guick to share it on Facebook. The terrible (for him) review garnered extensive publicity for the book.But not all authors are sporting when it comes to negative reviews. Many take it personally. Though painful to the writer, well written critical reviews, more than the positive ones, add to the treasury of anecdotes and folklore that nourish a literary community. Not too long ago, the sort of banter between writers and critics we now witness at lit fest panels used to unfold on the books pages of newspapers. If books sections are to reclaim something of their erstwhile glory days, fair yet critical reviews would certainly help.

Adani Green Energy: Sri Lanka revokes power purchase deal

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

Sri Lanka has revoked a power purchase deal with India's Adani Group after a probe into U.S. allegations that the conglomerate's executives paid bribes to secure Indian power supply contracts, according to an AFP report published by the Economic Times newspaper Sri Lanka opened the probe into the Group's local projects, the AFP reported, after U.S. authorities indicted billionaire Gautam Adani and other group executives in November on bribery and other charges, all of which the Group has denied.

While President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's cabinet has revoked the 20-year deal power purchase deal signed in May 2024, it has not cancelled the project and has appointed a committee to review the project, the AFP reported, citing an official document and an Energy Ministry official.Sri Lanka's Power and Energy Ministry declined to comment. But two Ministry sources told Reuters they were still reviewing the project and the power purchase deal had not been revoked. The Adani Group did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The U.S. allegations had raised concerns among some partners and investors of the group, with at least one Indian State reviewing its power deal with Adani and TotalEnergies halting further investments in the conglomerate. Overseas, Kenya has scrapped more than \$2.5 billion in deals with the Adani Group, including contracts to develop an airport and build power transmission lines, after the U.S. indictment.

Under the power purchase deal, Adani Green Energy was to build two 484 megawatts wind power stations in the South Asian island nation's northern province, with a total investment of \$442 million. The company would be paid 8.26 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh). The cash-strapped country, which has suffered from crippling power blackouts and fuel shortages, has been trying to speed green power generation to hedge against surges in imported fuel costs. The Adani Group is also involved in building a \$700 million terminal project at Sri Lanka's largest port in Colombo. Adani Green Energy shares were trading 1% lower in Mumbai.

Gujarat ATS seizes Rs 107 crore-worth of illegal alprazolam from factory in Anand district

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

alprazolam seizure, alprazolam tablets, gujarat ats, gujarat news, A team under the supervision of ATS SP K Siddharth and other officials raided the manufacturing unit and seized 107 kg of alprazolam, a statement from the ATS said. Six accused have been arrested in the case. The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) on Friday said it seized at least Rs 107 crore worth of alprazolam and 2,318 kg of "raw materials" from an "illegal factory" that would have been enough to produce 42.8 crore tablets.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Harsh Upadhyay received intelligence that Greenlife Industries, located in Neja village of Khambhat taluka of Anand district, was allegedly illegally manufacturing alprazolam tablets. A team under the supervision of ATS SP K Siddharth and other officials raided the manufacturing unit and seized 107 kg of alprazolam, a statement from the ATS said. Six accused have been arrested in the case. Alprazolam, which falls under the benzodiazepines class of drugs, is a tranquilising agent used in the treatment of anxiety disorders. Its manufacture is highly restricted in India due to the scope of misuse, and its illegal manufacture is an offence under the Narcotics, Drugs, and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. The ATS alleged that Ranjeet Dabhi, Vijay Makwana, Hemant Patel, Laiji

A grey birthday for the Election Commission of India



GNS News Agency, Jan 29

"The executive Government is instructing or managing things in such a manner that those people who do not belong to them either racially, culturally or linguistically, are being excluded from being brought on the electoral rolls. Electoral rolls are a most fundamental thing in a democracy... Independence of elections and avoidance of any interference by the executive should be regarded as a fundamental right," said Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in June 1949 in the Constituent Assembly while introducing the Constitutional provision to set up the Election Commission of India (ECI). All of India's founding leaders agreed with this unanimously. Tomorrow (January 25) is the 75th anniversary of the birth of the ECI — also celebrated as National Voters Day (January 25). Sadly, India's founding leaders will feel let-down by the ECI and not deem it to be a happy 75th birthday.

The case of MaharashtraDr. Ambedkar was prescient in his warnings about electoral roll manipulation by the executive. While he was more concerned about exclusion of voters through identity discrimination, government interference in electoral rolls can also be through a process of mass inclusion of voters to tilt an election — as seen in the recently held Maharashtra State elections.

The ECI enrolled 9.7 crore voters for the 2024 Maharashtra State election. The Narendra Modi government's Ministry of Health report estimated the entire adult population of Maharashtra (18-plus years), in 2024, as 9.54 crore. The ECI, by its own admission, registered 16 lakh more voters than the official estimate of the total adult population. Even if one were to accept that the government's estimate is only a projection, and can vary, it still implies that nearly 100% or more of all the adults in Maharashtra were registered as voters for the State election. This is very strange because the ECI neither enrolled nearly all adults as voters for the Maharashtra Lok Sabha election held just six months earlier, nor ever before in any of the other large States. Then, how were more people than the entire estimated adult population of Maharashtra enrolled

as voters only for the State election?

Mass enrolment in just months This is because 48 lakh people were registered as new voters in just six months between the Lok Sabha and the State elections. For context, between 2019 to 2024, only 32 lakh new voters were enrolled. In other words, 50% more people were enrolled as voters in just six months vis-à-vis the previous five-year period. What led to this sudden, and intriguing, rush by Maharashtrians to register and vote in the State election alone?Clues emerge upon careful analysis of the outcome. The BJP-led Mahayuti alliance gained 72 lakh more votes in the State election compared to the Lok Sabha election. One would logically presume that this gain by the BJP alliance was largely due to voters that voted for the Congressled Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance in the Lok Sabha election who then shifted allegiance to the BJP alliance for the state election. But that is not the case. Only 24 lakh such voters moved away from the Congress alliance between the two elections. So, where did the BJP alliance get its remaining 48 lakh (72 lakh – 24 lakh) votes from for the State election? It is not even the case that the BJP alliance got its remaining votes from other parties and independents, since this group too gained more votes in the State versus Lok Sabha election. It is then rational to impute that 48 lakh people who may not have voted in the Lok Sabha election, enrolled themselves as new voters for the State election and voted for the BJP alliance. Astonishingly, the ECI has confirmed officially that it enrolled the exact same number, i.e., 48 lakh people, as new voters for the Maharashtra election. Is this a miraculous coincidence, a case of divine intervention or executive interference, as Dr. Ambedkar had warned 75 years ago?What explains the sudden rush of new voters in six months for the State election? Are they real voters? Or are they ghosts? Were their documents verified when they were enrolled as voters? How is it that all the new voters enrolled seem to have voted for just one alliance?Regardless of one's political affiliations, to a rational mind, it is amply evident that there is something amiss with the electoral rolls in the Maharashtra election. Perhaps, there are sincere answers to these questions

If so, is it not logical to expect the ECI to release all the data in the public domain and issue clarifications in a transparent manner? But the ECI is conspicuously silent and arrogantly dismissive of these questions. A counter, which includes one by the Chief Election Commissioner, is that if there was such a large-scale addition of dubious or ghost voters, why were the Opposition parties with their war-rooms, not alert enough to catch this in time? This is a duplicitous way to absolve the ECI using the line of a political party's organisational inefficiencies. It is unfair and illegal to add vast numbers of dubious voters to influence an election and its outcome. It is the ECI's constitutional responsibility to run a fair election.

Makwana, and Jaydeep Makwana were "manufacturing" the narcotic and "selling" it to a man named Ajay Jain. They claimed to have seized Rs 30 lakh given by Jain to Dabhi.

While Dabhi runs his own trading company Satyam Traders, the other four accused manufacturers were colleagues at a company named Krishank Pharma in Khambhat, the statement added. It also said that Jain had earlier been convicted of manufacturing alprazolam and sentenced to 16 years in prison, having been booked by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) under the Ministry of Home Affairs, as well as the Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN) which falls under the CBIC.

UoH, ASPIRE BioNEST incubated startup included in Microsoft's Exclusive AI Coffee Table Book



GNS News Agency, Jan 29

Hyderabad: A startup incubated at the University of Hyderabad has been included in Microsoft's recently launched Coffee Table Book 'From Promise to Proof'.

ASPIRE BioNEST incubated startup SCIINV Biosciences AI/ML digital diagnostic platform AMRx at the University of Hyderabad (UoH) has been included in the Coffee Table Book which lists the top 200 AI first movers who are leveraging the power of AI to transform their businesses.Developed in partnership with San Jose headquartered Innominds, AMRx, is a pioneering, culture-free, patented diagnostic solution, harnesses advanced AI/ML algorithms to predict urinary tract infections and identify antibiotic resistance patterns using patient clinical history.This cutting-edge innovation bridges laboratory capacity limitations and significantly enhances speed and precision in infectious disease management, says Dr. Ranga Reddy Burri, Scientific Advisor- SCIINV Biosciences.



Ranga Reddy

INDIAN CHRONICLE

THURSDAY 30 JANUARY 2025

Number of cancer cases being diagnosed in India



GNS News Agency, Jan 29

The number of cancer cases being diagnosed in India every year is a whopping 14 lakh. Immunotherapy research and treatment in the country has come a long way, making it an effective treatment for certain types of cancer. However, the prohibitively high costs associated with it have made the treatment inaccessible for a large population. NKure Therapeutics, a Bengaluru-based cell and gene therapy start-up, is trying to address this problem by working on immunotherapy solutions that they say could potentially provide off-the-shelf affordable alternatives in cancer care. A relatively nascent field of cancer research, it was only as recently as 2020 when the Indian government approved the first immunotherapy drug in India. Immunotherapies like CAR-T cell therapy, where T cells (a type of white blood cell or immune cell that helps the immune system) are used to fight cancer, have seen advancements, but pose certain challenges in terms of side effects as well as affordability. NKure attempts to address this by using a different set of immune cells knows as Natural Killer cells or NK cells

"In CAR-T therapy, right now, blood is taken from a patient, the T cells are genetically modified and this is then given back to the patient. This is used for specific lymphomas and the whole process takes 8 to 10 days," explains Lalit Pai, CEO at NKure. However, given the treatment is specifically engineered for one person, the cost shoots up to about 1 crore.

"While the efficacy is very good, given the high costs associated with it, it cannot become mainstream. We need to go down a different pathway to get more affordability in immunotherapy," says Pai. "The hypothesis that we are working on is to get affordable immunotherapy to India." One challenge is the difficulty in culturing these cells outside the body. But the team now has a patent for the technology they developed for doing the same. Using this, one NK cell can grow 600 to 1,000 times over a 15-day period, says Lalit Pai, CEO at NKure.One challenge is the difficulty in culturing these cells outside the body. But the team now has a patent for the technology they developed for doing the same. Using this, one NK cell can grow 600 to 1,000 times over a 15-day period, says Lalit Pai, CEO at NKure.

The donor alternative Instead of taking the blood from a patient, the NKure team explores the possibility of extracting it from healthy donors. Each person could donate for around 100 patients, helping to make the solution offthe-shelf and significantly bringing down the costs to around 10-15 lakhs, say the people behind the initiative. If the first part of the research is about affordability, the second is about efficacy of the solution. This depends on correctly identifying the type of immune cell to be used from the extracted blood and the kind of genetic modification to do on it. "We have focused on NK cells. They are of a smaller proportion -- typically 5-15% of the white blood cells, whereas T cells are around 70%. So obviously everyone first looked at T cells, but now people are looking at the other subgroups," Pai notes. But why NK cells? "NK is a much more active cell. It has a way of identifying body-versus-non-body and self-versus-non-self, and it destroys the non-self. So, it doesn't really require targeting," he explains. One challenge is the difficulty in culturing these cells outside the body. But the team now has a patent for the technology they have developed for doing this. Using this tech, one NK cell can grow 600 to 1,000 times over a 15-day period, according to Pai. These cells can then be cryopreserved and thawed when needed without loss of functionality, he says. While developing genetically modified NK cells from healthy doses helps to make the treatment more affordable and off the shelf, Pai admits that there are certain flipsides to it. A major one is rejection of the cells by the patient's body. "If you are giving back a patient's blood cells to the same body, you don't expect too much rejection. But when you are giving the blood cells of a healthy person, it could be perceived as foreign by the patient's body. You need to see how the body reacts to it, whether the cells are creating any safety issues and so on."

That said, Renjitha Gopurrapilly, Chief Scientist at NKure, points out that the side effects like a Cytokine storm (asevere immune reaction in which the body releases too many cytokines – a type of protein - into the blood abruptly) that one may face during the administration of T-cells into the body do not happen with NK cells and hence it's a "safer therapy." What studies indicate

While there are no marketed NK cell therapies by which one could determine the efficiency of the treatment, studies so far point in that direction, says Gopurrapilli."It is shown to be as effective (as CAR-T cell therapy). There's no marketed NK cell therapy anywhere in the world yet. Phase-2 trials have been going on in some places. But there are multiple institutes in the U.S. for example who have conducted credible studies showing the effectiveness of the therapy," she notes.

While the NKure team's current research focuses on developing NK cell therapies that can fight lymphoma, they also have an in-licensed technology to fight colon cancer. The rights for the latter have been purchased from a Taiwanese firm. Gopurrapilly explains the difference between the two. "In the in-licensed product, we take the patient's own blood, develop NK cells from it and put it back into the patient every two weeks or three weeks. When it comes to our own product, we are trying to make an allogenic off-the shelf product from healthy dose and engineer it to put it in the CAR for targeting mechanism." "Our aspiration is to get approval for the phase-two study of the in-licensed technology, which, in two years' time we hope to take to market. And for our own product, we hope to get approval for phase-one study," says Pai.

Founded by regenerative medicine expert Mahendra Rao about two years ago, NKure has tall ambitions and hopes to bring down the cost of immunotherapy to one tenth of what is in the market currently. They believe that with the advancement of technology the price will further reduce. "We also need to scale up without compromising on the function. We don't want to keep on growing NK cells forever or bring it to a number where the cytotoxicity or the functionality is compromised. The ideal expectation would be to develop the least number of cells in in-vitro condition that would efficiently eradicate the tumour. That's what we have been working on," Gopurrapilly notes.

