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## Tamil actor Ajith Kumar's car crashes on track during practice race in Dubai, star escapes unhurt

Chennai: Tamil superstar Ajith Kumar's car crashed on a race track during the first practice session for the upcoming Dubai 24 hours race. The actor, who owns the racing team Ajith Kumar Racing, will be participating in the intensely contested Porsche 992 class along with his teammates Mathieu Detry, Fabian Duffieux and Cameron McLeod. Interestingly, Fabian Duffieux had also taken over as the team manager for Ajith Kumar Racing in December last year. It may be recalled that Ajith had headed to Barcelona for a test session last year. Ajith's racing firm, Ajith Kumar Racing, had announced earlier that the first practice session for the 24H Dubai would happen today.

## Temples getting ready for Vaikunta Ekadasi in Hyd

Hyderabad: Temples across Hyderabad and surrounding regions have started gearing up for the heavy rush of devotees and to conduct special rituals with religious piety, on the occasion of Vaikunta Ekadasi on January 10. Elaborate arrangements are being undertaken by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) at the famous Sri Venkateswara temples in Himayathnagar and Jubilee Hills. The main effort by the TTD is to ensure 25,000 to 35,000 devotees who are expected to turn-up at the two temples to have Vaikuntadwara Darshan without any hassles.

Efforts are on to provide quality basic amenities like drinking water and enough counters for smooth distribution of Prasadam at the two TTD temples.

## Delhi election dates: Voting on Feb 5, results on Feb 8

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

New Delhi: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Tuesday announced February 5 as the date of voting for the 70-member Delhi Legislative Assembly and the results will be declared on February 8. The date of the Issue of the Gazette Notification is January 10, the last date for making nominations is January 17, the date for scrutiny of nominations is January 18, and the last date for withdrawal of candidatures is January 20. The date before the elections should be completed is February 10.

Chief Election Commissioner of India, Rajiv Kumar, Election Commissioners of India, Gyanesh Kumar and Dr Sukhbir Singh Sandhu addressed the press conference held in the Plenary Hall of the Vigyan Bhawan in the national capital. As per the CEC, Delhi has 70 constituencies, including 58 general and 12 SCs, across 11 districts. There are 83.49 lakh male voters, 71.74 lakh female voters, and 25.89 lakh young voters, culminating in a total of 1.55 crore voters. He mentioned that the total number of polling stations is 13,033 in the national capital, out of which PwD and women-managed are 70 each. He also mentioned that the Saksham App for the PwD voters, Home Voting facilities for the senior citizens, and CVIGIL for complaints will also be available to address the concerns of the people. The term of the current Delhi Assembly ends on February 23, and



the whole election process has to end before that. Earlier on Monday, the ECI released a newly revised voter list for Delhi. According to the latest figures, Delhi's voter base has grown significantly over the past two months. In October 2024, the total number of voters stood at 1,53,57,529. However, after a summary revision, this number has risen to 1,55,24,858, an addition of 1,67,329 new electorates by December 2024.

The Commission has cautioned against the submission of false and fabricated documents for getting new voter ID.

## Digital Personal Data Protection Rules prioritise India's citizen-centric governance: PM Modi

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said the Draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, prioritise India's commitment to citizen-centric governance as they aim to safeguard personal data while driving growth and inclusivity. The Prime Minister, in his comments on X, referred to Minister for Electronics and IT Ashwani Vaishnav's explanation on the draft rules which seek to protect personal data of individuals and empower citizens. Union Minister Vaishnav highlighted that the Draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules reflect India's leadership in shaping global data governance norms.

"Unlike some international models that lean heavily towards regulation, our approach is pragmatic and growth-oriented. This balance ensures that citizens are protected without stifling the innovative spirit that drives our startups and businesses. Small businesses and startups will face lower compliance burdens," the Minister observed. "When we talk about the global future, then human-centric approaches should be foremost." These words by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the recent United Nations Summit of the Future reflect India's vision of putting people first. This philosophy has guided our efforts in shaping the Draft Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules. The rules, after being finalised, would operationalise the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, bringing to life our commitment to safeguarding citizens' right to personal data protection," the Minister further stated. The rules are designed with simplicity and clarity, ensuring that every Indian, regardless of their technical know-how, can understand and exercise their rights, he added. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology on Friday released the draft rules for the Digital Personal Data Protection Act which make it mandatory for a Data Fiduciary to ensure the verifiable consent of a parent before processing any personal data of a child. The Act was passed in Parliament in August 2023 and the government is seeking feedback on the draft rules through the



MyGov portal till February 18, 2025.

According to the draft rules, "A Data Fiduciary shall adopt appropriate technical and organisational measures to ensure that verifiable consent of the parent is obtained before the processing of any personal data of a child and shall observe due diligence, for checking that the individual identifying herself as the parent is an adult who is identifiable". The identity must be established through government-issued IDs or digital tokens linked to identity services like Digital lockers. This is aimed at ensuring the privacy of a child on various social media platforms such as Google, Meta's Facebook and WhatsApp and X. The rules also make it mandatory for the Data Fiduciary to immediately inform any personal data breach "to each affected Data Principal, in a concise, clear and plain manner and without delay". The rules further state that the processing of personal data outside India is subject to the restriction that the Data Fiduciary shall meet such requirements as the Central government may, by general or special order, specify in respect of making such personal data available to any foreign State, or to any person or entity under the control of or any agency of such a state.

## BJP, Congress workers clash in Hyd

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

Hyderabad: A tense situation prevailed in front of the BJP State office at Nampally after Congress and BJP workers clashed with each other on the issue of BJP former MP Ramesh Bidhuri's sexist remark against Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi on Tuesday. Earlier in the day, Youth Congress functionaries surrounded the BJP office and pelted stones and eggs in protest against the comments made by Bidhuri on Priyanka Gandhi. The BJP workers retaliated and chased Congress workers with sticks. Police had a tough time handling the situation with Congress and BJP workers refusing to leave the spot. A BJP worker sustained a head injury in the incident while a large police convoy was deployed to disperse the workers of both parties. Both the party leaders accused each other of the incident. Congress leaders claimed that they were staging a protest peacefully and that the BJP workers provoked them to attack the BJP office. On the other hand BJP leaders claimed that they used force only after the Congress started stone pelting.

Meanwhile, Union Coal Minister and BJP State president G Kishan Reddy condemned the attack on the BJP office and blamed the Congress for the incident. He accused the Youth Congress leaders of attacking the BJP office on the directions of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy. The Union Minister condemned the incident, calling it an act of cowardice and emphasizing that the State government must bear responsibility for any future consequences of such attacks. He asserted, "Do not mistake our tolerance for weakness. We reject the politics of violence and will not tolerate attacks against us. If you disagree with someone's remarks, protest peacefully—that is enough. Resorting to physical attacks, such as pelting stones and using sticks against the BJP office, is unacceptable." Even after Ramesh Bidhuri apologized for his comments, is it justified to respond with such intolerance?" he asked. The BJP State president demanded the City Police Commissioner to respond on the issue as the



police personnel were mute spectators during the entire clash. Strongly condemning the attack on the BJP office, union Minister of State for Home Bandi Sanjay said BJP would not sit idly and would react strongly. Foundations of Congress offices, including Gandhi Bhavan won't remain if BJP workers jump into action, he warned. "What is the State government doing when the ruling party workers are taking the law into their hands and attacking with stones? Suitable legal action should be taken. The workers who committed the attack should be arrested immediately," he demanded.

Later, Speaking to the media, ACP Vikram Singh said, "We are investigating the incident of attack on BJP office. We are examining the CCTV footage and will take action. We have deployed forces as per our regulations." Meanwhile, TPCC president Mahesh Kumar Goud criticised Youth Congress leaders for attacking the BJP office and stressed that protests should be staged in a democratic manner. He also found fault with the BJP leaders and stated that their comments were highly condemnable.

## ACB Intensifies Probe into Formula-E Race Case: Multiple Raids in Hyd



GNS News Agency, Jan 7

Hyderabad: The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) has ramped up its efforts following a recent High Court ruling, conducting a series of raids across multiple locations in Hyderabad. The ACB's intensified investigation focuses on the Formula-E car race case, with several searches carried out at offices of Greenko, a key player in the race. Greenko is alleged to have made significant contributions to the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) in the form of electoral bonds, with claims of quid pro quo transactions. Greenko reportedly paid BRS a massive ₹41 crore in electoral bonds, issuing bonds of ₹1 crore each on multiple occasions. The ACB's actions come amidst accusations that these financial transactions may have been tied to the company's involvement in the Formula-E race, where it had a stake as a partner.

The ACB conducted raids at six different locations in Hyderabad, including the offices of Greenko, located in prime areas like the HiTech City and the city's Greenko

premises. The searches also targeted the offices of A.S. Next, a company that had an earlier partnership in the Formula-E race case, with investigations focusing on possible financial irregularities. In addition to the raids at corporate offices, the ACB also searched the residences of senior officials involved in the case, including IAS officer Aravind Kumar and BLN Reddy, marking an escalation in the bureau's efforts to uncover any illegal financial dealings linked to the Formula-E race. The case continues to unfold as the ACB tightens its scrutiny on the financial entanglements between corporations and political entities, particularly in the context of the high-profile Formula-E racing event. The ACB's crackdown signals a significant push towards transparency and accountability, following public concerns about political funding and corporate influence.

## Residents stage rasta-roko over power disconnections by SCCL in Bellampalli

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

Mancherial: Residents from various colonies and retired coal miners of residential quarters found fault with the management of the State-owned Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) for disconnecting power supply. They staged a rasta-roko, affecting traffic for a while, opposing the move of the coal major at the Market Road in Bellampalli on Tuesday. The residents and retired coal miners expressed displeasure over the disconnection of electricity to the quarters handed by the SCCL to the government.

## Asaram Babu gets interim bail on medical grounds, but will remain in jail

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

New Delhi/Jaipur: The Supreme Court on Tuesday granted interim bail to 83-year-old self-styled godman Asaram Babu till March 31 in connection with the rape case of a female follower at his ashram in Surat. The order was passed by a bench of Justices M.M. Sundresh and Rajesh Bindal, which also added a bail condition that Babu should not meet his followers upon release from the Jodhpur Central Jail where he is serving a life sentence in another rape case.

Appearing for Asaram Babu, Senior Advocate Devadatt Kamat, along with Advocates Rajesh Gulab Inamdar and Shashwat Anand, pressed on the merits of the case as well as on Asaram's medical condition. It was argued that the conviction was based solely on the testimony of the prosecutrix without corroborating evidence and pointed to inconsistencies in the prosecution's case. However, the apex court opted not to delve into merits and confined its consideration to the petitioner's health issues, thereby disposing of the special leave petition.

Sources said that despite the bail, it seems difficult for Asaram to get out of jail as he is also serving a separate life sentence for raping a minor. Over the last five months, he has been granted parole three times. Asaram's lawyer, R.S. Saluja, stated that this is the first instance of bail being granted by the Supreme Court. However, Asaram cannot be released due to his conviction in the second case. This case, filed by a woman from Asaram's ashram near Gandhinagar, remains a challenge. Preparations are underway to file a bail application in the Jodhpur High Court for the second conviction, he added. While granting bail, the Supreme Court stipulated that Asaram must not meet his

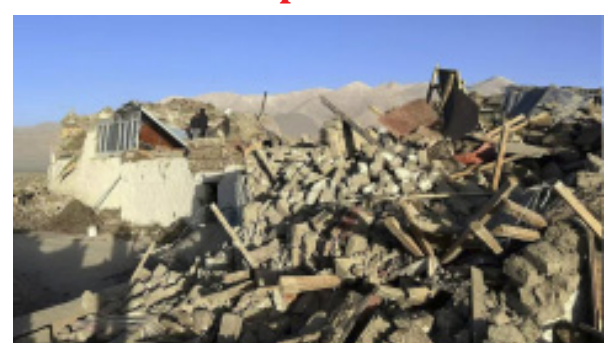


followers or attempt to tamper with evidence.

In 2013, Asaram was arrested by Jodhpur Police from an ashram in Indore. After five years of hearings, he was sentenced to life imprisonment on April 25, 2018, for raping a minor. Another rape case was filed by a woman from an ashram in Gandhinagar, Gujarat. On January 31, 2023, the court sentenced Asaram to life imprisonment in this case as well. Meanwhile, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the State of Gujarat, opposed the plea, highlighting the gravity of Asaram's conviction and asserting that adequate medical facilities were available to him in custody. After weighing the submissions, the apex court granted medical bail till March 31, 2025, enabling Asaram to undergo necessary treatment. The bench clarified that the relief was granted solely on humanitarian grounds and directed compliance with conditions imposed during the bail period. The Supreme Court also indicated that Asaram's medical status could be reassessed closer to the expiration of the bail term.

## Tibet-Nepal earthquake: 95 killed, 130 injured as 7.1-magnitude earthquake hits Tibet; tremors felt in Nepal, India

A 6.8-magnitude earthquake struck near one of Tibet's holiest cities on Tuesday, killing at least 95 people and injuring 130 others with tremors also shaking buildings and forcing people to run to the streets in neighbouring Nepal. According to regional disaster relief headquarters, the quake jolted Dingri County in Xigaze in Tibet Autonomous Region in China at 9:05 am Tuesday (Beijing Time). The US Geological Service, however, put the quake's magnitude at 7.1. At least 95 people have been confirmed dead and 130 others injured as of 3 p.m. Tuesday (local time), state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Chinese President Xi Jinping has ordered all-out rescue efforts to carry out relief and rescue operations in the affected areas. Xi ordered utmost efforts to treat the injured and urged efforts to prevent secondary disasters, properly resettle affected residents, and handle the aftermath work effectively. Following the quake, China Earthquake Administration launched a level-II emergency service response and sent a work team to the site to assist with disaster relief efforts. Xizang Autonomous Region also issued a level-II emergency response to the quake. Some 22,000 disaster relief items, including cotton tents, cotton coats, quilts and folding beds, together with special relief materials for high-altitude and frigid areas, have been dispatched by central authorities to the



quake-hit area. Over 1,500 local firefighters and rescue workers have also been dispatched to the ground. Xigaze also known as Shigatse is close to the border with India. Shigatse is considered one of the holiest cities of Tibet. It is the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama, a key figure of Tibetan Buddhism whose spiritual authority is second only to the Dalai Lama. The epicentre was located in Tsoqo Township of Dingri County, which has a population of approximately 6,900 people within a 20-km radius. There are 27 villages within this area. Official data show Dingri County has a population of over 61,000 people. The epicentre is located 90 km North-East of Lobsutse in the Khumbu Himalayan range of North-East Nepal.



# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## The Kejri splurge

For once, the BJP and the Congress are on the same page. Their common rival in poll-bound Delhi is former CM Arvind Kejriwal, who is under fire for having renovated his official residence at a cost of at least Rs 33 crore. According to an audit report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India, the expenditure quadrupled — the initial estimate was Rs 7.91 crore — by the time the work was completed in 2022. Moreover, the renovation was done in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, a turbulent period during which many development projects were stalled and the state government was supposed to be protecting Delhi residents from the deadly virus. Now that's what you call a classic case of misplaced priorities.

The damning report has dented Kejriwal's carefully constructed 'aam aadmi' image, giving the BJP and the Congress ample fodder to target the ruling AAP, which is eyeing a hat-trick in the upcoming Assembly elections. Splurging Rs 96 lakh on curtains and Rs 66.9 lakh on marble stone for walls, and that too at a time when people were falling ill or dying, is simply unacceptable. Kejriwal, who has projected himself as a commoner CM from the outset, has a lot of explaining to do. The extravagance was avoidable, to say the least.

The CAG report has also put the Public Works Department on a sticky wicket, citing irregularities in the re-modelling of the ground-floor accommodation and the construction of an additional storey.

A fair and thorough probe is needed to establish the complicity of officials. As of now, the case has become a hot-button poll issue in the Capital. At stake is the credibility of AAP, whose top leaders have been accused of corruption by Central agencies. The party has its work cut out to regain the trust of voters, who gave it a landslide mandate in 2015 and 2020.

## In search of a 'grand strategy' for India's foreign policy in the 21st century

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

For as long as states have had conflicts, thinkers have tried to set out the terms of a "grand strategy" of a country, one that draws together its national power and resources with its diplomatic, military and economic ambitions. For India's Chanakya (Arthashastra), or for military generals like Thucydides (History of the Peloponnesian War), Sun Tzu (The Art of War) and Carl von Clausewitz (On War), the focus was on how to wage war. Amidst present-day realities of relative peace, their writings are now quoted in books on battles for diplomatic influence instead. Friends and allies

At least three recent books have aimed to look at a "grand strategy" for Indian foreign policy in the 21st century, harking in some measure to ancient strategic wisdom. In *Friends: India's Closest Strategic Partners*, Professor at Jindal University Sreeram Chaulia writes about the seven countries he thinks are India's most important allies, including Japan, Australia, the U.S., Russia, France, Israel and the UAE. While none of the partnerships constitutes an "alliance", he speaks instead of the need for friendships for India's strategy to "assume its destiny as a leading power" of the world. Chaulia's argument for a world of friendships is three-fold. One, that India cannot depend on a multilateral framework to advance on this path and needs specific bilateral relationships to power it forward. The second, India's friends are by and large those who believe in Indian strategic autonomy. The third, that these friends are invested in India using its strategic independence as a countervailing or deterrent challenge to Chinese hegemony. There are obvious exceptions to these rules. The U.S. may not be a fan of Indian strategic autonomy — U.S. Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti recently indicated in a speech that in conflict, partners must choose sides. Russia aims to bring India and China closer (as President Putin sought at the recent BRICS summit with a Narendra Modi-Xi Jinping meet after years). It is also clear that none of India's neighbouring countries qualify in Chaulia's calculus as countries that can help India's rise, a thesis by exclusion that many Indian thinkers would disagree with. The book is remarkable, however, for its clarity of thought in an age where writers often hedge their bets, in line with India's own amorphous and sometimes ambiguous foreign policy choices. The organisation of the chapters, with one for each of India's friends chosen by Chaulia is also helpful, especially for students of each of these important relationships. Positioning India's strengths also out this season is McGill University Professor T.V. Paul's excellent *The Unfinished Quest: India's Search for Major Power Status from Nehru to Modi*. If Chaulia's 'Friends', works within the silos of each relationship, Paul's 'Quest' flows chronologically from India's independence, in a treatise on Indian power and its practical past. Long before External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said that India's ambitions have shifted from being a "balancing power" to a "leading power", Paul points out the Nehru had visualised India as "one of the four great powers of the post-war international system", along with the U.S., the Soviet Union and China. Paul also, correctly, positions India's civilisational attributes, including the cultural and religious aspects, now at the forefront of the Modi government's diplomatic forays, as part of its "soft power", adding that the status of "Vishwaguru" or even "Vishwamitra" would elude India if it veers from its traditionally peaceable and liberal ethos that contribute to it. Paul's evaluation of India's economic and military heft is well researched and worth reading, particularly as he presents them in absolute and comparative terms to other global powers. Unlike Chaulia, Paul does carry a chapter on "The Neighbours", but like Chaulia, he concludes that India's global status will increase even without gaining leverage in South Asia. The turning point finally, there's Dhruva Jaishankar's *Visva Shashtra: India and The World*, a scholarly recounting of Indian foreign policy over the ages, that begins with ancient strategic treatises, goes through pre-independence foreign policy thought, followed by the first few decades of the Indian Republic. Jaishankar marks 1991 as a significant turning point of "fundamental change" in Indian foreign policy — broadly as a reaction to global events like the Gulf war, Israel-Palestine peace process, the collapse of the Soviet Union and withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the resultant period of U.S.-led unipolarity in the world. Jaishankar, the third in his family line of strategic thinkers, weaves the intricacies of India's foreign policy past with considerable ease, leading up to the present period in 2024. Part 1, "History", is scrupulously well presented, followed by Part 2 titled "Strategy".

## In Gujarat, row over woman accused of forging letter against BJP MLA sees Patidar leaders across parties unite



GNS News Agency, Jan 7

The 'parading' of a Patidar woman, an accused in a case related to the circulation of an allegedly forged letter targeting BJP MLA Kaushik Vekariya, in Gujarat's Amreli has sparked a row in the state with Patidar leaders, cutting across party lines, speaking out against the incident. Terming it the "public humiliation of a woman", Congress leader Padesh Dhanani and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Gopal Italia have issued statements, calling for action against the police chief of the district. A BJP leader is among the four accused in the forgery case.

"I have just learnt about a meeting of BJP leaders in Amreli deliberating about how to free the daughter from jail. Instead of doing such meetings and misleading the people, leaders like Kaushik Vekariya... if worried about the dignity of the Patidars... should discuss what punishment to give the Amreli SP and the investigation officials. Decide that and convey it to your home minister and your BJP government," Italia, national joint secretary, AAP, said in a video statement. In the last week of December, a letter accusing Vekariya, the Amreli BJP MLA and the deputy whip of the party in the state legislature, of corruption went viral on social media. The letter was allegedly written on the letterhead of taluk panchayat chairman Kishore Kanpariya. Local BJP leaders escalated the matter to state BJP chief and Union minister C R Paatil even as Kanpariya denied having written the letter and filed a complaint with the Amreli police. The police lodged an FIR and said that Kanpariya's signature on the letter was forged. On December 28, the police arrested Manish Vagharia, youth leader of the taluk

BJP in Amreli, Ashok Mangroliya, sarpanch of Jashwantgarh village, Jitu Khatra, and Payal Goti in the case.

After obtaining remand of the four accused from a local court, the police then conducted a reconstruction of the crime in which all four accused, including the woman, were paraded around the areas where the letter was allegedly forged. This did not go down well with the Patidar community and leaders, politicians and social organisations protested this police action. "Those arrogant ones from the Kaurav clan (a reference to Mahabharat) paraded an unmarried woman in public in Amreli and thus hurt the pride of the entire Gujarat," former Congress Legislature Party leader and ex-Amreli MLA Padesh Dhanani said in a post on X on Thursday.

"How long will you throw dust in the eyes of the people? You have no shame after a daughter's dignity has been insulted in this manner. Further, there are no lawyers in your meeting. Here I am, Gopal Italia, a brother of this sister, an advocate who can fight till the SC to get her freed. You should decide how to punish the SP," Italia said. Denying the allegations, Sanjay Kharat, Superintendent of Police, Amreli, said in a video statement on Wednesday evening that the police had conducted the probe in a "lawful manner".

"The district police has been investigating the case of a forged letter defaming the Amreli MLA that had gone viral on social media. We had received a complaint regarding this from the taluka panchayat chairman whose signature is seen on the letter. We filed an FIR and arrested some persons in the case," SP Kharat said. "During investigation, it came to light that the four accused had deleted communications between themselves and had also destroyed other evidence in the case. After receiving remand of the accused and completing the panchnama, we took them to the office to find out where they had kept the evidence in the offices and shops. This is very important in the interest of the investigation and it was thus conducted by the police in a lawful manner," he added. On the protests, SP Kharat said, "We strongly disagree with the allegations made against the police and the court too, in light of the evidence presented by the police, sent all the accused to judicial custody."

## Karnataka contractor suicide case: BJP will be left 'red-faced' when documents emerge, says Priyank Kharge



GNS News Agency, Jan 7

Amid massive protests seeking his resignation over the suicide of civil contractor Sachin Panchal, Karnataka minister Priyank Kharge said on Thursday that some documents related to the case will leave the BJP "red-faced" in the coming days. Panchal died by suicide on December 26, leaving behind a purported death note in which he accused one Raju Kapanur of issuing death threats demanding Rs 1 crore for awarding a contract. The BJP has been demanding Kharge's resignation, saying that Kapanur is Kharge's close aide. It set a January 4 deadline for the Karnataka government to hand over the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

"Some more documents about the case will come out in the next few days. Let there be an investigation, too. When they (the documents) come out, the BJP will definitely be

left red-faced," Kharge, who handles the portfolios of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, said in a press conference. Kharge said the BJP was desperate to fix Congress leaders "by hook or crook" and secure his resignation. The BJP has been agitating in various parts of the state ahead of a major protest scheduled for January 4 in Kalaburagi. During this event, the party plans to surround Kharge's house and demand resignation over the case.

The minister said the state government was being pulled into a transaction between two people. He noted that the deceased was not a registered contractor but was employed by Unity Infrabuild. He added that the government would not be swayed by what he described as a "campaign of lies". The BJP's poster campaign against Kharge, which started two days ago in Bengaluru, was held in Mandya on Wednesday. BJP workers protested against the Congress government for allegedly harassing contractors and demanded Kharge's resignation.

Kharge said the BJP was making baseless allegations against him, and he had filed defamation petitions against BJP state president B Y Vijayendra, general secretary P Rajeev and former MLC Ganesh Karnik. The purported suicide note of Panchal blamed eight people for his death. They are Raju Kapanur, an ex-corporator from Congress at Kalaburagi; local Congress leaders Nandakumar Nagabujange and Goraknath Sajjan; Prakash Sheer Patila, a history-seheeter from Maharashtra; Shiv Sena corporator Manoj Sejawal; managing director of Unity Infrabuild Vikas H M; project manager Vinay; and Ramangowda Patil, a class-1 contractor from Kalaburagi.

## Bombay High Court says further court monitoring of probe into Govind Pansare's death not necessary, orders expedited trial

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

Govind Pansare, an activist and Communist Party of India (CPI) leader, and his wife were shot by unidentified assailants in Kolhapur during their morning walk on February 16, 2015. Govind Pansare, an activist and Communist Party of India (CPI) leader, and his wife were shot by unidentified assailants in Kolhapur during their morning walk on February 16, 2015. The Bombay High Court Thursday disposed of the plea by the kin of deceased activist Govind Pansare seeking a court-monitored probe into his death, saying the investigation did not require further oversight and directed the lower court to expedite the trial.

Pansare, an activist and Communist Party of India (CPI) leader, and his wife were shot by unidentified assailants in Kolhapur during their morning walk on February 16, 2015. While his wife survived, the CPI leader died at a Mumbai hospital four days later. The high court, on August 3, 2022, transferred the investigation into the death to the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) from the Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Maharashtra Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

In its verdict on the plea by Pansare's daughter and daughter-in-law seeking a probe into his death and its monitoring by the high court, a bench of Justices Ajey S Gadkari and Kamal R Khata Thursday noted that the ATS had investigated the allegations made by petitioners from "all angles" and except the arrest of two absconding accused, nothing further remained to be probed. The court observed, "...continuous monitoring of the further investigation by this Court under Article 226 of the Constitution of India is not necessary. After the accused persons are arrested, the investigating agency can report it to the trial court as per the provisions of (the) Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC)." The bench noted that the trial in the case had already commenced on December 16, 2024, and the prosecution had examined 28 witnesses. The bench referred to Supreme Court judgments in Vineet Naraian and Shahid Balwa cases, which held that the task of monitoring by the court would



In February last year, the Bombay high court had asked the Maharashtra ATS to look into the information given by Govind Pansare's kin that he was killed because of his book, Shivaji Kon Hota (Who was Shivaji)

end the moment the chargesheet is filed in the matter. It also disposed of intervention pleas by some accused persons against the high court's continued monitoring of the case. In February last year, the high court had asked the Maharashtra ATS to look into information given by Pansare's kin that he was killed because of his book, 'Shivaji Kon Hota (Who was Shivaji)'. On April 2, 2023, the state lawyer submitted, in a sealed envelope, the status report of the investigation in the case. ATS Pune claimed to have found leads related to the accused Vinay Pawar and Sarang Akolkar, who were absconding. On April 18, 2023, nearly eight years after it began supervising the case, the high court decided to discontinue monitoring the 2013 murder case of another Maharashtra activist Narendra Dabholkar. The court had then held that no further monitoring was required as the trial had commenced and was progressing steadily.

## WhatsApp remains top among social media platforms to be misused by cyber criminals: Report



GNS News Agency, Jan 7

Social media platform WhatsApp, followed by Telegram and Instagram, remains one of the favourite hunting grounds for online scammers, as per the latest report from the Union Home Ministry. In the first three months of the year 2024, a total of 43,797 complaints regarding cyber fraud through WhatsApp were received, followed by 22,680 complaints against Telegram and 19,800 against Instagram. The annual MHA report 2023-24 reads that cyber fraudsters have been using Google services platforms for initiating these crimes. The Google Advertisement platform provides a convenient facility for targeted advertisement from across the border.

"This scam, known as 'Pig Butchering Scam' or 'Investment Scam' is a global phenomenon and involves large-scale money laundering and even cyber slavery. Unemployed youths, housewives, students, and needy people are targeted, who are losing large sums of money (even borrowed money) on a daily basis," the report reads. I4C has partnered with Google and Facebook for sharing intelligence and signals for proactive actions like flagging digital lending apps and its signals, and abuse of Google's Firebase domains (free hosting) by cyber fraudsters, android banking malwares (hashes) and many others. Sponsored Facebook ads are extensively used by organised cyber criminals to launch illegal lending apps in India. Such links are proactively identified and shared with Facebook, along with Facebook pages for necessary action, it further reads. I4C is making efforts for the capacity building of all pillars of criminal justice system i.e. law enforcement agencies, forensic examiners, prosecutors and judges for imparting training in cyber security, investigation of cybercrime, and digital forensics in institutes across the country.