Would that pose a challenge to the ambitions of introducing it as an off-the-shelf product? "It's a question of logistics and how we scale the product," answers Pai. "The manufacturing will be centralised. It will take 15 days to make the product from a healthy dose and then we can cryopreserve it. This way, we can build a stock at a central place and distribute it when required. We'll have to do some demand forecasting for various centres and keep stock accordingly." According to him, existing CAR-T cell therapy takes about two weeks of hospitalisation which adds to the expenses. NKure, on the other hand, aims to offer its NKcell therapy as a daycare procedure involving an IV of about four hours. With more studies pointing to the ability of genetically modified NK cells to treat even other serious conditions such as Parkinson's disease, the team plans to venture into such areas after the completion of the ongoing research. The hope is that, with the skill sets that we are



GNS News Agency, Jan 29

India's data centre market continues to grow robustly, with the total capacity projected to rise to 2 GW by 2026. There is nearly 525 MW capacity under various phases of construction across top cities like Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru.Cloud computing, technology advancements, 5G rollouts and the digitalisation of BFSI continue to be the growth drivers with artificial intelligence (AI) workloads to ramp this demand up further. These growth drivers are projected to push the India data centre market value to USD 11.6 billion by 2032.

Data centres have also emerged as an attractive asset class for institutional investors in the last few years, with a large capital pool being committed and deployed in this sector. The industry has seen advancements on various fronts and will continue growing exponentially in the next 2-3 years.Some of the key trends to look out for in 2025 and beyond:

Data centre operators are increasingly investing in large-scale projects with capacities of over 100MW, specifically in Navi Mumbai. Apart from Mumbai, Chennai is another preferred market for these operators to set up facilities. Hyderabad will also see significant hyperscaler capacity development in the next few years, with two major hyperscalers — each with 100-plus acres of land — having projects in various stages of development. With the increase in cloud computing and large-scale AI-led demand, the industry will see various large campuses to house this growing demand.Creation of New Availability Zones & Micromarkets

Mumbai and Chennai continue to be the preferred markets for data centre operators. However, due to the scarcity of suitable land parcels and the exponential rise in land prices in the existing DC clusters, the focus is on exploring alternatives slightly away from the conventional hubs in these cities. Surge in AI-led Data Centre Demand and Infra ChangesAs per NASSCOM, India's AI market is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 20 per cent between 2023 and 2028. This will strengthen the data centre demand. With rising Al workloads, data centres are becoming increasingly dense and power-consuming. The average rack density is anticipated to increase up to 30 KW/rack compared to the existing 8-10 KW/rack server density. Advanced and Sustainable Cooling SolutionsTo incorporate AI-led changes in data centre infrastructure, the industry is gearing up for the adoption of newer, more energy-efficient technologies. This includes incorporating cooling techniques like liquid immer-

sion cooling which offer significant power efficiency and substantial cost savings. The upcoming hyperscale and purpose-built AI data centres are expected to adopt this technology.Tie-ups between Chipmakers, Infra Providers

Key trends to look out for

in Data Centres in India

Over the past two years, India's data centre industry has witnessed collaborations between chip developers and infrastructure providers (for instance, the partnerships between NVIDIA and Yotta and Tata Group and Reliance Jio Infocomm on various fronts). These collaborations aim to build sustainable, energy-efficient, future-ready data centres and are expected to take shape in the next two years. Such collaborations align with the government's India AI mission, and the data centre ecosystem will benefit immensely.Edge Data Centre Facilities Development

Another important development in the Indian data centre industry which will witness incremental growth in the next couple of years is the setting up of edge data centre facilities closer to end-users and devices generating data. These facilities are expected to manage the growing data traffic from tier II and tier III cities and support applications like OTT (over-the-top) platforms, IoT (Internet of Things) devices, gaming and Smart Cities with reduced latency and a better consumer experience. Tier II cities like Patna, Jaipur, Lucknow, Ahmedabad and Bhubaneshwar have already started getting commitments from the data centre operators to set up such edge facilities. Migration from On-Premise to Cloud

Many companies increasingly prefer hosting on a hybrid cloud rather than relying on traditional on-premise infrastructure. Cloud computing reduces costs and maintenance needs associated with traditional IT infrastructure. This also offers improved scalability and better security solutions, and will, in turn, accelerate data centre demand from cloud companies. Focus on Green Data Centres

The data centre industry is becoming increasingly committed to its Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) considerations. Operators have started using renewable energy to support a part of their power demand via wind and solar energy through strategic power purchase agreements. Some data centre operators plan on 100% green facilities in the next few years, and continuous efforts are being undertaken to meet this goal. There is backward integration by data centre operators to develop their own sources of green power by investing in renewable energy projects. Efforts related to water and waste management are focused on adopting circular economy principles. The government is also exploring the feasibility of using nuclear energy to power data centres, and 2025 could be the start of this vision.

Enhanced Security Measures The industry continues to improve on the security aspects of data centres to prevent cyber threats and security breaches by integrating advanced security measures like AI-powered security tools, Zero Trust Architecture and multi-factor authentication.Skill Development and Enhancement of Talent Pool

Efforts on training programmes and learning centres for skill development in hardware, software and data centre operations and IT infrastructure management have improved. Both private operators and the government are focusing on creating a talent pool to align with the country's digital growth.Overall, the Indian data centre market is on an exponential growth trajectory, driven by institutional capital, technological innovation, regulatory support and the country's vast digital ecosystem.

Delhi HC ponders if CAG reports can be made public before tabling in the House;

building, we will be able to apply this to other cells and for other genetic modifications," Pai notes.

Thought-reading tech revolution priced at Rs 8000, now available for pre-order



GNS News Agency, Jan 29

Hyderabad: Omi artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled wearable, demonstrated by CES 2025, is being marketed as a breakthrough device that will help enhance productivity and automate everyday activity. Priced at Rs 7,640 (approximately \$89), the device is available for pre-order and is set to ship in Q2 of 2025. The wearable is designed by San Francisco based startup Based Hardware and can be worn in several forms. It can be worn as a necklace (which reacts to the voice command such as "Hey Omi" or attached to the back of your head with medical tape (providing an "brain interface" reading the brain waves and analyzing information without verbalization and speech).

The product can be used as an augmentation to smartphones with content applicable to the user's context, thus where it can increase the efficiency of the user. It is supported in both Android and iOS devices where it continuously listens to the user's environment and provides appropriate answers via a companion app.Omi works on the open-source platform, where each developer builds his custom apps or integrates his models in without a hitch. Power-packed AI processes conversations, retains context controls, and provides a personalized answer for help. Whether it is answering questions, summarizing conversations, creating to-do lists, or tracking your meetings, the wearable is what you use every day.Besides its remarkable AI power, Omi also tackles the issue of privacy by allowing users to have control of their data. The open-source platform enables the user to track whether and where the data is sent, or to retain the data locally.Even though the technology in Omi's "brain interface" is still in its infancy, it shows a potential. The device uses a single electrode to detect brain activity, distinguishing user interaction from unrelated thoughts, and processes this data to provide relevant responses.Initially a project on Kickstarter called "Friend,"Omi was rechristened following a change in ownership of the domain name by a different company. Even with competition from other AI devices, Omi will try to differentiate itself by positioning itself as a tool to augment rather than replace throughput.

Govt whip greeted by protests in Yadadri Bhongir dist



GNS News Agency, Jan 29

Bhongir: Residents of Vangala village in Gundala Mandal staged a protest against government Whip Beerla Ilaiah. The protestors displayed placards and raised slogans against the government and the Whip during the foundation stone laying ceremony for CC road works. The police intervened and dispersed the protesters.

The villagers alleged that a majority of the residents were not considered for the sanction of the Indiramma houses. The beneficiary lists were filled with names of the Congress workers. The names read out at grama sabha recently disappointed many. They demanded the inclusion of their names in the housing list, free power supply and the implementation of welfare schemes.

say such a step 'may violate Constitution'

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

The Delhi High Court Friday orally enquired that unless CAG reports are tabled, how can they be brought out in the public domain with a court direction. The court also mulled that directing to make Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports public before their tabling may violate Article 151 of the Constitution.Article 151 prescribes the powers of the President and the Governor/Lieutenant Governor for tabling audit reports in Parliament and Assembly, respectively. The division bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela made the observation while dealing with a public interest litigation by one retired civil servant Brij Mohan seeking the court's directions to make public 14 audit reports of CAG on the Delhi Government's functioning.CJ Upadhyaya orally enquired from the petitioner's counsel senior advocate Geeta Luthra as to under what provisions of law she was pressing for the petition

After she responded that she was relying on the "fundamental right to know, as a citizen, as a voter," which flows from Article 19, CJ Upadhyaya orally remarked, "These generalised arguments will not do… we are dealing with reports prepared by a constitutional body, we have to be conscious."

CJ Upadhyaya pointed out, "Article 151 (of the Constitution) does not say that reports once placed before the house, whether they shall be made public or not... they have provided in some circular/manual that they can be made public once it has been laid. Since you're saying circulars are not sacrosanct we want to know under what provision (you are seeking the direction in the PIL)... Unless we comply with Article 151, how can it be brought out in the public domain... we want to know on what premise is your prayer based... Article 19 is subject to certain limitations... and right to know is a statutory right flowing from Right to Information Act... you have to establish that there is a public duty on the authority... where's that authority?... Public has a right to know but not in violation of any constitutional provision... if your prayer is granted, Article 151 will be violated... we are just trying to understand the whole gamut in which you've filed the petition."Justice Gedela, too, orally remarked, "It has to fall within RTI Act, for that it has to be information first... we don't think it is information before (being tabled in the house).'

The petitioner, Mohan, who retired as a Senior Administrative Grade (SAG) officer in 2013 from the Indian Audit & Accounts Department (IA&AD), has submitted that the 14 CAG reports "should be made public urgently and they should be discussed and debated before Delhi goes to polls before Vidhan Sabha elections are held." Mohan, in his PIL, has also contended that the PIL is filed for the "benefit of the voters in Delhi", as they "must be aware of the state of affairs in Delhi and financial health of Delhi before they cast their votes in the forthcoming elections in Delhi."CJ Upadhyaya further enquired from Luthra, "Why do you want this info before elections? Are you interested in knowing



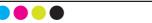
the information for the purpose of choosing the government?"Luthra responded in the affirmative, to which CJ Upadhyaya responded orally, "Sorry. You should be concerned with the information contained in the report, you should be concerned with the report... we ourselves feel that it is very important... but (we are) confronted by constitutional provision... it is a constitutional requirement (to table the report)... You're before a court of law, your arguments should be legal."

2 Bangladeshi 'infiltrators' arrested in Chinchwad, Aadhaar cards seized

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

Pimpri Chinchwad police have arrested two alleged Bangladeshi citizens residing illegally in India and seized their Aadhaar cards. The accused were identified as Shohag Sukumar Majumdar, 20, and Suman Gopal Tikadar, 35. Police Constable Mohsin Shaikh of the Anti-Terrorist Cell at Pimpri station lodged the first information report (FIR) in this regard .As per the FIR, Majumdar and Tikadar are natives of Khulna in Bangladesh. P D Salunkhe, the Police Sub-Inspector investigating the case, said the accused were working at a construction site in Chinchwad. Acting on a tip-off, the police nabbed the two on Thursday and seized documents from them, including Aadhaar cards. The police probe revealed that Majumdar entered India illegally with his parents a few years ago. They stayed at a family member's house in North 24 Parganas. Later, his parents returned to Bangladesh while Majumdar worked at a local shop, managed to procure an Aadhaar card - which said he hailed from North 24 Parganas in West Bengal - and arrived Pune in February 2024 in search of a job. Investigators found that he regularly spoke to family members in Bangladesh over the phone.









Is poverty being underestimated in India?



GNS News Agency, Jan 29

Last month, the government released a factsheet on the 2023-24 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES), which recorded a decline in poverty in urban and rural areas. Over the last few years, policymakers and academics have debated the issues of incomparable data sets, the unavailability of data, and the definition of an adequate consumption basket to determine a poverty line. Is poverty being underestimated in India? P.C. Mohanan and N.R. Bhanumurthy discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Samreen Wani. Edited excerpts:

How do you define poverty? Is poverty being underestimated in India?

P.C. Mohanan: We had a stable definition of poverty from the late 1970s to 2005. We started with the expenditure required for sustaining a minimum calorie diet and that used to be updated every five years using the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data. When the NSSO started the whole exercise, its estimates of private expenditure and those of the National Accounts were very similar, so there was no controversy. But over the years, their estimates diverged so much that questions came up about the accuracy of the NSS data. Then, the government appointed the Tendulkar Committee. At the same time, the NSSO also started experimenting with different methodologies to improve the collection of consumption expenditure and that meant using different recall periods. (A recall period is when a respondent is asked to recall their consumption expenditure over a specific time period.) After 2011-12, the government neither had official poverty estimates nor conducted a survey. People started using alternative estimates of expenditure and later, the multidimensional poverty index was used. So, using certain data sets, there have been claims that poverty has drastically come down. But that is questionable because it depends on the poverty line and the data

N.R. Bhanumurthy: In the last two decades, the number of people below the poverty line has drastically come down, whatever line you take. But the delta between the two decades (the change in poverty estimation over a period of time) is very large for many reasons such as high GDP growth, increase in public expenditures through a number of flagship programmes introduced by the Union and State governments, and an improved public delivery system. In addition, we still have the National Food Security Act, which covers nearly 80 crore people. So, saying that people still live in extreme poverty would be counter-intuitive, if that is happening. Initially, while defining poverty, we were talking about calorie consumption alone. Now, the definition has been broadened. And that is the way to go. If you use the Tendulkar line or the Rangarajan line, you might get different numbers, but the change between two rounds in both the methods would be more or less the same and close to 17% or 18%. Dr. Rangarajan himself estimated that poverty was close to 10% based on the 2022-23 survey. With the recent factsheet, I wouldn't be surprised if poverty would have come down further to single digits.

What are your concerns with the HCES data?

PCM: Over the years, there has been a divergence between the NSSO per capita household consumption expenditure data and those from the National Accounts. Some of the issues were because of the recall period. The NSSO started experimenting with different recall periods. While it set a seven-day recall period for certain items, it set a 30day period for others. But these estimates then could not be compared with previous consumption estimates, which had different recall periods. We had the uniform reference period (URP), where we had 30 days of recall for all items, and the mixed reference period (MRP) using 30 days (food) and 365 days (for other goods). Tendulkar estimated poverty based on MRP. Then we had the modified mixed reference period (MMRP) — seven days for food items along with 30 days and 365 days for other items. This gives you a higher estimate of expenditure because your recall is better. If you use the higher expenditure distribution on a lower poverty line, which is what many researchers have done, naturally your poverty goes down. Rangarajan had suggested a different methodology in his committee report, but the government did not accept that. In the last two years, the NSSO has made a further modification by visiting households in three sittings instead of one. This way, data reporting is better because respondents get more time and can recall better. The current methodology will still give us higher expenditure. But if you use this data on the older poverty line, your estimate will come down. Very few people have tried to create a new poverty line for the NSSO's new methodology. This is a major gap.NRB: We need to improve the methodology. We cannot go with a URP because some expenditures would not have been made in the last seven days or the last month. Right now we are looking at a slightly broader aspect of consumption. If you look at the factsheet, food articles constitute less than 50% of the total consumption basket. So, it shows that we are not spending on food items alone and are looking at other services required for the household. In that sense, there is a need for us to reexamine the old methodology. The present criticism is with the estimate that suggests a decline in poverty by over 17% between two rounds. I would say that whatever poverty line we use, the decline in the number of poor between 2011-12 and 2023-24 would be closer to 17% or more.

What do we know about poverty in rural and urban regions?

PCM: The data show that the rural-urban differential in consumption is actually coming down. Rural areas are dong better. But the idea of a rural area that we have is based on the 2011 Census, so a significant portion of the rural areas is basically urban or peri-urban in character. Earlier, food expenditure used to be the major component of rural consumption patterns. But the 2022-23 data show that a substantial number of items are the same in urban and rural areas now, which means rural consumption has actually changed in terms of diversity. We need to put a statistical base in place, including a Census, so we know what is rural and urban.NRB: There should be clear-cut separation of what is rural and urban. If we decide to shift peri-urban to urban areas, I think urban poverty would have declined much faster than the preliminary estimates we have now. In any case, at the aggregate, we see a sharp fall in the number of poor, but in terms of consumption, we have to look at public policy interventions.

Where do you stand on an upward revision of the poverty line in India?

PCM: A research paper by the Foundation for Agrarian Studies used the Rangarajan methodology on the 2022-23 HCES data. They estimated around 25% poverty. I'm not clear that by just updating a poverty line in that fashion, we would have a definite estimation. But we need to have some agreement on a methodology and the government needs to stand behind that. That is unlikely to happen.NRB: With the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) laying down \$2.15/day as a poverty line, even their estimates suggest poverty was just about 12.9% in 2019. So, I don't agree with the 25% figure that Dr. Mohanan is quoting. NITI Aayog's estimates also don't really support that number. However, I agree with him that we need to have a clear-cut methodology for a poverty line estimation, but at the same time we need to stick to a single poverty line. There have been some criticisms against Niti Aayog's multidimensional poverty index. UNDP's index has 10 indicators and India's index has 12. Is this criticism valid?NRB: The UNDP has one methodology for all countries. It is only a framework that suggests what needs to be part of your consumption basket. But it is left to the countries to customise that methodology. Broadening that basket is the right way to do it. We have rightly added bank accounts and maternal health to the 10 indicators that the UNDP includes in its index.PCM: I am not sure about that because multidimensional poverty tells you whether you are deprived of that particular indicator or not

Now there are many indicators which may not be applicable to a household. When you don't have a child, all those indicators related to a child are not relevant, so that household is not deprived of those things. Many of the indicators actually don't go down. Once you have access to electricity, a bank account, etc., you don't get deprived of those indicators in future. This index will never go up. Poverty estimates will continue to stay low because of the way the indicators have been selected. There is no scope for getting deprived in future. We don't measure income vulnerability and we need to do that.

TNPCB report on dumping of garbage in abandoned quarries puts Tiruppur City Corporation in a spot



GNS News Agency, Jan 29

The latest report of the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) to the National Green Tribunal on the impact of dumping of garbage by the Tiruppur City Corporation in abandoned quarries at Pongupalayam village has pushed the civic body into a challenging situation. The TNPCB report states that the City Corporation was not authorised to use the abandoned stone quarries for dumping garbage, and the civic body had failed to adhere to solid waste management norms."A show cause notice was issued to the City Corporation on August 22, 2024, under Section 5 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, for noncompliance with the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016. However, no reply has been received to date," the TNPCB report said, adding: "Unauthorised dumping of unsegregated municipal solid wastes into these quarries is in direct violation of the provisions of SWM Rules, 2016 and continues to endanger public health and the environment."

Urging the City Corporation to immediately stop dumping unsegregated waste at the abandoned quarry, the TNPCB advised the local body to send the segregated recyclable waste to authorised recyclers or cement kilns. The TNPCB had stated in its report that a team had inspected the quarry sites on January 8, 2025, and could observe that while dumping of solid waste at the quarry in Survey number 199 had ceased, the practice continued at the quarry in survey number 206. The NGT-Southern Zone adjoined the case for next hearing after a week.

The TNPCB submitted its report following a public interest litigation filed before the National Green Tribunal opposing the dumping of the garbage in the defunct quarries in Kalampalayam area of ??Pongupalayam panchayat by a private entity SWMS that was entrusted with the responsibility of collecting and disposing garbage by the City Corporation. The dumping of the garbage in the quarries had caused land, water and air pollution, and was exposing people to grave health hazards, R. Satishkumar, State Secretary, Legal Awareness Wing, Tamil Nadu Farmers Protection Association, who filed the PIL, said. In its report submitted to the National Green Tribunal - Southern Zone on Tuesday, the TNPCB made a case for levy of ?2.8 crore as interim fine on the civic body for non-compliance with the Environmental Protection Act, and Solid Waste Management Rules. These norms required the City Corporation to segregate the garbage at collection points before collection for recycling and reuse. The City Corporation also faced the challenge of removing the dumped garbage. The TNPCB advocated preparation of short-term and long-term plans for solid waste management by the City Corporation.

Bengaluru's residential areas are no longer the neighbours' envy

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

When she moved into their house off Indiranagar 12th Main from Ulsoor in 1977, many people asked her family members why they had chosen an area so forsaken. "I was in class 10. We didn't know that roads were going to come up around us. This was part of a village called Doopanahalli and a laidback place. We were scared to come home after 6 p.m.," she recalls. The tuition teacher says she has seen the area grow before her eyes, remembering how they would marvel at the many beautiful houses being built on 100 Feet Road."As we were building our house, the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) planted so many trees. In the 1980s, the cross roads came up and plots were sold. I got married in 1984 and moved out of the country. When I returned in 1997 too, there were quite a few empty plots. In 1999, I bought a plot 10 houses away from the house where I grew up," she said.

She reminisces about how residents would play badminton on the road and on empty plots, and how they could see flights land and take off from HAL airport, and even the utility building - then the tallest in the city. "The BPO culture changed everything. Around the mid-2000s, it just crept under us and things just ballooned. I still don't understand how 12th Main became a commercial access road. I still know a lot of people here, but there are very few locals. We are struggling to keep at least our road residential. I tell people this is the only place I have. It is unfortunate what it has become despite our fight. Even if it was commercial, it would have still worked if the basic rules such as parking facilities were followed," she says, while recalling how she battled sewage backflow in her house only a few days ago.

Once a sought-after residential area, Indiranagar today is among the prime commercial hubs of Bengaluru. Its story is the same as many other prime old residential hubs of the city. With land parcels becoming scarce in the core areas of the city, real estate players across the board report massive redevelopment taking place in these prime areas. Once sought-after residential localities, prime old areas of Bengaluru are seeing rapid redevelopment, turning them into bustling commercial spaces. Digbijay Das, Senior Director, Valuation Services, Colliers India, said apart from the Central Business District (CBD) region, comprising M.G. Road, Richmond Road, Residency Road, Infantry Road, Cunningham Road, Sankey Road, Vittal Mallya Road, and Ulsoor, standalone residential developments in Koramangala, Indiranagar, Jayanagar, J.P. Nagar, etc., are being redeveloped into commercial office, retail, and mixed-use development areas. "Increase in commercial activity has led to a rise in land price and this has prompted the redevelopment. Redevelopment is taking place to fulfill the burgeoning demand for commercial office space, retail, and mixed-use real estate in CBD region which is starved of vacant land for new development," he said. Once sought-after residential localities, prime old areas of Bengaluru are seeing rapid redevelopment, turning them into bustling commercial spaces. Sudhanshu Mishra, Principal Partner, Square Yards, an integrated platform for real estate and mortgages, noted significant redevelopment across areas like Indiranagar, Koramangala, and parts of Whitefield, driven by rapid urbanisation and the growing demand for modern infrastructure. "Many older neighbourhoods, once dotted with independent houses, are transforming into high-rise apartments, tech parks, and retail complexes. This shift is largely fuelled by the city's robust IT ecosystem and the promise of higher returns for property owners and developers. Once sought-after residential localities, prime old areas of Bengaluru are seeing rapid redevelopment, turning them into bustling commercial spaces. Increasingly, residential pockets are being converted into commercial or mixed-use developments, often resulting in higher property prices and changing the neighbourhood's character, he said, offering Mumbai's Lower Parel and Bandra-Kurla Complex (BKC) as examples. Natural progressionOnce sought-after residential localities, prime old areas of Bengaluru are seeing rapid redevelopment, turning them into bustling commercial spaces.Once sought-after residential localities, prime old areas of Bengaluru are seeing rapid redevelopment, turning "CBDs remain the cornerstone of urban economic activity, serving as pivotal hubs for commerce and corporate operations. However, the emergence of secondary business districts (SBDs) offers a complementary solution, addressing rising commercial space costs and easing congestion. This shift does not signal the end of CBDs but rather complements their role. In Bengaluru, areas near the CBD have evolved into mature commercial markets. With land availability becoming increasingly constrained, redevelopment emerges as a natural progression. By optimising land use and revitalising aging structures, redevelopment maximises the potential of the floor area ratio (FAR), enabling the creation of taller buildings or additional usable space, aligning with the city's growing demand for modern



trade for sufficient parking, fire safety, and ensure there are no building or zonal violations. If these places are found to be in violation, trade licences should be null and void. But no inspections are happening," she said, adding that there are establishments that do not have parking space for even a bicycle or have come up in setback areas [the minimum amount of open space surrounding a building that must be maintained] and basements.Once sought-after residential localities, prime old areas of Bengaluru are seeing rapid redevelopment, turning them into bustling commercial spaces.She also pointed to the many rooftop bars and restaurants that the BBMP had admitted were illegal and had issued notices to them, but there had been no follow up since.Violation of sanctioned plans

C.N. Kumar, a resident of Jayanagar, said the situation is progressively getting worse in this old residential area too. "There are blatant violations of sanctioned plans. Independent bungalows are being converted into multiple floor dwellings. The densification of the area is leading to more traffic, and a strain on water, electricity, sewage network, and other resources. These are all old layouts and there is additional pressure on the resources now. The government should start looking at stricter implementation of existing rules," he said. Once sought-after residential localities, prime old areas of Bengaluru are seeing rapid redevelopment, turning them into bustling commercial spaces. Property developers like Anil R.G., Managing Director, Concorde, acknowledged that residential-to-commercial redevelopment in areas like Indiranagar and Koramangala has led to significant transformations. "For instance, Indiranagar's 100 Feet Road has evolved into a bustling commercial hub, with rental values reaching ?100 to 150 per sqft. This redevelopment has pushed up property prices by 50% to 70%, making it a lucrative opportunity for investors. However, long-term residents often face challenges such as increased traffic congestion. Indiranagar has seen a 30% rise in traffic over the past five years, and noise pollution, altering the quiet residential charm of the area. But, redevelopment has also brought modern infrastructure, better public amenities, and increased footfall, turning these neighborhoods into thriving urban spaces that cater to a younger, tech-savvy demographic," he added. A. Mohan Raju, Managing Director and CEO, Kalyani Developers, also said such residential-to-commercial redevelopment in areas like Whitefield typically leads to rising property prices and a higher cost of living. "While this boosts the local economy, it can displace long-term residents as land values increase and rental rates rise. The neighbourhood may undergo significant changes, with more commercial activity, infrastructure development, and population density, potentially disrupting the peaceful, residential environment. Over time, these areas may become more vibrant and economically prosperous, but the shift could result in the loss of cultural identity and challenges like traffic congestion and sustainability issues. Urban planning will be essential to balance growth with the needs of the community."No master plan in place Ironically, the city does not have a masterplan in place after the withdrawal of the draft Revised Master Plan (RMP), 2031, though the High Court of Karnataka in May, 2023, clarified that its withdrawal would not "negate all actions taken in pursuance of it, and the actions already taken as per the provisional RMP-2031 before withdrawal must be given due effect to."In addition, in October, 2022, the High Court of Karnataka directed the BBMP to submit a report on the exercise carried out on the use of residential premises for commercial activities in violation of the law in various parts of the city. The Division Bench was hearing a PIL petition filed by the Wilson Garden Residents' Welfare Association complaining that several basement floors, stilt floors, and parking areas in the residential zone are being allowed to be used by flower vendors in violation of laws.BBMP officials were unavailable for comment. The BBMP, this financial year, revised the property tax of 15,731 properties, as the tax being paid was for residential properties despite the properties being operated under the commercial category. The total pending amount estimated after this revision was 398.49 crore.

'They didn't glamourise violence,' says Devdutt Pattanaik, author of Ahimsa: 100 Reflections on the Harappan Civilization

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

A century after the world learned of the existence of the Harappan civilisation, as ancient as Mesopotamia and Egypt, Devdutt Pattanaik reflects on the "peculiar" but peaceful Harappans in his new book, Ahimsa, which he has also illustrated. Edited excerpts from an interview.

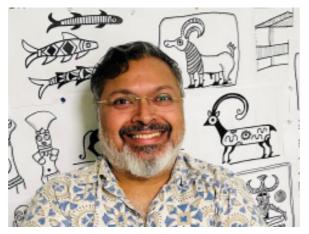
You've dedicated 'Ahimsa' to 'those who choose dialogue (sam-vaad) over debate (vi-vaad)'. Was this inspired by your experiences on Twitter?