## Hotelier killed in Himachal Pradesh during brawl with cops, 2 constables booked amid public outrage

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

Hotelier killed Meanwhile, family members of the victim and local hoteliers staged a protest against the district police administration, demanding stricter action against the constables. Two Himachal Pradesh police constables were booked, and one of them was arrested for allegedly killing the general manager of a private hotel in the Chamba district on New Year's Eve.

The victim was identified as Rajinder Malhotra, 49, a resident of Dalhousie. He was working with the Nature Valley hotel on the Dalhousie-Banikhet Road. The booked police constables have been identified as Anoop Kumar and Amit Kumar. The police constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) under Deputy Superintendent of Police (Dalhousie) Hemant Thakur. Sources said there were three police constables in the hotel when a fight broke out between the police and hoteliers, and a third constable's role was under investigation. Meanwhile, family members of the victim and local hoteliers staged a protest against the district police administration, demanding stricter action against the constables on Wednesday. The protesters blocked the Pathankot-Chamba national highway for around four hours. Protesters alleged that the police constables were drunk when they entered the hotel and attacked the office in-charge and the general manager. The protest was withdrawn only after Superintendent of Police (Chamba) Abhishek Yadav suspended the two police constables and booked them. "Three police constables went to the hotel uninvited on New Year's Eve; two of them allegedly got into a scuffle with the front office in-charge Sachin Kumar and attacked general manager Rajinder Malhotra, who tried to intervene. Preliminary investigation suggests police constable Anoop Kumar, office in-charge Sachin Kumar and general manager Rajinder Malhotra fell from a significant height to the ground floor," a police officer told.

"Rajinder Malhotra sustained severe head injuries. He was declared dead in a local government hospital. Constable Anoop Kumar and hotel office in-charge Sachin Kumar suffered multiple fractures. The two were admitted to a local hospital. Amit Kumar was arrested for murder. Accused constable Anoop Kumar will be arrested after being discharged from the hospital. The third police constable was not at the crime scene when the incident occurred. Instead, he was sitting in his car in the parking lot," the police officer added. SP Yadav told the media, "Accused constables Amit Kumar and Anoop Kumar were posted in Chamba. They were sent to Dalhousie on duty in view of the New Year celebrations. They were returning from their duty when they went to the hotel. We registered a case against them and suspended the two. A departmental probe was also initiated against them. Indeed, there were three constables in the hotel when the murder took place, and the role of the third policeman is under investigation."

"As protesters and kin of the victim alleged that the constables were drunk, we collected the blood and urine samples of the accused police personnel. Accused Amit Kumar will be produced in a local court on Thursday," DSP Thakur said. Meanwhile, a police source said, "CCTV camera footage of the hotel was seized. The cameras were not equipped with night vision technology. The footage is dim and not clear, although it showed that a scuffle had taken place in the hotel." Malhotra was a native of the Khajjira area who settled in the Dalhousie Cantt area. He is survived by his wife, a daughter and a son. His body was handed over to his family after a postmortem examination.

The police filed a case under sections 101 (murder) and 109 (attempt to murder) of the Bhatiya Nayaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, at the Dalhousie police station.



## ‘Aapka mukhlis Manmohan Singh’: In letters to Pakistan, when former PM spoke of love for ancestral village, childhood memories



GNS News Agency, Jan 7

He might have been the Prime Minister of the world's largest democracy but each letter that Manmohan Singh wrote in Urdu, addressing the people of his ancestral village across the border in Pakistan, was undersigned "aapka mukhlis Manmohan Singh". Singh, who in his own words was "an underprivileged child of the Partition", had migrated to India from Gah village of Chakwal in Pakistan carrying the horrifying childhood memories and lingering trauma of seeing his grandfather Sant Singh being mercilessly killed in the riots. Such was the pain of losing his grandfather that Singh never revisited Gah. But the fact that his memories of Gah, more so of his school fellows who used to lovingly call him 'Mohna', were still deeply imbedded in his heart is reflected in the letters that he had sent across the border. Manmohan Singh Dr Manmohan Singh with his school friend Raja Muhammad Ali at New Delhi in 2008. Ali had travelled from Gah of Pakistan to meet him. These Chakwali shoes have rekindled my childhood memories. From feeling elated over receiving a pair of Chakwali shoes as a gift from his village to remembering his class fellow Bakht Bano, Singh's letters, accessed by The Indian Express, are now being preserved as trophies by the villagers after his demise last week. In a letter dated October 5, 2004, months after Singh took oath as the Prime Minister of India and the residents of Gah sent him gifts, including a pair of traditional shoes, he wrote: "Chakwali jooton ki ek jodi ke hamrah, mere aabai kasbey ke purane school imtihaan ke nateejey ki ek naqal irsaal karne ke apke iss amal se main bada mutasir huya. Ye rivaayati jootain wahaan guzre mere bachpan ki bahut si yaadon ko taaza karne ka baais ban gai hain. Mere maazi ko yaad dilaane wali inn cheezon ko irsaal karne ke liye main aapka behadd shukr guzaar hu..aapke mukhlis Manmohan Singh)."

This loosely translates as, "I have been deeply touched after receiving a pair of Chakwali shoes and a copy of my report card from the school of my native village. These traditional shoes have rekindled my childhood memories of the days I spent in the village. I am extremely thankful to you for sending me these things which remind me of my past...yours sincerely Manmohan Singh)." Manmohan Singh Dr Manmohan Singh and Ali wearing the handcrafted Chakwali shoes. Singh had addressed this letter to Raja Ashiq Hussain, the nephew of his classmate, the late Raja Muhammad Hussain. "After Dr Manmohan Singh had become the PM of India in 2004, I had gone to Delhi to meet him and hand over some traditional gifts and his school marksheet as a token of love from our village. While the meeting was not possible, the traditional Chakwali shoes which we got made for him and other gifts reached him. He wrote this letter in Urdu to acknowledge that he received them," Hussain said. Remembering classmate Bakht Bano

Singh, who was admitted to the local primary school of Gah, did not remember the names of all his classmates but he did remember "one girl" Bakht Bano. However, she had passed away much before he became the Prime Minister. After learning about her demise, Singh in a letter to Hussain requested him to visit Bano's family, which still lives in Gah, and express condolences from his side. "Mujhe chand bars qabal maadam Bakht Bano ki rehlat ho jaanne ki khabar se bahut sadma hua hai. Agar mumqin ho to aap

meri jaanib se unke saahibzaade Janab Khizar Hiyat tak meri tehziyat pahuncha dein..aapka mukhlis Manmohan Singh..." he wrote in 2004, saying he was deeply saddened after learning about Bakht Bano's demise and requesting Hussain, if possible, to convey his condolences to her son Khizar Hiyat. Speaking to The Indian Express, Bano's grandson Mazhar Abbas said that in the Class 2 school report card of the year 1938-39, while Singh was Roll Number 22, his grandmother Bakht Bano was Roll Number 19. "My grandmother died in April 1985. During her lifetime, our villagers had no connection with Dr Manmohan Singh. However, according to my father, she used to remember names of some of her class fellows. However, after Dr Singh became the PM in India and reconnected with people of Gah, he took my grandmother's name and remembered her as a girl with whom he was friends in the school. We were deeply touched when he sent a condolence letter to our family after knowing that my grandmother had died." "My responsibility to help people of my village. Even though Singh had never re-visited Gah, he facilitated developmental projects for the village, in coordination with then Pakistan president the late Pervez Musharraf.

After the solar power and water heating projects were completed, the villagers wrote a letter to him expressing their gratitude. Replying to the letter, Singh reverted on April 18, 2006: "Mere azeez doston, mujhe aapka khat mausul karke bahut khushi huyi. Mera aabai gaaon mere liye ek bahut hi azeez jagah hai. Gaaon mein tarakki aur behatari ke baare mein aapke alfaaz khushi ka ek zariya hain. Mujhe yeh sunkar bahut khushi hui hai ki roshni aur paani garam karan ke liye TERI ke zariye se amal kiye project ko bahut pasand kiya gaya hai. Main isey hamari gaaon ke logon ki madad karne ke liye ek niyamat samajhta hu aur mustaqbil mein aisa karne ki ummeed karta hu...aapka mukhlis Manmohan Singh. (My dear friends, I have been elated upon receiving your letter. My ancestral village is very dear to me. Your words appreciating the development and betterment in our village are a source of happiness for me. I feel very happy to hear that the projects related to lighting and water heating, executed via TERI, have been appreciated. I consider it my responsibility to help people of our village and hope to do this in future also.. yours sincerely Manmohan Singh)."

After Singh's school friend Raja Muhammad Ali who had travelled to Delhi to meet him in 2008, died two years later, Singh ensured that a condolence letter reached the family via the High Commission of India, Islamabad. The letter dated September 30, 2010, while mentioning that "Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was saddened to learn about the unfortunate demise" of Ali, added: "The Prime Minister has very warm memories of his childhood friendship with Janab Raja Muhammad Ali and the meeting with him in New Delhi few years ago..." Singh's fluency in Urdu can also be credited to the fact that he studied at the local government primary school in Gah till Class 4 where his admission records are still preserved. However, his pain of losing his grandfather in the riots outweighed his childhood memories at Gah, and he never revisited the village despite several invitations from the neighbouring country.

In her book Strictly Personal: Manmohan and Gursharan, his daughter Daman Singh recorded, "When asked by his other daughter Kiki, if he ever wished to return to Gah, he gently replied, 'No, not really. That is where my grandfather was killed'." Singh though had offered prayers at Kartarpur Gurdwara in Pakistan where he visited via the corridor in 2019. 'The underprivileged child of Partition' In his last address to the people of India as the Prime Minister on May 17, 2014, Singh had humbly mentioned his Partition trauma, describing himself as "batwaare ke kaaran beghar hua bacha (a child who was rendered homeless due to the Partition)". "I owe everything to this country.. this great land of ours where I, an underprivileged child of Partition, was empowered enough to rise and occupy high office... It is both a debt that I will never be able to repay and a decoration that I will always wear with pride," he had said.

## Delhi pollution body finds JLN stadium clean month after NGT order



GNS News Agency, Jan 7

A month after the National Green Tribunal ordered the immediate restoration of JLN stadium post singer Diljit Dosanjh's concert in the national capital, the Delhi pollution body has inspected it and found it clean. Delhi Pollution Control Committee's (DPCC) report informed the NGT that it was the organiser's responsibility to maintain the cleanliness of a stadium, booked for non-sporting events. "The Diljit Dosanjh concert was held on October 26 and 27, 2024, inside the main JLN stadium and several armoured decks were used to cover the football ground for the public to stand on so that the ground condition was not hampered," it said.

According to the report, an inspection was carried out on December 19, 2024, a month after the tribunal's order directing the DPCC to restore the stadium to its original position, clear all the debris dumped during the event, and file an action taken report within two weeks. On November 19, 2024, the NGT passed the directions after taking a note of a news report which said, "The aftermath of the concert left the stadium grounds littered with trash, including broken glass bottles, beer cans, plastic wrappers, and other refuse and the mess was so significant that athletes were seen trying to clean up the stadium, but their efforts were in vain due to the sheer scale of the damage." According to the DPCC report dated December 27, an inspection was done to "ascertain the action taken by the Sports Authority of India (SAI)" on the issue.

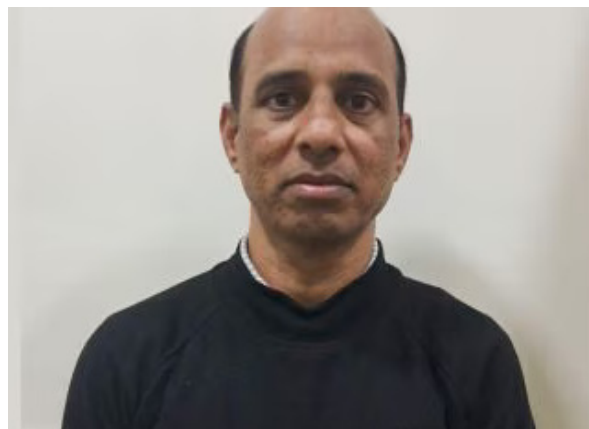
The pollution body said it inspected all areas inside the stadium premises and observed "cleanliness through-

out" with "no garbage or waste" dumped on the ground, spectators' seats, near gates or roads. The body even found all public entry and exit points clean. "JLN stadium is well equipped with several dustbins at regular intervals for usage of public, which were also found clean. There is a waste collection room in the stadium, where all the waste from all the dustbins is collected and stored, which is then cleaned weekly by the MCD trucks, as informed by SAI officials," it said. Citing the version of SAI officials, the report said only the inner ground and running tracks were closed for athletes during the concert but they could use the outer ground and its tracks as public entry was restricted there. On the tribunal's question over the rules for the use of stadia for such events, the report referred to SAI's statement and said the terms and conditions for such events include "during the booking period, cleaning and scavenging of areas booked/being utilised, will be the responsibility of the organiser and the same will be handed over to SAI in a neat and clean state after the program". If it was found unclean within 24 hours of the completion of an event, SAI would get the complex cleaned by an agency, with expenditures being borne from the organiser's security deposit, it said. It came on record that SAI approved and allowed non-sporting events across its stadia in July, 2013, in Delhi. Dosanjh's concert witnessed about 70,000 people in attendance, with trash littered on running tracks post event.

## Kautilya School of Public Policy signs MoU with Capacity Building Commission

Sangareddy: The Kautilya School of Public Policy (KSPP) at GITAM University, Hyderabad, and the Capacity Building Commission (CBC), Government of India, signed a knowledge partnership at the CBC office in New Delhi on Thursday. The signing ceremony was attended by the KSPP Dean, Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin, Dr Sharique Hassan Manazir, and the CBC delegation, including Dr R Balasubramaniam (Member—HR), SP Roy (Joint Secretary), Rahul Porwal, and Nikita Surana. Under this partnership, KSPP will provide customised learning resources, including Indic-centric case studies and real-time policy simulations that combine governance practices from India and global best practices.