More than Twitter, that's a silly space, it was academia. The way the academy is designed is through argument and debate. When someone does their PhD, we say 'defend your thesis', it's very combative. The academy comes from the idea that there is one truth — this works in science because, at the end of the day, you have to get mathematical, objective evidence. In the realm of history, to a large degree, you can get it, but when it comes to more subjective things like art, mythology, ideas, it becomes extremely difficult to figure out what's going on. I say: don't argue, listen. Try to figure out different ways in which we can understand the same thing.

You list the prejudices historians might bring to the study of Harappa. E.H. Carr once wrote that all historians have bees in their bonnets, you have to listen to the buzzing. Do you have any bees of your own?

I do. I don't like this notion of triumph or the greatness of the past. I don't see the past as better or worse than the present. A discourse in which the past was great or the past was terrible, both bother me a lot, and my instinct is to counter it, to see if there is an alternate way of looking at the same thing. There are good people, bad people, difficult lives, good lives. Technology keeps changing but emotionally, do we really change? You'll see that sense in my writing a lot.

A worshipper is often shown making offerings to a tree or a deity in Harappan art. In this illustration, a worshipper sits in a half-kneeling position calling out to a tiger. A worshipper is often shown making offerings to a tree or a deity



in Harappan art. In this illustration, a worshipper sits in a half-kneeling position calling out to a tiger. | Photo Credit: Devdutt PattanaikStamp seals and impressions, some of them with Indus script; probably made of steatite; British Museum (London)Stamp seals and impressions, some of them with Indus script; probably made of steatite; British Museum (London)

Why did you choose Harappa?

I was interested in the art. Some of the art in my book was done years ago in a fit of inspiration. I kept sketching the bull, the unicorn, the rhinoceros, the crocodile [from the Harappan seals]. As I was drawing, I noticed that the animals are anatomically absolutely correct, almost like photographs — it's quite impressive. I went down a rabbit hole of information, you go in deeper and deeper and your head starts to spin. I'm not a historian — I'm not interested in the history, I'm interested in the mythology of that period, how they imagined the world. The timelines [are fascinating]: the pyramids are built exactly when the Harappan cities are being built. The lapis lazuli — a stone found only in Afghanistan — made its way to Mesopotamia along the sea coast from Harappa.



INDIAN CHRONICLE

Is France's influence in West Africa over?



On January 1, Ivory Coast President Alassane Ouattara announced that French troops would withdraw from the country by the end of the month. On December 26, in Chad, France handed over its military base in Faya-Largeau and began the withdrawal of troops following the termination of a defence cooperation agreement in November. On December 3, Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye called for the closure of all French military bases, commenting that their presence was "incompatible" with the country's national sovereignty. Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Chad have joined three West African countries — Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso — asking for French troop's withdrawal, marking a major blow to France's waning influence in the region.

Why did Chad, Ivory Coast, and Senegal ask for French troop's withdrawal?

First, the narrative on incompatibility with national sovereignty. France has around 1,000 troops in Chad, 600 in Ivory Coast, and 350 in Senegal. Since independence, France had colonial pacts with these former colonies to maintain economic, political, and military influences, referred to as 'Françafrique'. In Senegal and Ivory Coast, French troops have been stationed since 2014 as part of Operation Barkhane. For Chad, the defence pact existed for decades and does not align with its security requirements. Chad's President Mahamat Daby says ending the defence agreements is like taking back national sovereignty. Ivory Coast and Senegal have followed in similar footsteps for a reciprocal relationship that respects each other's independence and sovereignty. Second, public dissatisfaction over French presence. French troops have been fighting insurgent groups linked to the Islamic state and al Qaeda across West Africa since 2014. Despite their military presence, French troops failed to quell the insurgency in the region. Besides, it has spread, degenerated, and intensified across the region. This raised anti-French sentiments alongside a public demand for their withdrawal

Third, West Africa's quest to move beyond France. Recently, many West African countries have shown interest in diversifying their relations from traditional colonial to new partners. The military governments in West Africa, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, have built military ties with Russian mercenaries to fight insurgency. For military leaders, Russian mercenaries do not come with the baggage of adhering to democratic values. Besides, Russia has successfully spread an image as a better security provider in Africa.

What does French withdrawal mean for African countries?

For Africa, French withdrawal means the end of France's decades-long influence. However, in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, French withdrawal and Russia's arrival has not addressed or contained insurgency. Rather, these three countries rank among the top in the Global Terrorism Index 2024 by the Institute for Economics & Peace. The military regimes have strengthened in the region with the new Alliance of Sahel states between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. The common anti-French sentiments would likely bring Chad, Senegal, and Ivory Coast to join the Sahel alliance and an opportunity to boost regional counter-terrorism efforts.

What does the withdrawal mean for France?

The withdrawal would have four implications - first, the obituary of the 'Françafrique'. Under French President Emmanuel Macron, the withdrawal marks the end of "Françafrique," giving prominence to maintaining a strong economic and diplomatic foothold. Second, the decline in political influence affects economic relations. Since 2010, President Ouattara has been in term with support from France; however former president Gbagbo's reemergence in 2020 challenged political stability. Without political influence, fulfilling France's economic interests can be problematic. Third, a waning military presence would impact international reputation. The military has supported pro-France African leaders to maintain political and economic stability. French Armed Forces have been stationed in support of UN operations since the Ivorian Civil War. Therefore, projecting France as a global fighter against terrorism and a defender of international values and human rights will be undermined in the new reality. Fourth, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have pushed out French troops involuntarily, which are now either replaced by Russian mercenaries or engulfed in a military coup, making French influence impossible. It is uncertain for the Ivory Coast, given its political and economic ties with France even after independence.

Is there a larger waning European influence in Africa?

In the geopolitical era of conflicts, Europe's declining presence and the competition from Russia and China in Africa were the least focused. The EU is struggling with the shifting political landscape, security issues from the war in Ukraine, and larger economic strain; therefore handling autocracies, migrants, and anti-Europe sentiments has been put on the back burner. In the last few decades, Germany, rance, and the U.K. have called down their development funding, leading to increased military coups and greater involvement of external actors. To gain a political and security presence in Africa, Russia has filled the military vacuum, while China asserts its economic influence through the Belt and Road Initiative. The EU's trade surplus has declined by 15%, from 55 billion euros to 35 billion euros between 2022 and 2023. In comparison, China maintains a surplus of more than 70 billion euros. Militarily, Russia has benefited from the troops' withdrawals. Whether this will change the rightwing governments in Europe is worth asking. The 2024 manifestos of these parties can be useful in this regard. Their policies are more security-oriented in managing borders and migrants, rather than being economically driven. In the coming years, Europe's foreign policy approach will be more inward-looking, with few EU members looking to expand markets into Africa while facing competition from China.

Afghan women's group hails ICC's move to arrest Taliban leaders for persecution of women

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

An Afghan women's group on Friday (January 24, 2025) hailed a decision by the International Criminal Court to arrest Taliban leaders for their persecution of women. The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor Karim Khan announced Thursday (January 23, 2025) he had requested arrest warrants for two top Taliban officials, including the leader Hibatullah Akhundzada. Since they took back con-



Four years on, Shivamogga quarry blast case probe is back to square one



GNS News Agency, Jan 29

Chikka Bore Gowda, a resident of Kengal Hanumanthaiya Nagar near Bhadravati in Shivamogga district of Karnataka, calls his son C. Devendra's mobile phone every now and then only to hear a pre-recorded message saying that the call could not be connected. Gowda last saw his son four years ago.Sixty-year-old Gowda, a farmer, lost his ailing wife, Susheela, eight years back. He lived with his son and his family. The blast at a stone-crushing unit at Hunasodu near Shivamogga on January 21, 2021, left them devastated. The police who investigated the case concluded that six people died in the incident, though they identified five among the victims initially. Three people, including Devendra who was at the site that fateful night, were declared "missing".

"If we knew for certain that he died in that blast, we would have reconciled to the loss over time. But now, we are dying every day thinking of him. We don't know what happened to him for certain," says a tearful Gowda. Though the police later said the DNA test proved the sixth body to be that of Devendra's, Gowda refuses to believe it and continues to harbour suspicion.Devendra alias Shashi had a daughter and his wife, Shobha, was pregnant with the second child when he went "missing" following the blast. "After he did II PU [pre-university course], I insisted that he stay at home looking after cows and agriculture in the village instead of going out for any job. After I lost my wife, I wanted my son to remain with me," says Gowda. The father got an autorickshaw for Devendra, who occasionally worked for Praveen, who used to procure explosives for stone-crushing units. According to Gowda, Devendra would collect money from those running thestone-crushing units and hand it over to Praveen. He had maintained a notebook of payments

The blast that shook allIt was around 10.20 p.m. on January 21, 2021, that a lorry carrying explosives, including gelatin sticks and detonators, blew up at the Hunasodu stone quarry. The cause of the accident is not clear as all those at the spot died or went missing. It is said that the lorry came in contact with a transformer, leading to a spark. There were no safety measures in place. The blast was so intense that residents of Shivamogga city — about 4 km away — and several villages in Bhadravati taluk and also those in the neighbouring Davangere and Chikkamagaluru districts heard the sound and thought it was an earthquake.

The impact of the blast was so huge that many houses in the villages of Hunasodu and Kalluganguru suffered damage. Many borewells around the quarry area were rendered defunct and hundreds of electronic gadgets went out of order. People living near Hunasodu — who reached the spot after seeing flames and thick waves of dust engulfing the locality — found parts of both the lorry and bodies of people scattered across a large area. The police eventually cordoned off the area and called in experts to understand what actually had happened. The incident caught the nation's attention and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi took to social media to express shock and offer condolences. A file photo of authorities retrieving the remains of victims at the blast site at Hunasodu in Shivamogga taluk.

tion of over 300 calls on my son's phone on that day — January 21, 2021. I was with him for half of the day. He hardly received any calls when he was with me. However, the records furnished by the police show that he got calls without a break. It is impossible. I don't believe the police claim that he died in the blast."Gowda and the family members of Nagaraj and Punith, who are also missing, have filed a writ petition in the Karnataka High Court seeking an inquiry into the case by the Central Bureau of Investigation. They believe the three did not die in the blast but could have become pawns in the hands of influential people, allegedly involved in the case.Chargesheet quashedWhile the three families have no closure at a personal level, the fate of the case and investigation is quite literally back to square one.

Though the Shivamogga Rural Police registered the case following the blast, soon after, the case was handed over to the Shivamogga Cyber Crime, Economic Offences and Narcotics (CEN) Police for investigation. The then IGP of Eastern Range S. Ravi ordered the transfer of the case to the CEN police. K.T. Gururaj, police inspector, conducted the investigation and filed the chargesheet in April 2021 and later a supplementary chargesheet.

The police listed Sreeramulu, Manjunath Sai, P. Pruthviraja Sai, K. Vijaya Kumara, Mopuri Pavan, Chamma Javeed, Chelimanu Raju, Praveen Kumar, Manjunatha, B.V Sudhakar, S.T. Kulkarni, Avinash Kulkarni, Mumtaz Ahmad, Rashid, Narasimha, and Devendra as accused in the case Among them, Pavan, Javeed, Raju, Praveen Kumar, Manjunath, and Devendra are dead. Sreeramulu is the lorry owner, and Manjunath Sai, Pruthviraja, and Vijaya Kumara from Andhra Pradesh were accused of supplying explosives through Praveen without obtaining mandatory licence. They were accused of endangering life by not following rules.Sudhakar, a resident of Shivamogga, is the owner of BVS Stone Crusher, where the incident happened. S.T. Kulkarni and Avinash Kulkarni are the owners of the land which they had given on rent for the crushing unit. Mumtaz Ahmad was the writer at the crusher unit. Rashid, a worker. and Narasimha was the supervisor. The decision to transfer the probe to the CEN police, however, has eventually proved to be detrimental to the case, bringing the entire investigation back to square one.

The accused challenged the chargesheet in the High Court. The court, on September 20, 2023, quashed the proceedings citing that the CEN police had no jurisdiction in the first place to investigate the offences punishable under the provisions of the Explosives Substances Act. As a result, the proceedings of the case at the 3rd Additional District and Sessions Court in Shivamogga were also stopped. The court, on December 18, 2024, declared that the case was disposed of.However, the High Court, in its order stated that the Shivamogga Rural police had the liberty to conduct the investigation and submit the final report. When The Hindu contacted Shivamogga Superintendent of Police G.K. Mithun Kumar, he said the case would be re-investigated and a fresh chargesheet filed. Regarding the "missing" persons case, he said the probe is continuing.

No relief to affected residentsEshwar Naik, a farmer from Kalluganguru whose house is located close to the blast site, suffered huge losses following the incident.Eshwar Naik, a farmer from Kalluganguru whose house is located close to the blast site, suffered huge losses following the incident. Meanwhile, the residents of Hunasodu, Kalluganguru, Hanumanthapura, and neighbouring villages, whose houses were damaged during the blast, have repeatedly demanded relief from the government. They have staged protests outside the Deputy Commissioner's office multiple times. Their demand, however, has remained unfulfilled.Eshwar Naik, a farmer at Kalluganguru whose house is located close to the blast site, suffered huge losses following the incident. "We were the worst hit in the incident. The roof sheets, windowpanes, irrigation pumpset, and electronic gadgets were damaged. We spent more than ?50,000 for repairs. However, the government did not pay any re-

from jobs, most public spaces and education beyond sixth grade.

In a statement, the Afghan Women's Movement for Justice and Awareness celebrated the ICC decision and called it a "great historical achievement."We consider this achievement a symbol of the strength and will of Afghan women and believe this step will start a new chapter of accountability and justice in the country," the group said. The Taliban government has yet to comment on the court's move. An official in the former Western-backed administration warned the Taliban leadership was likely to exploit the decision for propaganda purposes by framing it as proof of their strong faith and resilience."They may tell their followers that their beliefs are so powerful they have provoked the collective opposition of global powers," Mohammad Halim Fidai said on the X platform. Mr. Fidai was a Governor of four provinces before the takeover and now lives outside Afghanistan. "This decision could inadvertently

serve as a badge of honor or credibility for them."The decision of the International Criminal Court (ICC) sends a significant political message and has the potential to increase political pressure on the Taliban. However, from a technical and practical perspective, implementing this decision appears to be highly challenging...."It has been 1,225 days — soon to be four years — since authorities imposed a ban that prevents girls above the age of 12 from attending school," said the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan Roza Otunbayeva. "It is a travesty and tragedy that millions of Afghan girls have been stripped of their right to education.""Afghanistan is the only country in the world that explicitly bars women and girls from all levels of education," said Ms. Otunbayeva.

'Make products in America or face tariffs': Donald Trump issues ultimatum at World Economic Forum

Davos: US President Donald Trump has invited global businesses to manufacture their products in the US and promised them lower taxes but also issued a stern warning that if they choose to produce their goods elsewhere, they would have to pay tariffs worth 'billions and trillions' of dollars.Virtually addressing the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, on Thursday, Trump promised substantial tax cuts to businesses that choose to produce in the US.

"My message to every business in the world is very simple. Come make your product in America, and we will give you among the lowest taxes of any nation on Earth. We're bringing them down very substantially, even from the original Trump tax cuts," he said. For businesses choosing not to manufacture in the US, Trump warned, "But if you don't make your product in America, which is your prerogative, then very simply, you will have to pay a tariff differing amounts, but a tariff which will direct hundreds of billions of dollars and even trillions of dollars into our treasury to strengthen our economy and pay down debt."He further asserted that there is "no better place" than the "good old USA" to create jobs and build factories under the Trump administration."Under the Trump administration, there will be no better place on earth to create jobs, build factories, or grow a company than right here in the good old USA," he added

Trump has proposed a 15 per cent corporate tax rate for companies that manufacture in the US, subject to approval from Congress.Trump began his presidency on Monday without immediately imposing the tariffs he had

promised during his election campaign, including a 10 per cent duty on global imports and 60 per cent on goods from China.But he said at that time that Canada and Mexico faced a 25 per cent duty on February 1 on goods they send to the US because of illegal immigration and illicit drug shipments, including fentanyl, across their US borders. Trump on Tuesday extended the February 1 deadline to China, threatening a 10 per cent duty. Referring to the relations with Canada, the US President, noted that the US has been at a deficit of nearly \$200 billion or \$250 billion with Canada, which he argued was unfair. He again reiterated his point to make Canada the 51st US state, adding that in that case, there would be no need to impose a tariff on it."Canada, we have a tremendous deficit with Canada. We're not going to have that anymore. We can't do it. It's, I don't know if it's good for them. As you probably know, I say you can always become a state. Then if you're a state, we won't have a deficit. We won't have to tariff you," he said."But Canada has been very tough to deal with over the years, and it's not fair that we should have a \$200 billion or \$250 billion deficit," he added.Trump also highlighted that the US no longer relies on Canada for products like cars, lumber, and oil."We don't need them to make our cars and they make a lot of them. We don't need their lumber because we have our own forests... We don't need their oil and gas. We have more than anybody," he said. Recently, Trump announced that his administration is planning to impose 25 per cent tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada. The US President, for some time, has been saying that Canada should be made the 51st US State to avoid facing these tariffs.

The next day, on January 22, 2021, the Shivamogga Rural police registered a case under the Explosives Act, the Explosive Substances Act, and sections of the Indian Penal Code that dealt with negligence in handling explosives and culpable homicide, not amounting to murder. The police concluded that six people died in the incident, and they identified five among them. They were Mopuri Pavan, 29; Chamma Javeed, 28; Chelimanu Raju, 24; Manjunath, 35, and Praveen, 36. Three others — Devendra, Punith, and Nagaraj — were declared "missing".

Praveen, according to the police, often supplied explosives to stone crushers. He had contacts in Andhra Pradesh from where he procured the explosives. Devendra, Manjunath of Antaragange, Punith of Basavanagudi and R. Nagarajof Gowrapura, - all residents of neighbouring villages in Bhadravati taluk - worked as Praveen's drivers and helpers whenever needed. On that fateful day, Praveen took all of them to deliver the goods. While Praveen and Manjunath were found dead, the remaining three were declared "missing"."If we knew for certain that he died in that blast, we would have reconciled to the loss over time. But now, we are dying every day thinking of him. We don't know what happened to him for certain."Chikka Bore Gowda, father of C. DevendraVinay Kumar, son of Nagaraj, a fisherman, says he and his father were fishing at Gowrapura tank on the day when his father got a call from Praveen. "He gave me ?20 and left with Praveen. That was the last I saw him," says Vinay Kumar, 24. Nagaraj's wife, Shanthamma, and their two sons — Vishwanath and Vinay Kumar — are all daily wage workers.Rajamma, 55, of Basavanagudi, lost her son Punith that day. She lost her husband 30 years ago. "My two daughters are married. My only son is now missing. I have been working in agricultural fields in my village," she says. Punith had purchased a luggage carrier. She had kept the vehicle till recently hoping that her son would return one day and use it. She says mournfully that she sold the vehicle for a few thousand rupees to meet her daily expenses. The experts who examined the parts of human bodies at the blast site concluded that they belonged to six people. With the help of identity cards, clothes, and other identification marks, they identified five people. The identity of the sixth person remained elusive. Three others, Punith, Nagaraj, and Devendra, were deemed "missing" from the spot at that point.Later, through the court's approval, the police collected blood samples of family members of those who were "missing". The samples were sent to the Forensic Science Laboratory in Bengaluru and the Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology at the Shivamogga Institute of Medical Sciences in Shivamogga. The experts noted that the sample of an unidentified body matched with the sample collected from Pranathi D., daughter of Devendra.

Gowda, however, says, "The police all of a sudden informed the media that there was a DNA match, leaving us in shock. But, when I sought the reports of the laboratory, they did not oblige. Without verifying the documents, how can I believe their statement."Gowda has doubts over the police version for various reasons. He says the supplementary chargesheet referred to the call details of the phone numbers his son possessed. "I am surprised at the menlief," he says. Since the incident, there has been no activity at the stone-crushing site and it remains desolate, but that hardly brings any relief to families already devastated by the blast.

Confirmation hearing for Kash Patel as FBI Director set for Jan 30



GNS News Agency, Jan 29

Washington: Kash Patel will appear before a US Senate committee on January 30 for a confirmation hearing to be the next director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).Patel, 44, is the highest-ranking Indian-American nominated by President Donald Trump in his administration. If confirmed, he would be the first-ever Indian American to lead the most powerful American investigation agency.

"The Nomination of Kashyap Pramod Patel to be Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation" has been scheduled for January 30, the Senate Judiciary Committee announced Patel would replace Christopher Wray. He is considered to be a loyal supporter of Trump. "I love the American dream. My story's pretty simple, it's unique, and some of you share in it," Patel, the former federal prosecutor, said during an inauguration event for Trump early this week."My parents were born and raised in East Africa. My father in the 1970s fled a genocidal dictatorship in Uganda, where he saw 300,000 of his countrymen murdered, where he saw what lawlessness would do if it was allowed to break through the system of constitutional justice," he said."He fled like so many others. He married my mother. They moved here.

They waited in line. They stood in line because the American dream was worth standing in line for. That dream is woven into the fabric of this nation. And our immigration policy is the greatest in the world," Patel said.But dreams and hopes aren't enough and Americans have to get to work, Patel said. "We have got to accept the realities that too many of you know from your communities. President Trump launched in his first term priorities of national security, law enforcement, economy, and global diplomacy.



INDIAN CHRONICLE

Bank deposit growth outpaces credit offtake for first time in 30 months

Deposits have remained prominent in FY25 as banks have intensified efforts to strengthen their liability franchise. (Representative/ Express file photo by Praveen Khanna)Deposits have remained prominent in FY25 as banks have intensified efforts to strengthen their liability franchise. (Representative/ Express file photo by Praveen Khanna)For the first time in 30 months, deposit growth in the banking system has outpaced credit growth after it registered a year-on-year growth of 11.8 per cent in the fortnight ended October 18, compared to a rise of 11.7 per cent in loan growth.

The growth in deposits can be attributed to rising term deposit rates of scheduled commercial banks (SCBs). The slowdown in credit growth was due to a higher base effect because of the merger of HDFC Ltd with the HDFC Bank and the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) such as higher risk weights for unsecured loans and the proposed LCR (Liquidity Coverage Ratio) norms.In the fortnight ended October 18, bank credit increased to Rs 172.38 lakh crore, compared to Rs 154.57 lakh crore in the year-ago fortnight. In the same period, bank deposits grew to Rs 218.07 lakh crore, as against Rs 195.15 lakh crore in the same fortnight of last year.

"On y-o-y (year-on-year) performance, credit saw a growth of 11.7 per cent (in the fortnight ended October 18, 2024), slower than the last year's rate of 19.7 per cent. Meanwhile, deposits saw a growth of 11.8 per cent, compared to 13.4 per cent last year. Hence credit offtake has moderated relative to deposit growth," according to a report by CareEdge Ratings. When compared to growth rates with December 2023, deposit growth has continued to surpass credit offtake, the report said. Since January 2024, deposits rose to 8.6 per cent as of October 18, 2024. Meanwhile, in absolute terms, deposits have expanded by Rs 17.3 lakh crore over the last 9 months. Deposits have remained prominent in FY25 as banks have intensified efforts to strengthen their liability franchise. Banks are also sourcing funds via



the certificates of deposits (CDs) at a relatively higher cost the report said.On a year-to-date basis, credit offtake increased by 8 per cent in the fortnight ended October 18."Mortgages and MSMEs account for the bulk of this increase. However, the growth slowdown compared to last year can be attributed to a higher base effect due to the merger and RBI measures such as higher risk weights and the proposed LCR norms," CareEdge said. In November last year, the RBI increased risk weights on the exposure of banks towards consumer credit, credit card receivables and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) by 25 per cent up to 150 per cent. In July this year, the RBI issued a draft guidelines to revise the liquidity coverage ratio (LCR) framework. LCR requires banks to maintain High Quality Liquid Assets (HQLAs) to meet 30 days net outgo under stressed conditions.Banks are expected to witness a moderation in their credit growth targets in the run-up to the proposed implementation of revised LCR norms from April 1, 2025, resulting in an improvement (decline) in the CD ratio and increase in liquidity buffers. The credit deposit ratio, which has been hovering around 80 per cent since September 2023, witnessed a marginal uptick reaching 79 per cent for the fortnight ending October 18, 2024, compared to 79.5 per cent in December 2023, the report said

Maintain balance between probes and ease of biz: CBIC to Customs

In a bid to reach out to industry and limit the possible overreach of tax authorities in investigations, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has instructed the Customs field formations to maintain "balance" while carrying out investigations for tax evasion related to import and export of goods in the interest of "ease of doing business". In the set of instructions issued on November 1, the CBIC said such evasion cases are categorised as commercial intelligence and fraud cases and they need to be differentiated from outright smuggling cases which involve contraband items.

The CBIC has asked the field formations to not approve any such investigation without the approval of the commissioner and conclude investigation into commercial intelligence (CI) cases within a year. The Board has also asked officers to seek information and documents in CI matters in writing with full disclosure of the specific nature of the inquiry being initiated by the authorities. "The Commissioner is responsible for developing and approving any intelligence, investigation and its completion. Each investigation must be initiated only after the approval of the Commissioner. A CI case investigation must reach the earliest conclusion which is normally not more than one year," the instructions issued by the Investigation-Customs wing of the CBIC under the Ministry of Finance said.

Earlier in March, the CBIC had issued a similar set of guidelines to its Goods and Services Tax (GST) field formations asking them to maintain ease of doing business while engaging in investigation with regular taxpayers. The new instructions come now after concerns being raised by

written documentation by authorities. The CBIC has told the officers to analyse all intelligence inputs and relevant aspects in CI matters before initiating investigation including cross checking with available data, technical literature, prevalent industry practice, judicial pronouncements, extant legal framework, precedence etc. "It is desirable to undertake as complete an analysis as feasible, before the actual investigation is initiated," it said. The Commissioner may also decide whether the commercial intelligence is to be brought to the notice of Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) in case it may have cross jurisdictional relevance, the CBIC said. The Board underlined that ease of business is to be maintained in the process of such investigations by seeking documents preferably by writing letters, as far as possible. "The time frame specified for appearance, or producing information, should be reasonable and keeping in view the mode of communication of the letter/summon. Before seeking any information or documents, the relevancy and propriety of what is being sought shall be recorded (on e-file), ensuring that it is holistic and result of preparation, and also so as not to have repeated issuance of letter/summons or seekng of piecemeal information," it said. The Board also highlighted that it is "not necessary" to keep investigation pending till limitation in law and the conclusion of investigation should also mean recording that it is not being pursued further as nothing objectionable was found in terms of matter investigated. "The closure report consequent to the appropriate payment of government dues by the person concerned should also not be delayed and should have a brief selfexplanatory narration of the issue and the period involved. Timely actions, i.e. without delay, at these stages are all

Rajshri Deshpande on being 'an activist actor', not doing films for money and fighting stereotypes: 'Would only get offered gangster's wife or intimate parts'

When the Netflix global hit Sacred Games dropped as the streaming giant's debut India Original in 2018, it put everyone on the map. The audience was in awe of what Anurag Kashyap-Vikramaditya Motwane had helmed with Nawazuddin Siddiqui and Saif Ali Khan in the lead and within that audience, closer home, was a section which discovered who actor Rajshri Deshpande was.The crime-thriller series brought Rajshri acclaim as Subhadra, wife of Nawazuddin's Gaitonde, but what it also led to was nasty virality, where out-of-context intimate clips from the series started crowding the internet. While all of this was peaking, Rajshri Deshpande was busy doing something which the same audience would find out about her personality later: building a school.

"I wasn't affected by it all," she tells SCREEN as recalls the phase. "I knew building the school was far more important and I told people in the village the same thingfocus on ground, all is noise," she added with a laughter.In an interview with SCREEN, Rajshri Deshpande–who has in recent years upped the game with works like Trial by Fire, The Fame Game and her latest Gujarat riots-based short film Gugudi by filmmaker Abhiroop Basu–charts her journey; from forgettable cameos in Salman Khan's Kick and Aamir Khan's Talaash, to memorable screen work which has made her a credible voice in the industry, although not without her major challenges.