## 50 SIM cards, changing locations: How accused in Mumbai hoarding collapse case evaded cops for 6 months



The accused would visit Lucknow in the past for work and knew the city well, and hence decided to hide there, a police officer said. The accused visited Lucknow in the past for work and knew the city well, and hence decided to hide there, a police officer said. Over a period of 6 months, Arshad Khan (42), an accused in the hoarding collapse case in Mumbai's Ghatkopar, changed 50 SIM cards to ensure he was not tracked down by the police. After every call he made, he disposed of the SIM card and kept changing phones too, to avoid being tracked. None of these calls were made to any family members, relatives, or friends. It was eventually human intelligence that led a crime branch team to his doorstep in Lucknow on Monday. Khan is one of the ac-

used in the Ghatkopar hoarding collapse case that took place on May 13 in which 17 persons died. No call made to family, friends

Ever since July, when he went missing, he was hiding out in Lucknow, police said. He did not make a single phone call to his family, relatives or friends. He did not even visit his native place Deoria in UP. For work purposes, he would visit Lucknow in the past and knew the city well, due to which he hid there, an officer said. Based on this, a police team was camping in Lucknow but he kept changing his location and also went to other states intermittently. He did not stay at any place for long, an officer said. Whenever he had to coordinate with anyone to fix a place where he could hide, he would use a new SIM card and then dispose of it. Police narrowly missed catching accused in past

The police had zeroed in on the houses of a few business associates with whom he had dealings in the past. The police team narrowly missed him a couple of times before they eventually nabbed him on Monday from Lucknow. The police are trying to find out on whose behalf Khan took Rs 84 lakh from Ego media company that owned the hoarding which collapsed. The police have made four arrests in the case prior to this including the owner of Ego Media Bhavesh Bhide. The police suspect the payments made in blank cheques to Khan, who has no relations to the company, was a payout. Khan has, however, said earlier that since he got some work done for Ego Media, he received a payout for the same.

## Foggy mornings, chilly nights to continue in West Bengal throughout first week of the year: IMD

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

West Bengal is experiencing a wave of bone-chilling winter with no significant change in minimum temperatures expected in the next few days. However, there's a chance of rain in some North Bengal districts over the weekend, including Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Kalimpong. These areas might see light rain or even snowfall, particularly in the hilly regions. At present, Darjeeling is experiencing a temperature of 14 degree Celsius while the highest temperature on Thursday is expected to be the same. The lowest temperature is expected to dip to around 5 degree Celsius. In Purulia, it is currently 20 degree Celsius, warming up slightly to a high of 22 degree Celsius and a low of 10 degree Celsius. Kalimpong is experiencing a mild day with a current temperature of 18 degree Celsius and an expected low of 8 degree Celsius. "While South Bengal will remain dry, North Bengal is bracing for potential rainfall this weekend. Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Kalimpong are particularly likely to experience light rain or even snowfall, especially in the higher elevations," said a weather office official. The cold wave has persisted across the state, impacting both urban and rural areas. Kolkata saw a slight dip in minimum temperatures from Wednesday to Thursday, with readings around 14 degrees Celsius. Western districts have recorded even lower temperatures, dipping below 9 degrees. Despite the chill, tourist spots in North Bengal remain crowded with visitors. "Dry weather is most likely to occur over Sikkim and the districts of Sub-Himalayan West Bengal. Shallow to moderate fog is likely to prevail at one or two places in the morning over Sikkim, Kalimpong, Alipurduar, Malda, and South Dinajpur districts... Dense fog, reducing visibility is likely to prevail in the morning at one or two places in Darjeeling, North Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, and Coochbehar districts," the IMD predicted. While South Bengal anticipates



dry weather, North Bengal's forecast includes the possibility of rain on January 7. The Meteorological Department predicts light rain for Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Kalimpong on Saturday and Sunday, with snowfall possible in the hilly terrain. Morning fog is also expected in several districts across both North and South Bengal, including Kalimpong, Alipurduar, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Paschim Bardhaman, Nadia, and Murshidabad. A western disturbance, expected to enter northwest India around January 4, may bring a slight rise in temperatures by the weekend. Kolkata's maximum temperature is expected to remain around 22 degree Celsius. "The strong winds are blocking the entry of cold winds due to the influence of successive western storms. However, a western storm may enter northwest India on January 4. As a result, temperatures may rise over the weekend," said an official. The minimum temperature in Kolkata was 14.2 degree Celsius early on Wednesday morning. Compared to that, the temperature dropped by one degree on Thursday and stood at 13 degree Celsius. In other words, the mercury dropped by 4 degree Celsius in the first two days of the year.

## Elderly woman in Mumbai loses Rs 1.5 crore to 'Delhi cops' after she sends parcel to daughter in US

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

The cyber wing of Mumbai police have launched an investigation into a case where a 78-year-old woman from South Mumbai allegedly lost Rs 1.51 crore to online fraudsters who posed as personnel from the Delhi Police. According to the Mumbai Crime Branch, the woman was coerced into transferring the amount, on being informed by the "police officials" that the parcel box she had sent to her daughter in the US through a courier service firm on December 5 contained mephedrone drug, and US dollars.

In her complaint to the police, the elderly woman said she sought a courier service from a company to send some edible items to her daughter. The police said that the woman, a relative of a builder in South Mumbai, was initially threatened by a "courier firm staff" and later by "police officials" who had a video call with her under the pretext of taking legal action. "She opted for the courier service on December 5, and the following day, she received a call from an individual identifying himself as Amit Kumar from the courier company, who claimed that the parcel contained expired passports, Aadhaar card, credit cards, 2,000 grams



of mephedrone and \$2,000 in cash," said a police officer. The fraudsters threatened to arrest her in a money laundering case and sent forged arrest warrants and investigation reports. They forced her to share her bank account details made her transfer Rs 1.51 crore. The woman lodged a complaint with the police helpline and later submitted an application to the South cyber police station. The police registered a case of extortion, cheating and criminal intimidation. "We are trying to trace the culprits through the bank account details and call data records," said an officer.

## In 2024, Pune records country's largest dip in housing launches, sales not hit: Report

The year 2024 saw Pune recording the largest dip in terms of launches of tenements in the country, according to a report by real estate advisory firm Anarock. It said, Pune's housing market saw a dip of 28 per cent in new launches in 2024 as compared to the previous year, subsequently reflecting on the sales of apartments amid a steady year-on-year 14 per cent rise in prices. Anarock's report released last week showed that 60,540 housing units were launched in Pune as against 83,625 units in 2023. The lower supplies, however, have not affected the sales much, with the city's market reporting sales of 81,090 units in 2024 as compared to 86,680 units in 2023 – a dip of 6 per cent.

The report said an average housing cost in the country has risen by 13-30 per cent with Pune's market reporting a rise of 14 per cent. "On an annual basis, housing prices rose between 13-30 per cent across the top seven cities, primarily due to increased input costs and strong homebuyer demand," the report read. Shashank Paranjape, managing director, Paranjape Schemes (Construction) pointed to a labour shortage which had caused delays in completing the projects, especially in the affordable housing segment. "The decline in affordable housing is another factor that impacted the overall growth. The outskirts of Pune that traditionally were seen as pillars of affordable housing are now seeing an overall price appreciation. It is becoming difficult for the first-time home buyers to purchase a property in these lo-

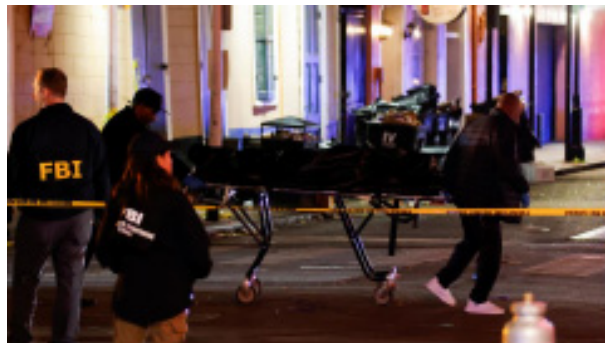


cations," he said.

Price rise notwithstanding, Pune has seen steady sales which has decreased the unsold housing stock in the city. As against 1,01,220 units which remained unsold by the end of 2023, there were only 80,670 housing units by the end of 2024. Pune, the report said, had seen the highest decline of 20 per cent in unsold stock in the country. Anuj Puri, chairman of Anarock Group, said residential prices would stabilise in the coming year. "Average residential price hikes will stabilise in the coming year, though there will be a steady growth amid increased input costs and high demand. 2025 will also see generous new supply infusions by listed developers, who have significant inventory lined up.



## New Orleans attack: Global condemnation, condolences



GNS News Agency, Jan 7

International condemnation poured in on Wednesday (January 1, 2025) for the attack on a crowd of New Year's Eve revellers in New Orleans which killed at least 15 people and wounded dozens more. "New Orleans, so dear to the hearts of the French, has been struck by terrorism," French President Emmanuel Macron wrote on X, posting in both French and English. New Orleans was initially founded by colonists from France and the attack took place in the Louisiana city's famed French Quarter. "Our thoughts are with the families of the victims and the injured, as well as with the American people, whose sorrow we share," Macron said. Law enforcement vehicles and people stand near the area near the scene where a vehicle drove into a crowd during New Year's celebrations, in New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S., January 1, 2025. Law enforcement vehicles and people stand near the area near the scene where a vehicle drove into a crowd during New Year's celebrations, in New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S.,

Christian Estrosi, mayor of the southern city of Nice, which suffered a car-ramming attack in 2016 that killed 86 people, also sent condolences. "The tragedy in New Orleans, a sister city of Nice, very painfully recalls our own... Our thoughts go out to the families and the lives mowed down in mid-New Year's celebrations," he said on X. Britain "The shockingly violent attack in New Orleans is horrific," said British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on X. "My thoughts are with the victims, their families, the emergency responders and the people of the United States at this tragic time." China "We are shocked by this violent attack," Beijing's

foreign affairs spokeswoman Mao Ning told reporters. "China always opposes any violent and terrorist acts targeting civilians." "We mourn the victims, and express our sympathy to their families and those injured." "Ukraine" Horrified by the attack in New Orleans, US, which has claimed innocent lives and left many injured," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky posted on X. "We trust that those responsible for this terrible act will be brought to justice. Violence, terrorism, and any threats to human life have no place in our world and must not be tolerated. Our deepest condolences to the families of the victims... Ukraine stands with the American people and denounces violence." "European Union" I am deeply saddened by the deliberate attack on those celebrating New Year's in New Orleans," the European Union's top diplomat, Kaja Kallas, posted on X. "There is no excuse for such violence... We stand in full solidarity with the victims and their families during this tragic time." "United Nations

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres "strongly condemns" the attack and "extends his condolences to the families and loved ones of those who lost their lives", according to a statement from his spokesperson. "He also wishes a swift recovery to those persons injured." "Germany" This is terrible news from New Orleans," German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in a post on X. "People celebrating happily are torn from their lives or injured by senseless hatred. We grieve with the families and friends of the victims and wish all those injured a quick recovery." "Israel" Deeply saddened by the terrorist attack in New Orleans," Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar wrote on X. "My heartfelt condolences go out to the families of the victims. Wishing a swift recovery to the two injured Israeli citizens and all the wounded... Terror has no place in our world." "Saudi Arabia" Saudi Arabia "condemns and denounces" the attack, its foreign ministry said in a statement on X. "Turkey" We are deeply saddened by the attack that took place in New Orleans, USA," Turkey's foreign ministry said in a statement. "We extend our condolences to the families and friends of those who lost their lives... We hope that the motive for the attack will be revealed as soon as possible and that those who might be responsible will be held accountable before justice."

## Tesla Cybertruck explodes outside Trump hotel in Las Vegas, killing one

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

At least one person was killed and seven wounded when a Tesla Cybertruck exploded outside a hotel belonging to US President-elect Donald Trump in Las Vegas, police said Wednesday (January 1, 2025). U.S. President Joe Biden said authorities were investigating any links between the Las Vegas explosion and an attack earlier Wednesday in New Orleans, where a truck plowed into a crowd of New Year's revelers, killing at least 15.

However, Mr. Biden cautioned that no such links had yet been found. The FBI and local law enforcement said they believed the Tesla blast was an isolated incident. The electric vehicle pulled up to the Trump International Hotel's glass entrance before a "large explosion," Las Vegas Sheriff Kevin McMahon told reporters. Video footage shows the stainless steel truck parked at the hotel entrance before bursting into flames, followed by smaller explosions that appeared similar to fireworks. Mr. McMahon said there was "one deceased individual inside the Cybertruck," while seven people received "minor" injuries. He said the hotel had been evacuated. He told a later news conference that the back of the truck contained gasoline and camping fuel canisters, as well as "large firework mortars." Mr. McMahon also said the fact that it was a Cybertruck "really limited the damage... because it had most of the blast go up through the truck and out," noting that the glass doors of the hotel, just a few feet away, "were not even broken by that blast." Mr. Biden said authorities were probing "any possible connection with the attack in New Orleans." "Thus far, there's nothing to report on that score," he said. FBI agent Jeremy Schwartz described the Las Vegas blast as "an isolated incident."

"We do not believe that there's a bunch of folks out there supporting this or helping this," Mr. Schwartz said. Tesla chief Elon Musk said the explosion was "caused by very large fireworks and/or a bomb carried in the bed of



the rented Cybertruck," adding in a post on his social media platform X that it was "unrelated to the vehicle itself." Mr. Musk said earlier the "whole Tesla senior team" was investigating the blast, adding: "We've never seen anything like this." Police said they were still working to establish the cause of the explosion. U.S. media, including NBC and CBS, reported that authorities were investigating it as a potential terror attack, citing unidentified sources. Musk-Trump "concerns" The truck had been rented in Colorado through the carsharing company Turo, police said. There had been indications that the suspect in the New Orleans attack had been inspired by the Islamic State group, Mr. Biden said. Mr. McMahon said they had "no indication" so far that the blast in Las Vegas had any similar links to the jihadist group. However, he added: "It's a Tesla truck, and we know Elon Musk is working with President-elect Trump, and it's the Trump tower."

"So there's obviously things to be concerned about there and that's something we continue to look at," Mr. McMahon said. Mr. Musk, who backed Trump in the November election and was named by the Republican to head up a commission to trim government spending, said he would post more information "as soon as we learn anything."

## New textbooks in Bangladesh credit Ziaur Rahman for declaration of independence: media report



GNS News Agency, Jan 7

Bangladesh has introduced new textbooks that state that Ziaur Rahman declared the country's independence in 1971, replacing the previous ones crediting founding father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with the declaration, according to a media report. The new textbooks for primary and secondary students have several changes, The Daily Star newspaper said. The textbooks also removed the title "Father of the Nation" for Mujibur Rahman.

The new textbooks for the 2025 academic year will state that "on March 26, 1971, Ziaur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh, and on March 27, he made another declaration of independence on behalf of Bangabandhu," the paper quoted Prof AKM Reazul Hassan, chairman of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, as saying. "The information has been included in the free textbooks where the matter of the declaration was mentioned," he added.

According to the paper, writer and researcher Rakhil Raha, who was involved in the process of making changes in the textbooks, said they tried to free the textbooks from "exaggerated, imposed history." "Those who revised the textbooks found that it wasn't fact-based information that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman sent the wireless message (declaring independence) while being arrested by the Pakistani army, and so they decided to remove it."