I left a high paying corporate job and moved to Mumbai. In my early 20s, I would think money would give me happiness and then I struggled to get out of that thinking because it had stopped giving me happiness. It took away my life. In my 20s, I would dress like a 40-year-old, behave like an elderly person, which was wrong. That age, I should have travelled, partied, done theatre, but I didn't. I just wanted to make money and buy things for my parents, support my family. That's because I saw my mother struggle a lot. When I moved here, I had enough money to survive, so I was absolutely fearless. So, I did small roles in films like Salman Khan's Kick, Aamir Khan's Talaash, did some TV shows as well. But it wasn't my calling, so I stopped that, because there was no growth. Then I travelled, enrolled in some classes for self-development. Acting wasn't my dream-freedom was. There were no goals that I want to achieve this or that.I did get good money for both, I just had one scene. It was funny because Salman Khan couldn't turn up for shoot, so I get paid for one day extra! I don't even remember if my scene is still there. I thought those big sets were boring, because you are such a tlny person there, no one knows you, nobody is paying attention to you. You are one of the junior artistes there, and I didn't feel bad then, nor will I feel hurt today. It is not like I want some special treatment, but people look at me differently.Never, I have said no to so many ads which don't align with me. There was one shoot where a six-year-old child was filming with me and after 14 long hours, he was so exhausted he started crying. I requested them to do the rest later, I will do it for free, but they convinced the parents by paying them extra. But it was a wrong thing to do. After that, they never called me. The moment you say something you get blacklisted.

No, because there is a lot of love and respect, I get. I do like to stand up for things. We were shooting for a film, and they had two vanity vans for two actors, including me. There were a few girls in the costume department, and they had to walk three kilometers for the washroom. How was that even possible? I put my foot down, said they will have

How vitamin B9 deficiency affects the body, and here's what you can do



one vanity van. But if you say this out aloud, they will call you whatever. You do have to stand up for the right reason.

How was the phase of Angry Indian Goddesses, Sacred Games and Manto for you?My parents were happy that my work was coming out, but I didn't realise what was happening, especially when Sacred Games blew up. I was in the village, working on my school, solving a crisis there. It was around that time when the madness of Sacred Games was peaking with videos of mine from the show being circulated on WhatsApp. I wasn't affected, I knew building the school was far more important and told people in the village the same thing, ki waha mat dhyan do, ye zaroori hai.. My attention was there more. And not like some great roles were coming my way then.

There was a gap of two years after Sacred Games, were you refusing work?

I was in the village at that time and the roles which were coming were clones of Sacred Games. Either it was the wife of a gangster or something to do with intimacy. I remember getting some casting calls where I was told, 'Mam this has just two sex scenes, that shouldn't be a problem for you.' This is how they'd talk.Another problem here is that the more popular you are in terms of social media trends, people will pay attention to that. You will have very often paying attention to other kind of cinema and what people are doing there. A film works because of the entire ensemble, Trail by Fire reached out to many because it had a fantastic cast and an amazing team.

But if a film comes your way, with not the best of scripts but good money, won't that be tempting?

I have said no to films even when I had no work and little money. What exactly will I buy with that money? I want money to travel, but I am not materialistic. I have seen what money did to me in my 20s, I don't want to go back to that depression. Everyone loves money, but it is difficult to handle it. I remember after Sacred Games people told me now, I should just cash in on the show and earn truckloads of money, go ballistic with my PR. But that's not me.

Do you feel popular?

See there is a lot of respect, and I have worked hard to get here. It takes time to achieve this space, but the audience can see it. My 'popularity' is because of my social work as well as acting. Otherwise, some people think I am just an actor, some believe I am just an activist. A lot of times, when I go to do my social work, they feel I am an actor first whereas here in the industry, they feel I am an 'activist kind of an actor.' I am both and I keep these two separate.

a section of taxpayers on investigations lingering for years part of preventive vigilance ensuring that no room remains and sometimes processes being initiated without adequate for malpractices," it said.

Why municipal corporations' struggle for revenues mirrors India's faltering urban development agenda

If municipal corporations across most of urban India struggle to level potholed roads or unclog drains, there is good reason for that. Urban India may well be contributing almost 60 per cent of the country's economic output, but municipal corporations — essential service providers in urban areas — are faced with debilitating financial constraints, with property tax revenues mobilisation pegged at an abysmally low 0.12 per cent of GDP.

Result: Most municipalities have ended up becoming mere extensions of the state governments, relying heavily on transfers from the state administration or the central governments just to stay solvent, and, in the process, struggling to retain their operational autonomy. Despite significant responsibilities, municipal corporations' revenue receipts were quite modest - just 0.6 per cent of GDP in 2023-24 — and pale in comparison to those of the Central and State governments at 9.2 per cent and 14.6 per cent of GDP in 2023-24, respectively. Against this backdrop, if things have to change for the better, MCs need to boost their ownsource revenue stream through tax reforms, rationalising user charges, and strengthening collection mechanisms to meet the rapid growth in urbanisation and the increased demand for high-quality reliable public services in cities, a new Reserve Bank of India (RBI) study said. The report said that municipal corporations should not rely heavily on the government for revenues as it can limit their financial autonomy and capacity to plan and execute long-term projects."Own sources of revenues afford municipalities increased financial autonomy, stability, and enhanced capacity to strategise and execute urban development initiatives more efficiently and effectively," the Report on Municipal Finances, released by the RBI earlier this month said. The MCs need to enhance their own sources of revenue through reforms in property tax, the rationalisation of user charges, and better collection mechanisms. Municipal revenue receipts, which were subdued during 2020-21, grew by 22.5 per cent in 2021-22 mainly due to a rise in non-tax revenues. The growth in the revenue receipts moderated to 3.7 per cent in 2022-23 (Revised Estimate (RE)) and was budgeted to increase by 20.1 per cent in 2023-24

Despite significant responsibilities, MCs' revenue receipts were quite modest (0.6 per cent of GDP in 2023-24) and pale in comparison to those of Central and State governments (9.2 per cent and 14.6 per cent of GDP in 2023-24, respectively). The report said that the revenue receipts of MCs exhibit concentration, with the top 10 MCs accounting for over 58 per cent of total municipal revenue receipts. The consolidated budgets of the municipalities indicate a surplus on the revenue account. The surplus fell to Rs 1,034 crore in the pandemic year 2020-21 from Rs 4,914 crore in 2019-20. It was budgeted higher at Rs 20,819 crore in 2023-24.It further said that the elasticity of property tax revenues, the predominant source of tax revenue for municipal corporations, can be improved through adopting property tax formulae which are more reflective of property valuation. Property taxes constitute more than 16 per cent of revenue receipts of municipal corporations and more than 60 per cent of their own tax revenue. Own tax revenue includes property tax, water tax, electricity tax, education tax, and other local taxes."The introduction of GIS (Geographic Information System)-based property tax mapping and digital platforms for tax collection can help improve compliance and plug revenue leakages," the report said. The MCs can boost their non-tax revenue streams through periodic adjustments in user charges/fees for services such as water supply, sanitation, and waste management to ensure cost recovery, while also bringing about improvements in the provision of services to the public, the report stated.Better monitoring to stop pilferage, use of technology for enhanced efficiency, and public communication campaigns can also augment collections of user fees and charges, it said.Non-tax revenue is dominated by fees and user charges, followed by income from investment and other income. The total grants from the Central government and the State governments to the MCs increased by 24.9 per cent and 20.4 per cent, respectively, in 2022-23. Transfers from the Central government accounted for 2.5 per cent of the total revenue receipts of the MCs during the recent years."The MCs rely heavily on the upper tiers of government for revenues, which can limit their financial autonomy and capacity to plan and execute longterm projects," the RBI report said. This, it said, underscores the need for state-specific strategies to strengthen MC revenues and finances and achieve better urban development outcomes through reforms in local taxation, better enforcement of tax laws, and innovative non-tax revenue streams.At the same time, given the large dependence on transfers from the state governments, timely, adequate and rule-based frameworks for transfers from the upper tier authorities would help the MCs to fulfil their functional obligations effectively and efficiently and contribute to urban development.



A deficiency of vitamin B9 can lead to various health issues and complications. Also known as folate or folic, this vitamin plays a pivotal role in DNA synthesis, cell division, and one's entire well-being. Despite its importance, not many people are aware of this deficiency that can cause symptoms like fatigue, irritability, and digestive problems. In addition, vitamin B9 also helps with mood regulation and cognitive function. "In severe cases, a deficiency in vitamin B9 can lead to anemia, which is characterized by a decrease in red blood cells and can result in symptoms like shortness of breath and dizziness," said Dr Shireen Furtado, senior consultant, medical and cosmetic dermatology, Aster CMI Hospital, Bangalore.

Vitamin B9 is equally essential for the body's ability to produce red blood cells, as well as for proper nerve function. Adding, Dr Aniket Mule, consultant internal medicine, Wockhardt Hospitals, Mira Road said that B9 deficiency is also associated with cardiovascular diseases and strokes that are known to cause higher mortality and morbidity rates.According to Dr Mule, vegetarians and vegans tend to have this deficiency. To prevent this deficiency, it is essential to consume a diet rich in folate-containing foods such as leafy green vegetables, citrus fruits, legumes: chickpeas, soybeans, ladyfinger, tomatoes, beans, lentils, lettuce, oranges, and sweetcorn, said Dr Mule.Adding, Dr Furtado said that in some cases, supplementation may be necessary, especially for pregnant women or individuals with certain medical conditions that affect nutrient absorption. Regular blood tests can also help monitor vitamin B9 levels and ensure that any deficiencies are promptly addressed through dietary changes or supplementation. Insufficient folate levels are associated with neural tube defects and congenital anomalies, mentioned Dr Mule."It will be imperative for you to consult an expert who will help you to understand what B9 deficiency is and recommend a diet plan to ensure your B9 levels are in the required range. Maintaining adequate B9 levels will do wonders for your health," said Dr Mule.

This viral challenge reveals why women might have better balance than men

While social media is filled with videos of people attempting this feat, there seems to be a curious pattern -women often find it easier to balance than men. While social media is filled with videos of people attempting this feat, there seems to be a curious pattern -- women often find it easier than men. A new viral challenge has people getting down on all fours, placing their elbows on the ground, and attempting to put their hands behind their backs without falling over. While social media is filled with videos of people attempting this feat, there seems to be a curious pattern women often find it easier than men. But is there a reason behind this gender difference? Dr Vajalla Shravani, certified pilates instructor and fitness expert at Tone 30 Pilates, explains that it comes down to our center of gravity. "The center of gravity is a crucial factor in balance and stability. It refers to the point in a body or object where the weight is evenly distributed in all directions," she notes. Women's apparent advantage in this challenge isn't just coincidence. "On average, women tend to have a lower center of gravity than men due to differences in body composition and fat distribution. Women generally carry more weight around their hips and thighs, while men carry more weight around their upper body, such as the chest and shoulders," explains Dr Shravani. The role of muscle distribution Body composition plays a significant part, too. "Men typically have a



higher percentage of muscle mass, especially in the upper body, while women tend to have more fat and muscle distributed around the hips and lower body," Dr Shravani points out. This difference can make men "top-heavy," potentially making maintaining balance in certain positions harder.She adds that women rely more on their core and lower limb muscles for stability. At the same time, men depend more on upper body and trunk muscles, affecting how they maintain balance in different positions."



Sky Force movie review: Veer Pahariya should have been the lead of this film, not Akshay Kumar



Sky Force Movie Review: Veer Pahariya is efficient, Akshay Kumar appears distinctly older in the parts where everyone is young.Sky Force Movie Review: Veer Pahariya is efficient, Akshay Kumar appears distinctly older in the parts where everyone is young.

Sky Force Movie Review, Rating and Release: Last year Bollywood's Republic-Day gift was Fighter, which zoomed in, checking several patriotic-movie boxes: brave Indian fighter pilots, going up against favourite enemy Pakistan, displaying valour and camaraderie. This year, it is Sky Force, coasting on the same elements, except this one is a thinly-disguised account of a real life incident during the 1965 Indo-Pak conflict, in which a squadron decimated a fleet of modern American jets housed at Pakistani base Sargodha, in an operation the film calls Sky Force.

The story (which the film is based on), about a pilot on stand-by during that crucial operation, who disobeys his leader's direct orders and takes off in a plane that's not airworthy, his skill and derring-do instrumental in saving his brother pilots' lives, is worthy of dropped jaws. The film, however, doesn't do enough justice to this tale of unwavering courage in the face of certain death. Chiefly because the brave pilot T Vijaya (real name AB Devayya) played by debutant Veer Pahariya, who should rightfully have led this tale, consistently plays second fiddle to the film's lead, which is, of course, Akshay Kumar.

Right through, the effort at keeping Akshay's character, who plays Wing Commander KO Ahuja (his real-life counterpart being OP Taneja), front and centre skews the balance, with the plot bending over backwards to accommodate Ahuja's untiring efforts to find his long-lost teammate, in the face of bureaucratic stone-walling from his superiors (Chaudhri, Badola). The film goes into flashback mode from its opening in 1971, in which a captured Pakistani pilot's (Sharad Kelkar) interrogation yields a clue to the mystery of the missing pilot. The 1965 portions have the usual war-room strategic pointy-heads, with handsome airmen, kitted out in uniform and sharp shades, striding across the runway, and planes zig- zagging across the sky. Post-interval, large tracts are devoted to Ahuja's dogged search.

What's nice is that crude jingoism is kept to a minimum, even though it's now almost impossible to make a film like this without a reference to 'ghar mein ghus ke maarna'. Kelkar's character is given a hint of nobility: he may be an enemy but he understands the importance of family values. Speaking of which, the ladies here stay confined to their roles as wives: Nimrat as Akshay's and Sara Ali Khan as Pahariya's, constituting the idea of family and domesticity, nothing more, nothing less.And while the background score swells and booms, especially during the aerial dogfights, the melodrama is kept mostly muted. Pahariya is efficient; Akshay appears distinctly older in the parts where everyone is young ; grey-and-grizzled is a better look on him, which occurs briefly. The most moving part of the film belongs to neither of these gents: one of their compatriots, to whom a jokey situation is assigned in the beginning, is a reminder of 'not leaving anyone behind'. That should tell you everything about the way things roll in this sky force.Sky Force Movie cast: Akshay Kumar, Veer Pahariya, Sara Ali Khan, Nimrat Kaur, Sharad Kelkar, Manish Chaudhri, Varun Badola

Anupam Mittal refuses to invest in smart ring after investing big in smart locket on Shark Tank India

Shark Tank India Season 4, which is currently streaming on SonyLIV, recently saw a wearable product that allows its users to make payments via a ring. The ring works on UPI transactions, and can soon be used for metro rides, bus rides and train rides as well. Aman Gupta, whose company deals in wearable technology, was quite surprised when he saw the product and said that he was hearing of this technology "for the first time."