Earlier, in the textbooks of classes one to 10, the information on who made the Declaration of Independence was changed according to the government in power, the paper said. It is widely believed among supporters of Awami League that Mujibur Rahman had made the announcement and that Ziaur Rahman, who was an Army major and later a sector commander of the Liberation War, merely read out the declaration upon Mujib's instructions. Earlier, Bangladesh decided to start the process of erasing the image of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from its currency notes as it phases out the old notes. The move came after the ouster of his daughter Sheikh Hasina as Prime Minister on August 5. His statues and murals bearing his image were targeted as his daughter fled to India.

## 10 wounded in mass shooting outside nightclub in Queens

New York: A group of men fired at least 30 gunshots into a crowd gathered outside a nightclub in New York's Queens on New Year's Day, injuring 10 people, mainly teenagers. The shooting happened on the same day a terror attack was carried out in New Orleans that killed 15 people. Police officers received multiple 911 calls around 11:18 pm on Wednesday for "several people" shot outside the Amazura nightclub in Jamaica, Queens.

Police said three to four males were walking toward the venue and opened fire over 30 times in the direction of a group standing in line outside the event, striking multiple vehicles. Six females and four males, ranging in age from 16 to 20, were struck by bullets, NYPD officials said at a press conference on Thursday. Police are searching for a light coloured sedan in connection with the shooting. None of the victims are in critical condition and all are expected to survive, according to the NYPD. The New York Police Department (NYPD) reassured the public that it was "not a terrorist attack."

## South Korea police raid Jeju Air, airport over fatal crash



GNS News Agency, Jan 7

South Korean police on Thursday (January 2, 2025) raided the offices of Jeju Air and the operator of Muan International Airport as part of the probe into the fatal crash of a Boeing 737-800 plane that killed 179 people. The flight was carrying 181 people from Thailand to South Korea on Sunday (December 29, 2024) when it issued a mayday call and belly-landed before slamming into a barrier, killing everyone aboard except two flight attendants pulled from the burning wreckage. Search and seizure operations at the Muan airport

Authorities carried out search and seizure operations at the Muan airport where flight 2216 crashed, a regional aviation office in the southwestern city, and Jeju Air's office in the capital Seoul. South Korean and US investigators, including from Boeing, have been combing the crash site since the disaster to establish a cause, with both black boxes found and decoding work ongoing. "In relation to the plane accident... a search and seizure operation is being conducted from 9 am (0000 GMT) on January 2 at three locations," police said in a statement sent to AFP. "The police plan to swiftly and rigorously determine the cause and responsibility for this accident in accordance with the law and principles." "Police told AFP the search warrant was issued, and Yonhap reported it was approved on charges of professional negligence resulting in death, citing officials. South Korea has also announced it will inspect all Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated by its carriers, focusing on the landing gear, which appears to have malfunctioned during the Sunday crash.

South Korea's acting president, Choi Sang-mok, said Thursday that "immediate action" must be taken if that probe

uncovered any issues with the aircraft model. Authorities have previously said 101 aircraft of the same model were in operation by six different airlines. "As there's great public concern about the same aircraft model involved in the accident, the transport ministry and relevant agencies must conduct a thorough inspection of operation maintenance, education, and training," Choi said Thursday. "If any issues are found during the inspection, please take immediate corrective action," he added. The accident is the worst-ever aviation disaster on South Korean soil.

South Korean authorities have completed the initial extraction of data for the cockpit voice recorder, but the flight data recorder was damaged and was to be sent to the United States for analysis, officials said Wednesday. Country's airports are being inspected. Officials initially pointed to a bird strike as a possible cause of the disaster, and have since said the probe was also examining a concrete barrier at the end of the runway. Dramatic video showed the plane colliding with it before bursting into flames. The land ministry said in a statement that the country's airports were also being inspected "to evaluate the installation locations" around their runways. As the investigation continued, families travelled to the crash site for the first time to pay their respects on Wednesday and some returned the following day with cardboard boxes to collect their loved ones' belongings. On Thursday at the airport, a monk led prayers close to the crash site, while inside the airport, the stairs were covered in colourful post-it notes left by mourners. "Honey, I miss you way too much," one of them said. "Even if you faced lonely and painful moments in death, may you now soar like a butterfly," another read. Relatives also left flowers and food near the site including tteokguk -- rice cake soup traditionally enjoyed in South Korea on New Year's Day -- as they said their goodbyes, many in tears. Local media reported on a handwritten note, seemingly written by the pilot's brother, that was placed alongside gimbab -- a popular Korean dish -- and a drink cup near the crash site. I feel heartbroken when I think about the struggles you faced alone (in your last moments)," it read. "You were truly amazing and did so well, so I hope you can now find happiness in a warm place. Thank you, and I'm sorry." On Wednesday -- a public holiday in the South -- hundreds of people queued up to pay their respects at an airport memorial altar set up to honour the victims. So many people came to the memorial that the queue stretched for hundreds of metres and the local cell phone network was overloaded, local media reported.

## Tracing cardiology's mechanisation: the move from pills to one-time solutions for heart ailments

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

Over the past 10 years, we have fine-tuned the ability to replace valves without open-heart surgery. Photograph used for representational purposes only | Photo Credit: istock.com/Mohammed Haneefa Niza When 78-year-old Nancy Adams was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation, a common electrical disorder involving the heart, we decided on medication to control her heart rhythm and also a blood thinner to prevent a stroke associated with this disorder. The medicine worked, but she was miserable. Mrs. Adams kept saying that something didn't quite feel right. She was never a 'pill person,' she said, and the thought of taking medication for the rest of her life was something she couldn't wrap her head around. We then decided on ablation, a procedure where the extra impulses could be detected and eliminated by either thermal or electrical energy delivered by a catheter. She successfully underwent the procedure by an electrophysiology colleague and was a transformed woman during the next visit. "Thank you," she gushed as she hugged me. "I feel like I have my life back. Now if I can only get off this blood thinner," she continued, "I am covered with bruises, and I can barely afford the medication." "Well, there is a procedure for that," I said. "If your symptoms persist, a device implanted in your heart can prevent blood clots from forming, and you should be able to come off the blood thinners."

Lifelong pills vs one-time procedure Medicine, particularly cardiology, has been evolving from the traditional pill to a one-time mechanical solution for problems. Most people do not want to take pills for the rest of their lives. It all however, boils down to risk: the low-risk side effects of taking medications over time versus the one-time risk of a procedure. The mechanical innovation started in 1977; I was six years old when a young, dynamic Andreas Greuntzig developed the concept of angioplasty, the first mechanical intervention into the beating heart, based on the simple principle of literally smashing plaque against the artery wall. It took a decade, as I was preparing for medical school, for this to develop to the next stage, the coronary stent — a cylindrical piece of slotted metal mounted on a balloon to act as a scaffold to keep the artery open.

One of the most frustrating parts of being a cardiologist is the inability to predict sudden death despite medications. In 1980, the first internal defibrillator was placed into a patient (via a surgical implant) to detect and prevent sudden cardiac death, but it took more than another decade to invent and approve the current device - in 1993 - as I was in the midst of medical school. Over the next decade, as I was doing my cardiology fellowship, researchers figured out how to deliver medication locally to the artery to prevent re-narrowing; the drug-eluting stent was approved in 2003. The same year, the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved of the left ventricular assist device, a mechanical pump that could function on the left side of the heart as a destination or long-term therapy. New inventions, innovations

The following two decades as a practicing doctor saw me learning and relearning my craft as a flurry of new inventions kept us on our toes. Devices that could drill through calcium in arteries and balloons that emit sonic pressure waves to break up and soften calcium in arteries, enabling better delivery of stents materialised. The refinement of pacemakers to allow for better synchronisation of heart function and devices that could better treat heart failure by stimulating the receptors in the carotid artery and changing the way the nervous system affects the heart in heart failure came in. Little clips implanted through veins that could decrease the leak from valves and helped the heart pump more efficiently thereby reducing heart failure symptoms also became part of our arsenal. These devices have proven beneficial when patients cannot tolerate traditional heart failure medications. Not to be left behind, electrophysiologists (electrical specialists) have honed their ablation skills to perfection, making most electrical disorders treatable without requiring lifelong medications. Over the past 10 years, we have fine-tuned the ability to replace valves without open-heart surgery. As of this writing, another clip has just been shown to effectively reduce leaks in the tricuspid valve. Our structural team is already training on this procedure. De-



vices are under investigation to help treat angina in patients with disease in the distal arteries that stents cannot access. Neuroprotective devices to protect the brain as we perform these complex procedures are being investigated, as are devices replacing dysfunctional parts of the heart. Strokes and blood clots in the lungs are now being mechanically treated.

The price of illness All this technology comes at a price — a USD 4.8 trillion tag, the healthcare budget for the country in 2023. Unfortunately, most of these inventions are not entirely curative and are geared to treat the sickest of us. Some inventions can help in the preventive phase, like catheters that affect the nerve supply to the kidneys to manage high blood pressure and injectables to treat obesity and high cholesterol. The new administration has promised to address the root causes of our health issues, which continue to be our diet, exercise patterns, and lifestyle choices. The best things in life are free: exercise, sunlight, sleep, stress management, avoidance of alcohol, refined sugar, and smoking. For the rest, there is always a credit card and, hopefully, new government efforts to get us to eat healthy.

## Impeached South Korean President Yoon issues defiant message

Seoul: Impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol issued a defiant statement to his conservative supporters gathered outside his residence in the capital of Seoul, vowing to "fight to the end" against what he called "anti-state forces," as law enforcement prepared to detain him over last month's martial law decree.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials has a week to execute its detention warrant against Yoon, issued by a Seoul court on Tuesday. The warrant came after Yoon defied several requests to appear for questioning and blocked searches of his office, hindering an investigation into whether his short-lived power grab on Dec 3 amounted to rebellion.

Oh Dong-woon, the anti-corruption agency's chief prosecutor, has indicated that police forces might be deployed if Yoon's security service resists the detention attempt, which could occur as early as Thursday. But it remains unclear whether Yoon can be compelled to submit to questioning.

In a message to hundreds of supporters gathered outside his residence on Wednesday evening, Yoon said he would continue to fight against anti-state forces "violating our sovereignty" and putting the nation in "danger." He applauded his supporters for their efforts to protect the country's "liberal democracy and constitutional order" and said he was watching their protests on live YouTube broadcasts, according to a photo of the message shared by Yoon's lawyers. The liberal opposition Democratic Party, which drove the legislative vote that impeached Yoon on Dec. 14 over the martial law imposition, accused the president of trying to mobilize his supporters to block his detention and called for law enforcement authorities to execute the warrant immediately.



## Coldplay's Chris Martin follows this 'good' practice for mental health: 'I do it every morning'



GNS News Agency, Jan 7

We all have good and bad days. It is no different for Coldplay's Chris Martin, who recently opened up about a "good mental health" practice to deal with not-so-good emotions. "This is a good mental health thing for real. If you take a piece of paper and a pen for 12 minutes every day and you write down everything that's bothering you, and after 12 minutes, when you rip it up or throw it away or you burn it, it's a very good way of working out what's going on for you," shared Martin, in an appearance on the latest episode of Loose Women Talkathon on ITVX. According to Martin, it helps release the things you'd like to say but can't, and it also serves as a cleansing ritual. "I do it every morning. It's a miracle. Rather than texting someone angrily or, you know, being aggressive at work, it sort of gets out and then if there is something left even after those 12 minutes, you can gather yourself and say it calmly," said Martin.

Dealing with anger while going through a tough day can be challenging. Navigating anger can be overwhelming as each day feels like a new set of challenges that are difficult to accomplish. "This emotional uncertainty affects not only mental health but also physical well-being, for example, long sleepless nights, overthinking, restlessness, and racing heartbeat," said Dr. Santosh Bangar, senior consultant psychiatrist, Gleneagles Hospital, Parel. Writing down your thoughts helps to try and acknowledge the range of emotions you are feeling at that particular time. "Shifting your attention or being distracted can be effective in managing anger or such extreme, negative emotion. If anger bouts keep affecting your daily lifestyle, relationships, productivity, and work life, then it is necessary to consult an expert. Your doctor may suggest lifestyle modifications and counselling to manage it," said Dr Bangar. Journaling helps reduce stress and anxiety levels, which automatically helps get over the anger felt. "Journaling helps process thoughts and emotions. While it is not necessary to rip apart or burn the paper, some may find it extremely calming practice. So, it is essential to personalise these routines based on individual health conditions and preferences," said Dr Haricharan G, senior consultant physician, HoD, internal medicine, Gleneagles Hospitals, Lakdi Ka Pul, Hyderabad. However, clinical psychologist Kamna Chhibber shared that, in general, it may help, but it doesn't necessarily work for everyone. "For some people, writing would mean thinking about something and then focusing on it, which makes it run more in the mind instead of letting it go. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. It may work for some and not for others," said Chhibber.

## Al Jazeera broadcasts suspended by Palestinian Authority

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

The Palestinian Authority has ordered the suspension of broadcasts by Qatar-based Al Jazeera across the Palestinian territories, accusing the network of incitement, official media reported. Al Jazeera is already banned from broadcasting from Israel amid a long-running feud with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government. In September, armed and masked Israeli forces also raided the Al Jazeera office in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, saying it was "used to incite terror." The military issued an initial 45-day closure order, prompting the Palestinian foreign ministry to condemn "a flagrant violation" of press freedom.



Late Wednesday, the official Palestinian news agency Wafa said "Al Jazeera's insistence on broadcasting inciting content and reports characterised by misinformation, incitement, sedition and interference in Palestinian internal affairs" led to its suspension. An Al Jazeera employee contacted by AFP confirmed that the network's office in Ramallah had received a suspension order on Wednesday. "The specialised ministerial committee, comprising the ministries of culture, interior and communications, has decided to suspend broadcasts and freeze all activities of Al Jazeera satellite channel and its office in Palestine," Wafa reported. "The decision also includes temporarily freezing the work of all journalists, employees, crews and affiliated channels until their legal status is rectified due to Al Jazeera's violations of the laws and regulations in force in Palestine," it said. The network condemned the decision in a statement, saying it "aligns with Israeli occupation practices targeting its media teams". It accused the Palestinian Authority, which has partial administrative control in the West Bank, of "attempting to deter Al Jazeera from covering escalating events in the occupied Palestinian territories" including in Jenin and its refugee camp. The PA's security forces have been engaged in weeks of deadly clashes with armed militants in Jenin, in the northern West Bank.

Later on Wednesday, the channel aired images of what appeared to be Palestinian security officers entering the network's office in Ramallah and handing over the suspension orders. Militant group Hamas, rivals of Fatah which dominates the PA, condemned the decision to ban the network.

"This decision aligns with a series of recent arbitrary actions taken by the Authority to curtail public rights and freedoms, and to reinforce its security grip on the Palestin-

ian people," Hamas said in a statement. "We call on the Palestinian Authority to immediately reverse this decision ... It is crucial to ensure the continuation of media coverage that exposes the occupation and supports the steadfastness of our people." "Incitement campaign" Islamic Jihad, allied with Hamas in the Gaza Strip, also criticised the decision. "We condemn the authority's decision to close Al Jazeera's office in Palestine when our people and our cause are in dire need to convey their suffering to the world," the group said in a statement. Tensions between the Doha-based network and the Fatah movement of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas have risen in recent weeks following the channel's coverage of the clashes in Jenin. In late December, the channel condemned what it said was an "incitement campaign" by Fatah against the network in some areas of the occupied West Bank. "This campaign follows the network's coverage of clashes between Palestinian security forces and resistance fighters in Jenin," it said in a statement at the time. "During its coverage of the tragic events in Jenin, Al Jazeera ensured the presence of all voices, including those of the resistance fighters and the spokesperson for the Palestinian security forces." The security forces of the PA have been engaged in deadly clashes with gunmen since early December, triggered by the arrests of several militants. They are fighting members of the Jenin Battalion, most of whom are affiliated with either Islamic Jihad or Hamas, whose October 7, 2023 attack on Israel triggered the Gaza war. Al Jazeera continues to work in Gaza, where Hamas seized control in 2007. The violence in Jenin refugee camp, a stronghold of armed groups and a frequent target of Israeli military raids, has killed 11 people including PA security personnel, militants and civilians.

## Pakistan reduces pension benefits of retired civil, armed forces personnel



GNS News Agency, Jan 7

The Pakistan government has drastically reduced pension benefits of retired civil and armed forces personnel to reduce a growing pension bill which has already swelled over Rs 1 trillion, according to a media report. The Ministry of Finance on Wednesday (January 1, 2025) issued three separate notifications to discontinue multiple pensions, reducing both the first home-take pension and also lowering the base for determining future increases in pensions. The Express Tribune newspaper reported. After debt servicing, defence and

development, the pension is the fourth largest expenditure in the budget, the paper said. According to the Ministry of Finance's notification, on the recommendations of the Pay and Pension Commission of 2020, "it has been decided that henceforth, in an event where a person becomes entitled to more than one pension, such person shall only be authorised to opt to draw one of the pensions". Instead of taking a pension on the basis of the last drawn salary, the new pensioner will get a pension based on the average salary of the last two years.

The Finance Ministry stated that all the existing instructions on multiple pen-

sions should stand amended with immediate effect. The changes will not be applicable to people who have already retired, except in cases where multiple pensions are paid. It also ended the annual compounding of the pension and any increase would be treated separately from the base pension, a concept that is similar to the ad-hoc salary increase that is not made part of the basic salary to avoid compounding. The changes will take effect from January 1 and will be applicable to both retired civil and military personnel. Many serving federal government employees, who are taking salary and pension, would

also be affected by the changes. The finance ministry's notifications stated that the changes in the pension rules have been made on the basis of recommendations given by a commission constituted by the government of former prime minister Imran Khan in 2020. For the current fiscal year, the government has allocated Rs 1.014 trillion in the budget for paying pensions and its lion's share, as 66 per cent or Rs 662 billion has been allocated for military pensions. There is an increase of 24% in the pension bill compared to the last year, which is funded from the budget and is not sustainable.

After these changes, it is expected that in the next decade, the pension bill will significantly reduce and will become manageable. Apart from the new changes made in the pension system, the government already abolished the traditional pension scheme for the civilian employees hired from July 1, 2024. The scheme will also be applicable to employees of defence forces from July 1, 2025. Instead, the new employees have been provided with a system of contributory pension based on the contribution made by them through salary

## Biden to give second highest civilian award to leaders of January 6 congressional panel



GNS News Agency, Jan 7

President Joe Biden is bestowing the second highest civilian medal on Liz Cheney and Bennie Thompson — the lawmakers who led the congressional investigation into the violent January 6, 2021, U.S. Capitol riot by Donald Trump's supporters, and who Trump has said should be jailed. Mr. Biden will award the Presidential Citizens Medal to 20 people in a ceremony Thursday (January 2, 2024) at the White House, including Americans who fought for marriage equality, a pioneer in treating wounded soldiers, and two of the President's longtime friends, former Sens Ted Kaufman, D-Del, and Chris Dodd, D-Conn. "President Biden believes these Americans are bonded by their common decency and commitment to serving others," the White House said in a statement. "The country is better because of their dedication and sacrifice." Mr. Biden last year honoured people who were involved in defending the Capitol from the rioters, or who helped safeguard the will of American voters during the 2020 presidential election, when Trump tried and failed to overturn the results.

Ms. Cheney, who was a Republican representative from Wyoming, and Thompson, a Mississippi Democrat, led the House committee that probed the insurrection. Ms. Cheney later said she would vote for Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris in the 2024 Presidential race and even campaigned with her, raising Mr. Trump's ire. Mr. Biden has been considering whether to offer preemptive pardons to Cheney and others Trump has targeted. Mr.

Trump, who won the 2024 election and will take office on January 20, still refuses to back away from his lies about the 2020 Presidential race and has said he would pardon the rioters once he takes office. During an interview with NBC's "Meet the Press," Trump said, "Cheney did something that's inexcusable, along with Thompson and the people on the un-select committee of political thugs and, you know, creeps," claiming without evidence they "deleted and destroyed" testimony they collected.

"Honestly, they should go to jail," he said. Mr. Biden is also giving the award to attorney Mary Bonauto, who fought to legalize same-sex marriage, and Evan Wolfson, a leader of the marriage equality movement. Other honorees include Frank Butler, who set new standards for using tourniquets on war injuries; Diane Carlson Evans, an Army nurse during the Vietnam War who founded the Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation; and Eleanor Smeal, an activist who led women's rights protests in the 1970s and fought for equal pay.

He's also giving the award to photographer Bobby Sager, academics Thomas Valley and Paula Wallace, and Frances Visco, the President of the National Breast Cancer Coalition. Other former lawmakers being honored include former Sen. Bill Bradley, D-N.J.; former Sen. Nancy Kassebaum, the first woman to represent Kansas; and former Rep. Carolyn McCarthy, D-N.Y., who championed gun safety measures after her son and husband were shot to death. Mr. Biden will honour four people posthumously: Joseph Galloway, a former war correspondent who wrote about the first major battle in Vietnam in the book "We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young"; civil rights advocate and attorney Louis Lorenzo Redding; former Delaware state judge Collins Seitz; and Mitsuye Endo Tsutsumi, who was held with other Japanese Americans during World War II and challenged the detention. The Presidential Citizens Medal, created by President Richard Nixon in 1969, is the country's second highest civilian honour after the Presidential Medal of Freedom. It is awarded to those who "performed exemplary deeds of service for their country or their fellow citizens."

## North Korea's Kim vows toughest anti-U.S. policy before Trump takes office

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said he will implement the "toughest" anti-U.S. policy, less than a month before Donald Trump takes office as U.S. president, the country's state media reported Sunday (December 29, 2024). Trump's return to the White House raises prospects for high-profile diplomacy with North Korea. During his first term, Mr. Trump met Mr. Kim three times for talks on the North's nuclear programme. Many experts however say a quick resumption of Kim-Trump summitry is unlikely as Mr. Trump would first focus on conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. North Korea's support for Russia's war against Ukraine also poses a challenge to efforts to revive diplomacy, experts say. During a five-day plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party that ended Friday (December 27, 2024), Mr. Kim called the U.S. "the most reactionary state that regards anti-communism as its invariable state policy." Mr. Kim said that the U.S.-South Korea-Japan security partnership is expanding into "a nuclear military bloc for aggression." "This reality clearly shows to which direction we should advance and what we should do and how," Kim said, according to the official Korean Central News Agency. It said Mr. Kim's speech "clarified the strategy for the toughest anti-U.S. counteraction to be launched aggressively" by North Korea for its long-term national interests and security. KCNA didn't elaborate on the anti-U.S. strategy. But it said Mr. Kim set forth tasks to bolster military capability through defence technology advancements and stressed the need to improve the mental toughness of North Korean soldiers. The previous meetings between Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim had not only put an end to their exchanges of fiery rhetoric and threats of destruction, but they developed personal connections. Mr. Trump once famously said he and Mr. Kim "fell in love." But their talks eventually collapsed in 2019, as they wrangled over U.S.-led sanctions on the North.



North Korea has since sharply increased the pace of

## Taiwan President vows to boost the island's defence budget as China threats rise



GNS News Agency, Jan 7

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te pledged to strengthen the island's defences in the face of escalating Chinese threats, saying in a New Year's address on Wednesday that Taiwan was a crucial part of the "line of defense of democracy" globally. China claims Taiwan, a self-ruled democracy, is part of its territory and has vowed to annex the island by force if necessary. "Authoritarian countries such as China, Russia, North Korea and Iran are still collaborating to threaten the international order that is based on rules. This has severely influenced the Indo-Pacific region and the world's peace and stability," Mr. Lai said in his address. Beijing has used a variety of tactics in recent years to increase pressure on Taiwan, from sending warships and fighter jets toward the island on a near-daily basis to pressuring Taiwan's diplomatic allies to switch their recognition to China. In response, Taiwan has been reforming its military and buying weapons from the United States, its biggest unofficial ally. "Taiwan must be prepared for danger in times of peace. It must keep increasing the national defence budget to strengthen its defense capabilities in order to show the determination to defend the country. Every single person has the duty to protect Taiwan's democracy and security," Mr. Lai said.

Mr. Lai also issued a warning about the need to uphold democracy domestically, addressing recent political controversies in Taiwan. The Kuomintang-led opposition passed three bills last month after legislators got into a physi-

cal tussle over them. The bills are designed to make recall votes for politicians more difficult and change the budget allocation for the central government. Critics said another of the bills would paralyze the Constitutional Court. Mr. Lai's party has said the bills, which still need to be accepted by the executive branch, are a threat to democracy. "Domestic competition among political parties is a part of democracy. But domestic political disputes must be resolved democratically, within the constitutional system. This is the only way democracy can continue to grow," Mr. Lai said.

There are concerns that Russia could give North Korea advanced weapons technology in return, including help to build more powerful nuclear missiles. Russia and China, locked in separate disputes with the U.S., have repeatedly blocked U.S.-led pushes to levy more U.N. sanctions on North Korea despite its repeated missile tests in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions. Last month, Mr. Kim said that his past negotiations with the United States only confirmed Washington's "unchangeable" hostility toward his country and described his nuclear buildup as the only way to counter external threats.

## Bangladesh court rejects bail plea of Chinmoy Krishna Das

GNS News Agency, Jan 7

A court in Chattogram has refused to grant bail to Chinmoy Krishna Das, the former ISKCON leader, following a hearing held with heightened security on (January 2, 2025). The Daily Star reported. The bail request was turned down by Chattogram Metropolitan Sessions Judge Md. Saiful Islam after about 30 minutes of hearing both parties' arguments, according to Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Advocate Mofizur Haque Bhuiyan. Earlier today, 11 Supreme Court lawyers were set to participate in the bail hearing of Chinmoy Krishna Das. While speaking to The Daily Star, lawyer Apurba Kumar Bhattacharjee had said, "We have come to Chattogram under the banner of Ainjibi Oikya Parishad, and we will move for Chinmoy in the court for his bail." Earlier on December 3, 2024, Chittagong court had fixed January 2 for bail hearing as the prosecution submitted a time petition and there was no lawyer to represent Chinmoy. The unrest in Bangladesh stems from the sedition charges filed against Chinmoy Krishna Das for allegedly raising a saffron flag above Bangladesh's national flag in Chittagong on October 25. His arrest on November 25 sparked protests, culminating in violent clashes between his followers and law enforcement outside the Chattogram Court Building on November 27.



## Banks' non-food credit growth slows to 11.8% in November



The growth in non-food credit of scheduled commercial banks slowed to 11.8 per cent in November 2024 on a year-on-year (y-o-y) basis, compared to 16.5 per cent, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data showed. The industry segment witnessed a loan growth of 8.1 per cent in November 2024, compared to 5.5 per cent in the year-ago period. Within industry, though loans to micro and small segment saw moderation, it continued to see a double digit growth at 10.1 per cent in November 2024 (vs 16.9 per cent in November 2023).

Advances to medium industry rose by 20 per cent in November 2024, as against 12 per cent a year-ago, the RBI data showed. In November 2024, the overall bank credit, which consists of food and non-food credit, grew by 11.8 per cent, as against 16.3 per cent in the corresponding period of the previous year. The food credit grew by 22.9 per cent. The non-food credit of banks stood at Rs 170.02 lakh crore (y-o-y) in November 2024, compared to Rs 152.05 lakh crore last year, the data of sectoral deployment of bank credit for November 2024 showed. These figures exclude the impact of the merger of HDFC Ltd with HDFC Bank, which came into effect from July 1, 2023. Non-food credit is generally used as a gauge of bank lending. It is categorised into four broad categories – agriculture and allied activities; industry; services; and personal loans. Among these four, the credit offtake to personal loans segment has emerged as the prime driver of overall non-food credit growth in the past couple of years.

## Govt planning to ramp up food testing infrastructure to boost exports: Official

The Commerce Ministry is planning to expand food-testing infrastructure to enhance exports, a senior government official said on Wednesday. The Export Inspection Council (EIC), under the ministry, has initiated a detailed gap assessment study on food testing infrastructure for exports. "Although we have undertaken several measures, we are conducting a deeper analysis, both commodity-wise and region-wise. We are identifying gaps in our food-testing infrastructure. We expect the study to be completed within 2-3 months, after which we will develop a comprehensive plan to expand the infrastructure in a more holistic manner," Nitin Kumar Yadav, joint secretary in the Department of Commerce, told reporters. The EIC is also set to launch an integrated traceability module to streamline and manage processes involved in inspection, testing, and certification for exports. Yadav added that the council is adopting advanced technologies such as IoT-based sampling techniques. New laboratories are being established in Ahmedabad, Faridabad, and Mangalore, he said. The EIC is also entering into mutual-recognition agreements (MRAs) and memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with various countries for different products, aiming for global recognition of its mechanisms and processes.

FTA talks on with UK, EU This initiative comes as India is negotiating free-trade agreements (FTAs) with the UK and the EU, thereby seeking to improve domestic standards. The export of food items also holds significant potential in markets such as the UAE, which signed an FTA with India in 2022. "We are striving to establish MRAs for India. We are also studying the requirements of other countries and building capacities to facilitate these agreements," Yadav stated.