The entrepreneurs from Mumbai, Vijay Khubchandani, Maek Savla, Karthik Menon, presented their company named Seven that sells these smart rings which process single tap payments. The ring is not connected to one's bank account but operated via a wallet that can be topped up using UPI. They also said that the special feature of their product is that it does not require charging. The pitchers said that the technology will soon be available for metro rides as well and were expecting to see a boost in sales after that feature is introduced. The pitchers asked for Rs 75 lakh for 1 per cent of the company, valuing at Rs 75 crore.

As the investors started asking questions about the product and the company, Anupam Mittal raised an obvious question as he asked, "Do we even need it?" The pitchers said that they were of the belief that they have a unique product that will surely pick up as it eases the process of payment. After asking the most amount of questions, Anupam got out of the deal. Aman Gupta was quite hesitant in showing his appreciation as he said, "Payment via ring... I am hearing this for the first time."The pitchers shared



that they started their business in 2017 but could not launch the product due to many delays that were beyond their control. They finally launched the product in 2023 but have only managed to sell 3000 rings in one year. Aman Gupta got out of the deal as he declared, "Milte hain fir market mein (See you in the market)" to his possible competitors.Vineeta Singh, Varun Dua and Peyush Bansal decided to invest in the company as Peyush said that this had the potential to become the "tap equivalent of UPI." After some negotiation, the deal was ultimately closed at Rs 75 lakh for 1.5 per cent equity and 1.5 per cent advisory shares.

Junaid Khan says he 'sat outside' during sister Ira's wedding because their family thinks he's 'useless': 'Dad said...'



Aamir Khan's son, actor Junaid Khan, is preparing for his first theatrical release, Loveyapa, which he is promoting extensively. In a recent interview, Junaid shared that after the wedding of his sister, Ira Khan, his father said that Junaid should elope if he plans on getting married. He also shared that he doesn't enjoy parties, and even at sister Ira's wedding, he spent most of his time outside. In a chat with Siddharth Kannan, Junaid said that he doesn't enjoy parties with lots of people and loud music and said that "marriage is basically that." "After my sister's wedding, even my father was like, 'If you plan to get married, please run away and do it'," he shared with a laugh. Ira got married to Nupur Shikhare in 2024. Junaid also shared that he wasn't consulted or given any tasks for his sister's wedding and described himself as "useless."

He said, "Ira knew very well that no one should expect anything from Junaid, he is very useless in all these things. So no one consulted me for anything, I was just told the date and time and was asked to reach then. They were like if we give him anything to do..." When asked if he participates in family decisions or is "useless" at those as well, he said, "I am useless actually. They try a lot to get me involved but I am so useless..."Junaid said that he does not enjoy gatherings, and prefers to stay outside during parties. "Even at Ira's wedding, I was outside most of the time," he said, and when asked how he spent his time outside, he shared, "I sit outside with few people, a few like-minded individuals. Ira has given up on me when it comes to all this." He shared that even when there is a party at his father's house, he sits in the balcony.

Rozlyn Khan accuses Hina Khan of using cancer treatment for publicity: 'Hunger for limelight can take you anywhere'

Rozlyn Khan, who is a stage 4 cancer survivor, has accused Hina Khan of spreading misinformation and using her cancer treatment as a publicity stunt. On Thursday, Rozlyn shared a long note on her Instagram, suggesting it was all planned well for Hina's releases. Taking to Instagram, Rozlyn said, "Hunger for limelight can take you anywhere I heard and it's proven by few so called celebs ..! Things were planned around your new releases quite well ..! Congratulations Hina Khan." To prove there is no mischief. Rozlyn challenged Hina to share details of her cancer treatment. She added, "Please share details of treatment you have gone through for fellow cancer patients/survivor and oncologist to discuss in future. I'm sorry your PR activities are not getting you any sympathy boos you were showing off too much during your treatment, better luck next time with such PR activities..!"

Rozlyn Khan accused Hina Khan of spreading misinformation and slammed her for misguiding her 20 million followers. She wrote, "Its okay if you don't have sympathy for cancer patients, but at least don't spread misinformation like Karma, Ayurvedic nuska, and jaadu tona. All this is getting too much."Rozlyn further said that she might not have 20 million followers like Hina, but her 2 million followers are enough for her to spread cancer awareness.



someone who has experienced cancer so closely, Rozlyn said she won't let anybody play with the feelings of cancer patients. In the video, Rozlyn Khan can be heard saying that Hina Khan is often seen visiting expensive restaurants and hotels after her treatments, whereas cancer patients have

The Girl with the Needle, The Night Agent, Hisaab Barabar and more



Oscar-nominated The Girl with the Needle — directed by Magnus von Horn and co-written by Line Langebek Knudsen and von Horn — is streaming from January 24. The movie, which had its world premiere under the competition section during the Cannes Film Festival 2024, follows a young factory worker Karoline (Vic Carmen Sonne), who is struggling to survive in post-WWI Copenhagen. When she ends up unemployed, abandoned and pregnant, the charismatic Dagmar (Trine Dyrholm) takes her in as a wetnurse at an underground adoption agency which finds foster homes for unwanted children. A deep connection forms between them, until a shocking discovery suddenly shatters Karoline's world.Inspired by a true story, The Girl With The Needle is a haunting and profound look at one woman's search for love and morality.

This story of a resilient father told with wry humour showcases one of Abhishek Bachchan's career-best performances. Directed by filmmaker Shoojit Sircar, I Want To Talk follows the transformative journey of Arjun Sen, a chatty and shrewd Bengali man living the quintessential 'American Dream'. Arjun's life is upended when he learns he has only 100 days to live. This forces him to re-evaluate his priorities and reassess what truly matters in his life. His journey becomes a quest to reconnect with his estranged seven-year-old daughter and to make every remaining moment count. The film's cast also features Ahilya Bamroo, Jayant Kriplani, Johnny Lever, Pearle Dey, and Kristin Goddard in pivotal roles.

The new episodes of this popular series, based on the novel by Matthew Quirk, pick up after the high-octane events of Season 1. After Peter Sutherland (Gabriel Basso) managed to save the president, he earned the opportunity to become a Night Agent. Working in the secretive organization Night Action in Season 2 will push Peter into a world where danger is everywhere and trust is in short supply. The just-released trailer offers a glimpse of all the thrills ahead as Peter finds himself fully immersed in the mysterious world of Night Action, a top-secret organization rife with deadly threats. As Peter says in the trailer, the dangers ahead include everything from a possible mole in Night Action to experimental weapons in the wrong hands — and he can't trust anyone in these dire new circumstances.Based on the 1997 novel by the same name written by Jay Bonansinga, The Killer's Game follows veteran assassin Joe Flood, who is diagnosed with a life-threatening illness and authorises a kill on himself to avoid the pain that is destined to follow. After ordering the kill, he finds out that he was misdiagnosed and must then fend off the army of former colleagues trying to kill him. Directed by J.J. Perry and written by Rand Ravich, Bonansinga and James Coyne. The action comedy film's cast features Sofia Boutella, David Bautista, Lucy Cork and Pom Klementieff in lead roles. The film is streaming with dubs in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. Directed by Ashwni Dhir, the film promises to unravel a gripping narrative of financial fraud, corruption, and the relentless pursuit of justice. In Hisaab Barabar, R Madhavan essays the character of Radhe Mohan Sharma, a railway ticket checker who uncovers a small discrepancy in his bank account. What begins as a simple financial error quickly unravels into a dangerous journey filled with fraud, deceit, and corruption. As Radhe delves deeper, he finds himself entangled in a highstakes battle with Micky Mehta (played by Neil Nitin Mukesh), a suave yet ruthless banker with significant influence. As Radhe's quest for justice intensifies, the film poses a profound question: can one ordinary man take on systemic corruption? And will his perseverance and resilience be enough to secure his victory?Directed by Nandha Periyasamy, this Tamil-language film explores the journey of a man who, in spite of facing stiff opposition for doing good, shows how humanity ultimately wins. The film revolves around Manickam (Samuthirakani), a good-hearted man who runs a lottery shop at the Kumily bus stand, to support his family and his wife, Sumathi (Ananya), who prepares food for local workers. The emotionally charged film exults honesty and righteousness as extraordinary human qualities

The actor said she can't break people's trust by making some sensational statements about cancer. Being many dos and donts in terms of diet and lifestyle. She slammed the actor for showing off her privileged life, while there are many cancer patients who struggle to afford even a wig and often lose the battle against cancer. She even accused Hina of not sharing the reality of cancer on her social media handles, and only choosing to share glamourous posts.

Allu Arjun's blockbuster breaks Baahubali 2's record, trails Dangal by Rs 200 crore



Pushpa 2 box office collection Day 50: Pushpa 2: The Rule has been ruling at the box office for nearly two months. Starring Allu Arjun, the film has broken innumerable records during its phenomenal run. During its time in theatres, the film has also fended off competition from films both big and small. And it'll soon be released on streaming having passed its biggest milestone yet. Pushpa 2 has overtaken the lifetime global collections of SS Rajamouli's Baahubali 2: The Conclusion.According to estimates by Sacnilk, Pushpa 2: The Rule – Part had an overall 8.05% Hindi Occupancy on Thursday, collecting Rs 50 lakh. Thus, Pushpa 2's grand total stands at Rs 1230.55 crore India nett.

On the global level, Pushpa 2 has passed the Rs 1800 crore mark. Celebrating the success, Pushpa 2's production house, Mythri Movie Makers, took to social media to post, "50 iconic days of Pushpa 2: The Rule in theatres. Indian cinema's industry hit rewrote many records and set new benchmarks at the box office. Book your tickets today to enjoy the reloaded version."At the worldwide box office, Pushpa 2 is now the second-highest grossing Indian film of all time. The film makers shared earlier, "The WILDFIRE BLOCKBUSTER crosses a gross of 1831 CRORES in 32 days worldwide." The film still trails Aamir Khan's Dangal, which made over Rs 2000 crore globally in 2016. The majority of Dangal's revenue, however, came from China.Pushpa 2 was released in cinemas on December 5, and despite facing competition from Baby John, Game Changer, Azaad, and Emergency during its run, the film is still successfully playing across the country, with about 1000

shows. In a recent interview with Firstpost, director Madhur Bhandarkar spoke about Pushpa 2's success, and shared, "Pushpa 2 is a dub film. People are watching. They gave Rs 850 crores in business in the Hindi dubbed version. It's phenomenal. Pushpa 2 record will take another one decade to break it. I doubt anybody will come closer to it also. So I feel filmmakers should go for more real subjects."Pushpa 2 is also set to make its OTT debut soon. According to reports, the film's streaming rights have been sold for a substantial price.

Ajith wanted to wrap up films fast as in race, anything could happen: Magizh Thirumeni

Chennai: Director Magizh Thirumeni, who is directing actor Ajith Kumar's eagerly-awaited film 'vidaa Muyarchi', has now disclosed that actor Ajith Kumar, who is now on the racing circuit competing in International racing tournaments, had told him that he wanted to wrap up all his film commitments before he went to race because so many people were dependent on him, including his producers who had invested money on his films.

In an interview to a channel, Magizh Thirumeni said, "A couple of weeks before he was to head to the race, we were beginning to wrap up the film. Ajith had gone for practice sessions then. He showed us some videos of his practice laps. Ajith had met with two accidents during the practice laps. When we saw the footage, all our hearts skipped a beat. The first accident was one big massive crash. Then there was another one."

Director Magizh then went on to say that he will never forget what Ajith said after that. "He (Ajith) said, "Magizh, when I go to participate in this race, anything can happen,"• Magizh recalled, making sure that the listeners understood what Ajith meant by that statement. Then he went on to say, "When I go to participate in a race, anything can happen which is why I want to wrap up all my film commitments. So many people are dependent on me. There are two producers who have invested heavily on my films.







Neil Wagner interview: 'Winning Test series in India 3-0 will remain the pinnacle for a lot of New Zealand cricketers'



GNS News Agency, Jan 29

Cricket took Neil Wagner, who was born and bred in Pretoria, South Africa to New Zealand and he ended up playing 64 tests for New Zealand, finishing fifth on New Zealand's list of all-time Test wicket-takers with 260 scalps at an average of 27.57. Wagner idolised Allan Donald, who was called "white lightning," but unlike his hero, Wagner never had the nasty pace or height, but he had heart, ceaseless energy, his undying passion, and an aim to prove everyone wrong. The 38-year-old is still playing domestic cricket for Northern District.

In an interview with The Indian Express, Wagner opens up about how he misses intimidating the batters, bowling bouncers, winning the inaugural World Test Championship (WTC) and what it means for the New Zealand cricket team, who demolished India 3-0 on the Indian soil.Watching you bowl with such intensity, trying to intimidate batsmen, was one of the most thrilling aspects of modern cricket. Do you miss bowling bouncers?Yes! Definitely miss it! It was such a big part of me for so long and something I did with a lot of passion and it will be very hard to ever replace that feeling of playing for New Zealand and helping contribute to winning Test matches! I do miss it a lot!

You have 260 Test wickets. When you first arrived in New Zealand, did you ever envision yourself becoming the fifth-highest wicket-taker in New Zealand's Test history. coming in after legends like Richard Hadlee (431), Tim Southee, Daniel Vettori, and Trent Boult?I don't think I did! It's been pretty surreal but when I came over I knew I wanted to be more than just an average cricket player. I never tried to focus on becoming a top wicket taker but wanted to work extremely hard on getting better each day and performing for my team and mates to deliver what was required to the best of my ability. Those names mentioned were far better players than me, but I definitely tried to work to be as close to their level and to make us as good and competitive as I possibly could! It was a great challenge, and it pushed me to become better! It's a privilege to have been a part of it.Cricket has witnessed faster bowlers, more aggressive bowlers, and bowlers with greater skill. However, your unique blend of passion and relentless energy is rarely seen. Could you share more about this unwavering commitment?

I wasn't the tallest or fastest and it's always counted against me. I had a burning desire to prove people wrong and show that you could make it and have a successful impact even if I didn't tick those general boxes everyone is always looking for and that passion and heart can take you further than just talent sometimes. I was lucky to have very good players and people around me to support me and found a way of wanting to be successful in a way to make others around me better and complement them well. To bring something different and find a way.

Allan Donald inspired your love for fast bowling and bowling bouncers. Could you elaborate on how he influenced your approach?