The EIC has significantly increased testing facilities across the country, with the number of accredited laboratories rising to 78 and the number of export establishments approved through the EIC system increasing from 794 to 1,446 over the past decade, according to the ministry. "Export certificates accepted by importing countries have nearly doubled in a decade, increasing from 61,000 to over 120,000. The laboratory ecosystem has

Bank advances to industry increased to Rs 37.98 lakh crore in November 2024 from Rs 35.12 lakh crore in the year-ago period. Advances to the micro and small segment stood at Rs 7.57 lakh crore and credit to the medium industry was at Rs 3.4 lakh crore as of November 2024. "The heartening part of growth to industry is that there have been double digit growth rates registered for the MSME segment. In the case of the large industry, growth is at 6.1 per cent, higher than last year when it was 2.9 per cent," a Bank of Baroda report said.

In the reporting month, growth in personal loans grew by 16.3 per cent (Rs 53.73 lakh crore) in November 2024, compared to a rise of 18.7 per cent (Rs 46.18 lakh crore) in the year-ago period. Within personal loans, the housing loans (including priority sector housing loans) registered a growth of 18 per cent in November 2024, compared to a 14.8 per cent growth in the corresponding month of 2023.

The growth in credit card outstanding moderated to 18.1 per cent in November 2024, compared to a growth of 34.2 per cent in the corresponding month of the previous year. The RBI's November 2023 step to increase risk weights on unsecured loans – personal loans and credit cards segment, in order to check the unprecedented growth, has helped in the moderation. Vehicle loan segment also witnessed a moderation in growth at 10.3 per cent in November 2024, as against a growth of 20.6 per cent in the year-ago period. Excluding the impact of merger, credit to agriculture and allied activities registered a growth of 15.3 per cent (y-o-y), as against 18.1 per cent for the corresponding month of the previous year, the data showed. The growth in credit to the services sector was 14.4 per cent, compared to 22.2 per cent for the corresponding period of the previous year. The slowdown was primarily due to lower growth in credit to non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) (7.8 per cent in November 2024 vs 18.9 per cent last year same period) and trade segment (14.5 per cent vs 20.6 per cent). However, credit growth (y-o-y) to commercial real estate (26.3 per cent vs 17.1 per cent) and computer software (22.5 per cent vs 5.6 per cent) accelerated, the RBI data showed.



expanded from 21 recognised labs in 2013-14, accredited to ISO 17025 standards, to 78 labs in 2024-25, ensuring timely testing and facilitating exports," the ministry stated. EIC certification recognised by major global regulators

Notably, the EIC's certification system is recognised by major international regulatory bodies, including those of the European Union, the United States, Australia, Turkey, Korea, and Japan, among others. Active participation in organisations such as Codex Alimentarius, ISO, and the WTO has enabled the EIC to advance science-based standards, reduce trade barriers, and promote seamless international trade, the ministry added. The EIC is also set to launch a user-friendly online portal integrating traceability modules, a Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS), and E-Health features. This portal will streamline and manage end-to-end processes involved in inspection, testing, and certification for exports. Advanced technologies, such as IoT-based sampling techniques, are being adopted, and geographical expansions to locations such as Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh, are underway. New laboratories are being established in Ahmedabad (Gujarat), Faridabad (Haryana), and Mangalore (Karnataka), while the EIC continues to operate from its headquarters in New Delhi. It maintains a robust operational network of Export Inspection Agencies (EIAs) located in Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Kochi, supported by 24 sub-offices at major ports and export hubs.

## Air India first airline to roll out Wi-Fi for select domestic flights

Tata group airline Air India has rolled out Wi-Fi internet connectivity services on board domestic and international flights operated by select aircraft in its fleet. With the rollout of this service, Air India has become the first Indian airline to offer internet connectivity on domestic flights. Wi-Fi will be offered free of charge on domestic flights operated by select aircraft for a limited introductory period. The airline did not specify the length of the introductory period. Over time, Air India plans to progressively offer the service on other aircraft in its fleet.

For now, Wi-Fi connectivity will be available on the airline's Airbus A350, Boeing 787-9, and select Airbus A321neo aircraft. The airline was already offering internet connectivity on board international flights operated by these aircraft as part of an ongoing pilot programme. On-board internet services are fast becoming a standard offering, particularly among major full-service carriers (FSCs) globally. Air India has ambitions to be counted among the world's foremost FSCs.

Aircraft need special hardware Apart from the new A350 planes, which Air India started operating in 2024, the other aircraft are understood to be those of erstwhile Vistara, which merged with Air India in November. All these aircraft are equipped with special hardware that is required to offer internet connectivity on board. Vistara had been offering internet connectivity on select international flights prior to the merger. On board the Vistara aircraft, the service was facilitated by another Tata group company — Nelco — in partnership with Panasonic Avionics Corporation. The same service is being extended to Air India's domestic flights operated by the select fleet, it is learnt.

"Connectivity is now an integral part of modern travel. For some, it is about the convenience and comfort of real-time sharing, while for others, it is about greater productivity and efficiency. Whatever be one's purpose, we are confident that our guests will appreciate having the option of connecting to the web and enjoy the new Air India experi-



Tata group airline Air India has rolled out Wi-Fi internet connectivity services on board domestic and international flights operated by select aircraft in its fleet.

ence on board these aircraft," said Air India's Chief Customer Experience Officer Rajesh Dogra. Accessible on Wi-Fi-enabled devices such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones with iOS or Android operating systems, the in-flight Wi-Fi will also allow guests to connect multiple devices simultaneously. "The deployment of Wi-Fi on domestic routes follows an ongoing pilot programme on international services operated by the Airbus A350, select Airbus A321 neo, and Boeing B787-9 aircraft serving international destinations including New York, London, Paris, and Singapore. As with the domestic offer, Wi-Fi is complimentary for an introductory period. Air India will progressively roll out the service on other aircraft in its fleet over time," Air India said. According to Air India, passengers will have to enable Wi-Fi on their devices and select the 'Air India Wi-Fi' network to access internet connectivity on board the select aircraft. They will then be redirected to the Air India portal on the device's default browser, and will need to enter their details, including PNR and last name. After this, the device will be connected to the Wi-Fi network.

## 'I am not as fit as I used to be,' admits MS Dhoni; shares what he does to stay healthy and active



MS Dhoni might not be representing India as part of the men's cricket team anymore, but once a sportsman always a sportsman. So, when asked about his current exercise routine, Dhoni confessed to "playing a lot of sports" to stay fit as age catches up with him. "I am not as fit as I used to be. A lot of effort now needs to be there on what you are eating and I am doing very specific things to be fit for cricket. We are not fast bowlers so our requirements are not that intense. So, what helps me in between eating the right thing and going to the gym, is playing a lot of sports," Dhoni said in a candid interaction with Eurogrip Tyres

#TreadTalks on YouTube.

He added, "When you are in a good physical state, you play different sports like tennis, badminton, or, football. That keeps me engaged. It is the best way to be in touch with fitness because it's not very boring to a lot of extent. You can have that banter with your friends whoever you are competing against. That gives you a lot of motivation too. You want to be fit. You want to win games. You want to go back to the board and play all the different sports," Dhoni, 43, continued. Taking a cue, let's understand the benefits of playing different sports. According to fitness coach Varun Rattan, playing different sports diversifies stress on different muscle groups and joints, which decreases the chances of overuse injuries.

Citing a study published in the American Journal of Sports Medicine, he said that spending more than eight months annually in one sport nearly triples the risk of overuse injuries in the hip or knee. "This is because specialisation often leads to repetitive motions that can cause excessive wear and tear on specific body parts. Playing different sports seasonally provides natural periods of rest for specific body parts. It also reduces the risk of burnout and psychological stress," said Rattan.

## Why older adults remain highly vulnerable to diarrhoea, particularly in South Asia

Discover why South Asia's elderly face high mortality from diarrhoeal diseases despite global progress. Learn about the risks, causes, and preventive measures. Discover why South Asia's elderly face high mortality from diarrhoeal diseases despite global progress. Learn about the risks, causes, and preventive measures. A recent study published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases revealed a stark reality: despite significant progress in reducing global deaths from diarrhoeal diseases, older adults remain highly vulnerable, particularly in South Asia. This demographic, coupled with children under five, continues to account for the highest mortality rates worldwide.

The study, based on the comprehensive Global Burden of Disease (GBD) analysis conducted by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), highlighted that in 2021, diarrhoeal diseases caused 1.2 million deaths globally—a remarkable decrease from 2.9 million in 1990. However, the decline wasn't evenly distributed across all demographics or regions. Elderly Vulnerability: Those aged 70 years and older in South Asia had the highest mortality rate globally, with 476 deaths per 100,000 population. Regional Disparities: High-income countries reported fewer than one death per 100,000 children under five, while sub-Saharan Africa recorded over 150 deaths per 100,000 in the same age group. Declining DALYs: The burden of diarrhoeal diseases, measured in Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs), dropped from 186 million in 1990 to 59 million in 2021. Diarrhoea in South Asia, factors like limited access to clean water, poor sanitation, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure exacerbate these risks. (Representational)

Why older adults are at higher risk in South Asia Dr. Manisha Arora, Director of Internal Medicine at CK Birla Hospital, Delhi, explains that older adults are particularly susceptible to immunosenescence, or the natural decline in immune function. This issue is further compounded by pre-existing conditions such as kidney disease or heart disease, which complicate hydration management during diarrhoeal episodes. "Older adults often face a dilemma during diarrhoea," says Dr Arora. "Conditions like heart failure may require limited fluid intake, yet hydration is critical during diarrhoeal episodes. This contradiction, combined with



a reduced thirst mechanism and limited mobility, increases the risk of dehydration and its complications, including kidney failure and multi-organ failure." In South Asia, factors like limited access to clean water, poor sanitation, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure exacerbate these risks. Older adults often suffer from malnutrition, underlying health conditions, and social isolation, further elevating their vulnerability. Tackling the crisis To reduce mortality rates among the elderly, especially in vulnerable regions like South Asia, a multifaceted approach is essential, Dr Arora said: Improve Access to Clean Water and Sanitation: Safe drinking water and better hygiene practices can prevent diarrhoeal diseases. Strengthen Healthcare Infrastructure: Ensuring timely diagnosis and treatment is critical. Promote Vaccinations: Vaccines against pathogens like rotavirus can significantly reduce disease incidence.

Education and Awareness: Programs highlighting the importance of hydration and early treatment can help caregivers and patients. Focus on Elderly Care: Targeted interventions like fluid and electrolyte replacement therapy and managing comorbidities are vital. While global deaths from diarrhoeal diseases have seen a dramatic decline, the challenges faced by older adults, especially in South Asia, highlight the need for focused interventions. As Dr Arora points out, "Addressing dehydration, improving healthcare access, and promoting preventive measures are key to reducing mortality rates among the elderly."

## Nutritionist recommends having black cardamom when you feel extreme cold; we find out why

Many people feel extremely cold. While drinking warm water and beverages and wearing comfortable winter clothing help, according to integrative nutritionist Neha Ranglani, one remedy that always works is black cardamom. In an Instagram post, she claimed: "Keep black cardamom or badi elaichi handy. These pods have certain compounds that stimulate heat production in our bodies and keep us warm. It also improves blood circulation and blood flow so that the warmth is evenly distributed. It also balances kapha and vata dosha in the body, which is associated with feeling cold during winter. So, don't forget to carry it and enjoy the winter," shared Ranglani.

Is it effective?

Black cardamom is said to be packed with phenolic compounds that are said to be good for blood circulation in the body. In fact, badi elaichi, which has a smoky and pungent flavour, is considered thermogenic. Kanika Malhotra, consultant dietician and diabetes educator affirmed that black cardamom is indeed thermogenic, meaning it may increase heat production in the body. "This effect can be attributed to its bioactive compounds, such as cineole, terpinene, and camphor, which are known to stimulate metabolism and improve circulation. These compounds may enhance thermogenesis — a process where the body generates heat," said Malhotra. Additionally, black cardamom has carminative and digestive properties, which can



improve gastrointestinal function and stimulate the metabolic process, indirectly contributing to a warming sensation. According to a National Institute of Health 2015 study, black cardamom effectively reverses the signs of metabolic syndrome. "Black cardamom contains increased complex carbohydrates, and this component may improve gastrointestinal function as dietary fiber decreases obesity," it read. However, scientific studies specifically measuring its thermogenic effects are limited, noted Malhotra, adding that the "impact of chewing black cardamom for tackling extreme chill can vary depending on individual physiology."

## 'I have just gone through a breakup': Shenaz Treasury explores the healing power of singing bowl sound therapy in Mysore

Mysore is known for its rich cultural heritage, but for those seeking healing and inner peace, the city offers so much more. During a recent trip, actor and content creator Shenaz Treasury discovered the transformative practice of singing bowl sound therapy. The experience, guided by an expert healer, was nothing short of magical and helped her navigate a challenging phase in her life. In a post published on Instagram, she mentioned, "I have just gone through a breakup so it was the perfect break for me."

What exactly is sound therapy?

Singing bowl sound therapy, originating from Tibetan traditions, uses sound vibrations to promote healing. Dr Shorath Arora, chief yoga instructor at Himalayan Iyengar Yoga Centre, explains, "When the bowl is struck or rubbed, it creates vibrations that penetrate the body, promoting re-

laxation." The body, composed mostly of water, efficiently conducts sound, helping activate the parasympathetic nervous system and reducing stress. The rhythmic tones synchronise brainwaves to alpha or theta states, inducing deep relaxation and meditative states. Additionally, sound therapy can unblock energy pathways, restoring balance and harmony. Addressing emotional or physical challenges Yes, sound therapy can be customised for specific challenges. Dr Arora states, "Low-frequency vibrations can activate the vagus nerve, reducing stress and anxiety." Bowls tuned to the heart chakra help release blockages and promote self-love for emotional healing. Sound therapy may also aid physical pain by improving blood circulation and reducing stiffness, and it helps with sleep disorders by inducing delta brainwaves for deeper sleep.



## Boney Kapoor pleaded with Lata Mangeshkar for 4-5 months to feature in Pukar song: 'She came to Hyderabad, shot late at night'



Mangeshkar on board, since Mother Teresa was no more. He said, "I think God was kind. I pleaded, requested, and somehow she saw my madness and passion. I showed her the film, whatever we had shot till then. I said, 'Only you can do justice to this.'"

The producer further added, "In fact, when the situation was thought of, Rajkumar Santoshi told me, 'Boney, I want either Mother Teresa or Lata Mangeshkar. I need a very pious personality to sing this song.' Mother Teresa wasn't there, she had already passed away, and there wasn't any other choice left for me but to get Lata Mangeshkar." Boney had to follow her for months after which she finally gave a nod to his film. "I followed her for 3-5 months. I used to meet her everyday and talk to her. She was very sweet and consented. She even came to Hyderabad and was there for a week. We shot at nights and she wasn't keep too well those days. She had some illness, but she was there! She liked the situation and song as well. I feel blessed, I am the only filmmaker who got Lata Mangeshkar on screen and sang in a film. It was a big deal, it still is, to get her on board to sing in a film," he said. For the unknown, Lata Mangeshkar passed away due to COVID-related complications in 2022. She created history and her own legacy with melodious tracks in different languages. Meanwhile, sung by the nightingale, Ek Tu Hi Bharosa was written by Majroor Sultanpuri and Javed Akhtar.