Yes, he was a legend and such a fiery character and bowler and the passion he played with and how he went about things inspired me to want to do the same and be and bowl like him. He was a great role model and very nice guy off the field! It's something that always stayed with me and loved watching him as I was glued to the TV when he bowled.

It's been four years since that historic World Test Championship win. Your take on the changes that have gone by in the red-ball setup since, especially in the bowling department with you and Tim Southee retiring, and Trent Boult stepping away from the longest format?

Yes, it was one of the best days of my career and really meant a lot. It's nice getting rewards for the hard work we put in over the years and the way we played our cricket. We played a lot together and found a way to complement each other very well and enjoy each other's successes. It was a great period to be a part of! There's some exciting, good talent coming through and it will take them a bit of time to find their feet and roles and to complement each other well and go about things. No doubt they will have a lot of success too moving forward and just a pity we don't play as much Test cricket as others as it takes time to gain experience and learn and adapt and hopefully they can play more Tests and doesn't take them as long to find their way! But the talent and bowlers around are very excited and look forward to watching their progress.

The historic series win in India was sandwiched by series defeats against Sri Lanka away and England at home. Where do you see the basis of the inconsistency?

The series win in India was amazing and unreal. It will be the pinnacle for a lot of those players' careers I reckon, but as mentioned before, it will take them time to grow in their roles and gain experience and confidence moving forward and hopefully more Tests soon as possible they will find that! They weren't far off against England and results could have easily gone their way with some better luck at times and it's part of Test cricket. They'll be better for the experience and learnings moving forward but still played some really good cricket! The more Tests they can play the more experienced they'll be and they will do big things like when they beat India in India! And look forward to seeing this team moving forward and hopefully build on it and have more success than what we had in our time there.

With so many T20 leagues around the globe where do you rank Super Smash?

I think the Super Smash doesn't get the wrap or the fuss the others do as it doesn't look as big with big crowds or stadiums and all the extra pyrotechnics but standard of cricket is actually pretty good and decent level in some tough conditions. But obviously not having the big names or big players means we are down the bottom of the 3 big ones probably in the IPL, the SA20 and ILT20. Hopefully fingers crossed somehow, we can see our competition grow and get some big players involved for our boys to show their skills and talent and prove that it's got the potential. There has been some very exciting young talent coming through in it.

Novak Djokovic's aborted semifinal points to the sheer toll of lasting 7 best-of-5-sets matches to win a Slam, at 37

All about the 5000 bananas eaten by players at Australian Open, and why Cavendish variety of fruit is under threat



GNS News Agency, Jan 29

Players at the Australian Open polished off about 200 kilograms of bananas every day in the first week, ABC reported. Though the sight is a throwback best associated with Rafael Nadal, who was sorely missed for the first time at Melbourne, the universal fruit is of course a go-to replenishment for every tennis pro.While scientifically designed sports drinks for rehydrations and energy gels for soreness have gained visibility especially in the hot humid first summer Slam of the season, dietitians at the Oz Open can't stop talking about the humble banana.

ABC quoted Lauren Stribley, in-house dietitian at Sports Dietitians Australia, as saying that bananas are packed full of essential nutrients for generating energy during a match, as they contain 'carbohydrates for energy, fibre to help absorb nutrients, and minerals such as magnesium and potassium to help keep muscle cramps at bay.'Steibley added that fuelling not just of muscles, but also to power the brain in terms of concentration and decision

Novak Djokovic retires hurt from Australian Open: Has he played his last in Melbourne? Says, 'There's always a chance, but...'

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

It's the Grand Slam where Novak Djokovic has had the most success over the course of his professional career, but after walking out of the Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne on Friday, the Serb wasn't a 100% sure if he'd be back one more time. The 10-time Australian Open champion remained coy about his future as a torn muscle ended his quest for a historic 25th Major and a record-extending 11th title Down Under.Is there a chance this could have been his last appearance at Melbourne Park? "I don't know. There is a chance," Djokovic said in the post-match press conference. "Who knows? I'll just have to see how the season goes. I want to keep going. But whether I'm going to have a revised schedule or not for the next year, I'm not sure. I normally like to come to Australia to play. I've had the biggest success in my career here. So if I'm fit, healthy, motivated, I don't see a reason why I wouldn't come. But there's always a chance, yeah," Djokovic, who had his wife and kids Tara and Stefan present in the stands this year, said. Later, however, he did add that as long as he is able to put up with all this strife on tour and still feel capable of challenging for the Slams, he will continue playing.

Djokovic said he had quit the semifinal because of a torn muscle in his left leg after dropping the first set of his Australian Open semifinal against Alexander Zverev. He



Djokovic withdrew from last year's French Open before the quarterfinals after tearing the meniscus in his right knee. Is it a concern that it has now happened twice within one year? "How much of a worry is it? I don't know. It's not like I'm worrying approaching every Grand Slam now whether I'm going to get injured or not, but statistics are against me in a way in the last couple of years. So it is true that, you know getting injured quite a bit last few years. I don't know what exactly is the reason for that, you know? Maybe several different factors. But I'll keep going. You know, I'll keep striving to win more slams. And as long as I feel that I want to put up with all of this, I'll be around," Djokovic said.Djokovic had finished the contest against Alcaraz that way after hurting himself late in the first set, and had said he might not have continued playing that match if he had lost the second as well. "I didn't hit the ball since Alcaraz match until like an hour before today's match," Djokovic said Friday. "I did everything I possibly can to basically manage the muscle tear that I had. Medications and I guess the taping, and the physic work helped to some extent today. But towards the end of that first set, I just started feeling more and more pain and it was too much for me to handle. Unfortunate ending, but I tried," the 37-year-old said. Fans booed as Djokovic walked off toward the locker room, and he responded by giving two thumbs-up. The German world No 2 condemned the fans for jeering too, calling to show respect to Djokovic.

making, was necessary.Stribley, who advises the Port Adelaide AFLW team and South Australian cricket's women's program, was quoted as saying that sports foods were designed to be easily digestible and portable, but bananas remained eternal favourites in the nutrition race. "As sports dietitians, we tend to go for the food first options. Bananas are low GI — low glycaemic index — which means they'll provide you with a longer lasting energy. And particularly with international athletes who travel the world, you can get bananas anywhere," ABC quoted her. ABC explained that there are more than 1,000 types of bananas in the world, but only one — the Cavendish —

dominates global markets, with 50 billion tonnes of Cavendish grown worldwide each year. This variety is eaten in Australia and supplied to the United States and Europe. Australia's largest banana producing state, Queensland, will provide more than 5,000 Cavendish bananas will be provided to Australian Open players this month, all sourced from the largest banana producing state, Queensland. However the Cavendish bananas are under immense threat, the ABC reported, from a soil-borne fungus known as Panama disease. It led banana growers outside Darwin, to partner with scientists to develop a Panama disease-resistant banana plant.ABC quoted grower Mark Smith of NT Country Hour as saying, "It's one of the five staples - you've got wheat, barley, rice, potatoes and bananas - so a lot of people rely on bananas as domestic food."The genetically modified variety was given regulatory approval for human consumption but they won't be in sale in stores as thegenetically modified Cavendish is considered only a worst-case "back-up" in the "event that it is game, set, match to Panama disease", the ABC said. The famous Slam though, got through another year with players relying on good ol' fruit to keep cramps at bay.

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

If Novak Djokovic's cunning, commanding quarterfinal victory over Carlos Alcaraz served as a reminder of how much tennis is still left in him, his tame exit from the Australian Open served as a reminder of the size of the challenge that lies in front of him and his 37year-old body to continue to win the biggest tournaments in the world. After losing a tiebreaker 7-6 (5) following a gruelling 80-minute set in the searing Melbourne afternoon heat on the Rod Laver Arena, Djokovic was forced to retire from his semifinal against Alexander Zverev. The German World No. 2 will now play his third Major final in search of a first Grand Slam Djokovic may be the master of winning Grand Slams, but now in the twilight of his career, he faces a serious mental and physical challenge to deal with the sheer toll of playing seven best-of-fivesets matches across a fortnight.

Djokovic Novak Djokovic of Serbia reacts during his semifinal match against Alexander Zverev of Germany at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia, Friday, Jan. 24, 2025. (AP Photo/Asanka Brendon Ratnayake)With power-hitting baseline play – the brutal force with which the ball is returned into one's court on every ball by players like Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner – now becoming the norm on the men's tour, sustaining his level, maintaining fitness, and completing recovery will be the big challenge for the all-time great who inches closer to 40, to extend his haul of 24 Grand Slam singles titles.Having sustained a left leg injury during his quarterfinal, Djokovic had cancelled all training sessions in the buildup to the semifinal. Throughout the patchy, low-quality set, while not looking obviously compromised, he looked far from producing the dazzling shotmaking of his clash with Alcaraz.

Instead, it had become a war of attrition from the baseline, and the Serb, while not at his best, looked razor sharp, bailing himself out of trouble with impressive serves and returning well. The first signs of him feeling out of the contest came in the loose tiebreaker he played, which he ultimately lost by netting a simple put-away volley and then folding for the rest of the match.Djokovic explained his decision to retire, and the extent of his injury, a muscle tear, later in his press conference. "Towards the end of that first set I just started feeling more and more pain. It was too much, I guess, to handle for me at the moment. Unfortunate ending, but I tried," he said, according to the ATP Tour.The Serb was downbeat and even hinted at the possibility of this being his last appearance at the Australian Open – where he is the record 10-time champion: "It depends on this season."

Djokovic has played through injury, famously, in Melbourne Park before. The Serb won the season-opening Major in 2021 with an abdominal tear, and again in 2023 with a minor hamstring injury.Last year, midway through the French Open, the 37-year-old had injured his knee and had to rush into knee surgery to ready himself for Wimbledon, during which he admirably reached the final, but was far from his best.Sustaining the burden of Grand Slam tennis and a gruelling tennis calendar



had been Djokovic's hallmark. But as the years roll by the punches sting more. While his latest injury may have been more serious than initially feared, it is a telling reminder of the difficulties of playing through pain and recovery from injury for an elite tennis player in their late 30s. "It's a muscle tear. Two years ago, I have managed it better. On the court it didn't bother me as much. This time that wasn't the case," Djokovic said."It is true that (I have been) getting injured quite a bit (the) past few years. I don't know what exactly is the reason for that," he added. "Maybe several different factors. But I'll keep going. I'll keep striving to win more Slams. And as long as I feel that I want to put up with all of this, I'll be around."It's the latest hurdle, the latest layer of intrigue, that the enthralling GOAT must overcome in the final years of his fascinating career.

This Sri Lankan woman cricketer can bowl with both her hands

Hyderabad: You may have heard or/and seen people having the talent of writing or painting with both hands with ease. But, have you ever heard of any cricketer bowling with both hands, that too, in the same over.Sri Lankan woman cricketer Shashini Gimhani, who plays in the neighbouring nation's under-19 women's cricket team, bowls with both hands. The International Cricket Council (ICC) posted a reel on Facebook recently, where Shashini Gimhani has bowled with her left and right arms in the same over against India during the ICC Under 19 World Cup Match of India Vs Sri Lanka. Shashini Gimhani is an ambidextrous wrist-spinner, who became the youngest Sri Lankan to play a women's T20I, at the age of 15 years and 144 days. She first played in international cricket for Sri Lanka Under-19 in the Tri-series with Australia and England.

lost the opener 7-6 (5) in a tiebreaker and immediately walked around the net to concede the match to Zverev. The set had already lasted 1 hour, 20 minutes and included 19 points that lasted nine strokes or more apiece. The first four games alone lasted 31 minutes. About the injury, Djokovic said he wasn't aware how long this is going to keep him out of action, but thought he could manage it through the rest of the tournament, like he had done a few years ago with an abdominal tear (when he went on to win the Slam). "It was getting worse and worse," Djokovic said referring to the pain in his leg, which he hurt during his quarterfinal victory over Carlos Alcaraz on Tuesday night. "I knew, even if I won the first set, it was going to be a huge uphill battle for me."

Rohit Sharma lives dangerously, thrills briefly but his 2nd innings for Mumbai in Ranji Trophy was another frustrating outing

GNS News Agency, Jan 29

RohitRohit Sharma drives on left and gets out on right in the Ranji Trophy game in Mumbai Express Photo by Amit ChakravartyA few minutes past 10, the officegoers in the Bandra-Kurla Complex, Mumbai's swanky business district, opted for a small detour. ID cards still hanging around their necks, they made their way to the Mumbai Cricket Association Ground, where the few hundred seats were all occupied within minutes. Those who couldn't bunk work, stood in the balconies of the towers surrounding the stadium. For Mumbai's cricket tragics, this was another chance to watch Rohit Sharma. Mumbai, who were bundled out for 120 in the first innings, needed only 24 minutes to take the last three J&K wickets on Day 2 morning, bowling them out for 206. It was now up to Rohit and Yashasvi Jaiswal - the India opening pair who are performing the same duty for their Ranji Trophy team - to erase the 86-run first-innings deficit and lead Mumbai's fightback.

But once again, like in the first innings on Thursday, the Ranji returnees dug their team into a deeper hole. The only consolation being their stay lasted a little longer — Rohit, who was in the middle for just 28 minutes on Day 1 lived dangerously for 70 minutes before he was caught out for 28; Yashasvi followed him back to the pavilion after batting for 82 minutes for 26.From 54 for 0, Mumbai were reduced to 57 for 3 and although they had erased J&K's lead by lunch, they had lost half of their batsmen doing so.Struggling for runs, Rohit tried to hit his way out of the drought but not before a couple of early scares. Off the first ball he faced, Augib Nabi beat the India captain's outside edge.



A little later, when he was on 1, Rohit drilled one straight back to Umar Nazir but the pacer, who stuck out his right hand on the follow-through, couldn't hold on to the ball.It looked like Nazir — and J&K — would be made to pay for the dropped catch. In the same over, Rohit unleashed one of his trademark pull shots to send the ball sailing over the deep backward square fence. The next caught his edge and the ball found the gap between the slip and gully for a boundary. Rohit followed it up by stepping out of the crease, making room for himself and playing an uppish square cut for four. On a pitch that offered bounce and the ball swung around in the first hour, Rohit continued his T20 approach. In the next over, Nabi tested Rohit with a few short-of-the-length balls. After patiently battling them, he charged down to hit a six over longoff.Yudhvir Singh - who was introduced in the hope of breaking the partnership

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