Late singer Lata Mangeshkar, known as the nightingale of India, recorded over 50,000 songs in 14 languages during her singing career. However, the legendary singer never wanted to make an appearance in a movie before filmmaker Boney Kapoor convinced her to sing a song in his 2000 film Pukar, starring Anil Kapoor and Madhuri Dixit. In a recent conversation, Boney recalled that the film's director Rajkumar Santoshi had challenged him to either get Lata Mangeshkar or Mother Teresa to appear in the prayer song, "Ek Tu Hi Bharosa". In an interview with O2 India, Boney shared that he gave all his energy to get Lata

## 'Yash Johar sent 52 crew members to Egypt just to shoot a song, used a Boeing 737 like a bus': Nikkhil Advani recalls K3G expenses

Filmmaker Nikkhil Advani opened up about the exorbitant spending that went into Dharma Productions films directed by Karan Johar, citing the example of Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham. He said that Yash Johar wanted the world for his son, and left no stone unturned in realising his dreams. Nikkhil also narrated a story about traveling to Egypt to film a song with a large crew. He said that they had a chartered plane, which they used as a bus.

In an interview with Digital Commentary, he said, "Imagine Yash Johar's vision. Yash Johar's vision was that even if there's a blank screen for three hours after his son's name comes up at the end of a film, people should clap. Spending Rs 3 crore on a song was nothing. When we were making Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham, 52 of us went to Egypt to shoot one song. It isn't like Egypt is a small country. One location was in the west, the other was in the east. But we had a plane. A Boeing 737. It used to wait for us on the tarmac, 52 people were flying and coming back. We were using a plane like a bus. That's what Yash Johar was like." Nikkhil said that he tries to inculcate the work culture that he learned at Dharma into his own employees. "He would receive Shah Rukh Khan at the airport, and also receive a spotboy at the airport," Nikkhil said.

In an earlier interview with Film Companion, Nikkhil had narrated a story about K3G going over-budget by Rs



30 crore. "He took the paper on which we had written the costs, folded it, put it in his pocket and said, 'Ok, go and make the film.' It was a huge number back in 2000. On the first day of the shoot, we were filming Bole Chudiyan, with 200 dancers, 300 junior artistes and the entire star cast was there... Then he removes the same piece of paper, unfolds it, and says, 'Art budget was Rs 3 cr for the entire film, you have spent Rs 3.6 cr on one set.' He tore the paper and said, 'Now go and make this film.' The eventual budget of the film was Rs 54.5 cr."

## Govinda was cheated by producers, reveals wife Sunita: 'I would tell him that you're being fooled, fight for his dues'

Sunita Ahuja, the wife of Bollywood actor Govinda, has been the backbone of his career, managing his work and ensuring he gets his due. In a recent conversation, Sunita revealed the struggles she faced while handling Govinda's finances, particularly when it came to dealing with unscrupulous producers. "I used to look after Govinda's work. Being a manager, I have seen people not giving him money, and Govinda would say, 'Jaane do uska show think nahi gay hoga...' (let it go, maybe his show wasn't a success)," Sunita recalled in an interview with Hauterrfly. However, she wouldn't let things slide so easily. When confronted with such situations, she would retaliate, saying, "Why so? You danced! Didn't you? You worked hard! Woh tumhe bewakoof bana raha hai, mujhe pata chal raha hai" (He's fooling you, and I'm aware of it). "Sunita described Govinda as an "emotional person" who would often trust others too easily. According to her producers would take advantage of his good nature, making excuses for not paying him on time. "Chichi bhaiya, tickets didn't get sold. I'll give you your Rs 20-25 lakh later," they would say. But Sunita wouldn't have any of it. She would call them out, saying, "Kisko ullu bana raha hai? (Who are you trying to fool?) I was there, standing and seeing, I saw the show was full house." Sunita's no-nonsense



sense approach often led to her being perceived as the "bad person" in the industry. However, she remains unapologetic about her actions. "I didn't bother if they cursed me. I would stand in their face and get his dues. I'd ask Govinda to do his job and dance, and leave everything else to me," she said.

## 'I was first choice for Maine Pyar Kiya, was dropped as I was taller than Salman Khan': Kapil Sharma Show's Upasana Singh

Maine Pyar Kiya launched Salman Khan and Bhagyashree as leading movie stars. While Salman had appeared in a small role in Biwi Ho Toh Aisi, this was his first film as a leading hero but while selecting the leading lady opposite him, director Sooraj Barjatya auditioned many actors and one of those actors was Upasana Singh. In a recent interview, Upasana revealed that she was not selected for the film because she was taller than Salman. She recalled that after her initial audition, director Sooraj Barjatya had selected her for the role but his father Raj Kumar Barjatya did not like her enough for the role of Suman.

In a chat with Siddharth Kannan, Upasana recalled that she auditioned for Bhagyashree's role in Maine Pyar Kiya. She shared that she met Sooraj when she first came to Mumbai. "He told me everything about the film, my role. And he selected me. After that, he said that you come tomorrow and meet my father but from my end, you are okay. The next day, I met his father and he rejected me. They are very sweet people so he did not say rejected but they did not call me again," she recalled.

Upasana said that many years later, she worked with



Rajshri on Main Prem Ki Diwani Hoon and that is when Raj Kumar Barjatya announced in front of the film's cast that Upasana was their first choice for Suman. Recalling an anecdote from the set, she shared, "He said, 'did you know who was our first choice for Maine Pyar Kiya?' Kareena, Abhishek and Hrithik were all there. I had never told people about it because I lost out the role."

## SS Rajamouli's next with Mahesh Babu launched with a special ceremony



By now, it must be clear that any film SS Rajamouli decides to make will be considered a spectacle. And this is not just by the Telugu audience or the Indian audience, but the world itself. Such has been the reach of his films, and the scale of his vision that Rajamouli has become an icon of Indian cinema. Now, after RRR, the filmmaker is embarking on an even grander film with a vision that stands taller than his previous movies. Marking his first collaboration with Mahesh Babu, one of Indian cinema's most important superstars, the project was officially launched with a muhurat pooja on Thursday. This is a collaboration that has been in the making for almost 15 years now, and finally, the ace filmmaker and the superstar are working on what is billed to be a globe-trotting action adventure.

Interestingly, Mahesh Babu hasn't attended a muhurat pooja of his film for a few years now. It is his wife and former actor Namrata who attends these events. The Dookudu

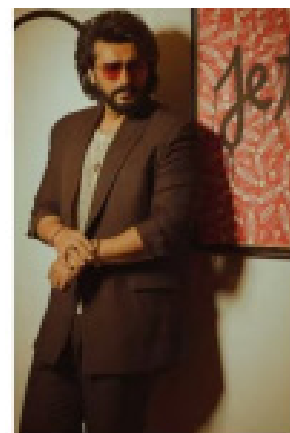
actor has made an exception for the much-anticipated film, which is expected to go on floors soon. Backed by KL Narayana, the film, tentatively referred to as SSMB 29, is expected to be the most expensive Indian film ever. There are reports that a major Hollywood studio would also be involved in the production of the film, which will be shot in global locations. There have been no official updates about the cast and crew of the movie except for the presence of Mahesh Babu, Oscar-winning composer MM Keeravani, writer Vijayendra Prasad, and cinematographer PS Vinod. SSMB 29 marks Vinod's second straight collaboration with Mahesh Babu after Trivikram Srinivas' Guntur Kaaram. The film is expected to bring in shades of mythology and weave it with an Indiana Jones-esque action adventure. There are reports that Priyanka Chopra-Jonas would play one of the leads alongside Mahesh Babu. If the makers have indeed signed on Priyanka, this could mark the actor's debut in Telugu cinema. It is also suggested that actor-filmmaker Prithviraj Sukumaran is playing a pivotal role in the film.

With Mahesh Babu expected to go through a makeover for the film, the muhurat pooja happened in utmost secrecy with no photos being leaked from the ceremony. It is expected that the makers would release an official video of the same taking care to not spoil the surprise by revealing anything about the film till the time is right. Just like all Rajamouli movies, SSMN 29 is also expected to be shot over a lengthy period of time. In fact, the film is speculated to be a two-parter, just like his Baahubali films, and will hit the screens in 2027 and 2029. Mahesh Babu too hasn't signed any other project, and is expected to give it his all in what will definitely be the biggest film in the careers of everyone involved in the project.

## Arjun Kapoor, Bhumi Pednekar-starrer Mere Husband Ki Biwi gets a release date

the makers announced the project with a release date. The film will hit the theatres on February 21. "Yahaan pyaar ki geometry thodi twisted hai—kyunki ye love triangle nahi, pura circle hai! #MereHusbandKiBiwi In Cinemas 21st February, 2025," a post read on the official Instagram handle of Pooja Entertainment. The makers also unveiled the film's motion poster, which shows a man's shoe caught between a stiletto and a Punjabi 'jutti.' Mudassar Aziz, who earlier helmed projects like Khel Khel Mein and Pati Patni Aur Woh, has directed Mere Husband Ki Biwi.

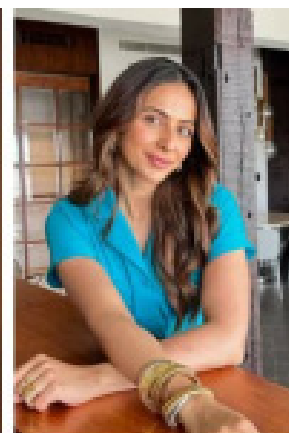
Excited about the film, Aziz in a press note said, "As a filmmaker, I've always believed in telling stories that



entertain and leave audiences of all ages smiling. I believe such films that endure and make for repeat viewings. Mere Husband Ki Biwi is a film that celebrates the quirks and complexities of romantic relationships. I've always been one for wholesome entertainers—



movies that bring friends and families together, make them laugh, and give them something to talk about. That's exactly what we've aimed for with this film." He added, "It's light-hearted, relatable, and full of moments that will stay with you long after you leave the theater."



I was eager to cast it exactly this way, and when the audience meets their characters, they will know just why!" The plot details have not been disclosed yet. The movie is produced by Vasu Bhagnani, Jacky Bhagnani, and Deepshikha Deshmukh.

## 'Karan Johar and I fought, didn't speak to Anil Kapoor and Govinda for 10 years': Nikkhil Advani on brittle Bollywood relationships

Filmmaker Nikkhil Advani, who broke out with the 2003 hit Kal Ho Naa Ho, opened up about his clash of egos with Karan Johar following the film's success, and his subsequent departure from Dharma Productions. Nikkhil described it as an "emotional" fallout, and said that both he and Karan were swayed by what people around them were saying. He said that he wasn't being given the due credit for Kal Ho Naa Ho's success, while Karan felt that Nikkhil was being given too much credit.

In a conversation with Hindi Rush, Nikkhil also opened up about bonds in the film industry, and said that he went without speaking to Anil Kapoor and Govinda for a decade. He did, however, eventually patch up with Karan. "I had left Dharma Productions because I was upset. Karan and I had fought. Some people were saying that I had directed all three of their biggest hits, while some were saying I hadn't even directed Kal Ho Naa Ho. There was a lot of confusion and anger." Nikkhil denied that he and Karan ever clashed creatively, and said that they were very close. "Even now, we are very close. Luckily, 20 years later, we have put everything behind us. Both of us have grown up. We've understood that films are films and life is life. I was very close to his father. It wasn't a creative clash; it was more of an emotional clash. 'How could you listen to other people who are saying this about me?' My whole thing was people aren't giving me credit for one love story, so I'll do six love stories," he said.

Nikkhil said that he admires the bond that Ajay Devgn



shares with Rohit Shetty, and the bond that Karan shares with Aditya Chopra and Shah Rukh Khan. He compared it to the equation that he shares with John Abraham. He said that there was a three-year period where people stopped taking his calls because his films weren't working. "Me and John drifted apart for a few years... I didn't talk to Anil Kapoor for 10 years, I didn't talk to Govinda for 10 years... When John and I meet, we don't talk about films or the industry. We talk about politics, food, fitness..." Nikkhil's last film was Vedaa, which featured John and Sharvari. The film didn't do well at the box office, and Nikkhil attributed its underperformance to its clash with Stree 2. He said that he was pushing for the film to be delayed, but it wasn't in his hands.

## Avinash Mishra slammed by Chahatt Pandey's mother and Vivian Dsena's wife Nouran Aly, threatened with legal action

This week, emotions are running high on Bigg Boss 18 as the contestants are getting to meet their family members. Chahatt Pandey, Eisha Singh, Shilpa Shirodkar, and Avinash Mishra's family members appeared on the show in the latest episode. While the contestants had an emotional outburst, Avinash was also in for some bitter schooling from Chahatt's mother. She slammed Avinash for character-assassinating her daughter on national television and even threatened legal action against the actor. Avinash and Chahatt, who worked together on a TV show earlier, shared a bittersweet equation on the Salman Khan-hosted reality show. This equation has seen nasty showdowns, where Avinash has made derogatory comments about it. Reacting to it, Chahatt's mother told Avinash that the Pandey family is very upset with the actor and they will never forgive him. Later she went on to add that Avinash would be dealt with legally for defaming her daughter on national television.

Shilpa Shirodkar also had a breakdown seeing her daughter Anushka. After meeting her mother, Anushka

spoke to Times Of India praising her mother. Anoushka also shared how Namrata Shirodkar and Mahesh Babu are proud of Shilpa's game on Bigg Boss 18.

She said that Namrata and Mahesh watch the show every day and are very proud of Shilpa. Anoushka also commented on Namrata and Shilpa's fight that was spoken about on the show, she shared that all sisters fight, but they don't miss a single interview. She also revealed how they want to see Shilpa winning the trophy.

In the upcoming episode, Vivian Dsena's wife Nouran Aly, and his daughter will also appear on the show. While Vivian will be emotional, he will later get a wake-up call from Nouran once again where she will expose Avinash's real side to him. Later, Nouran will also confront Avinash and question his loyalty towards Vivian. Bigg Boss 18's grand finale is scheduled for 20th January, while it has not been officially announced, there is no update about the show also getting an extension so far.



## Rohit Sharma opts to 'rest' for Sydney Test, Jasprit Bumrah to lead India in BGT finale



GNS News Agency, Jan 7

Rohit Sharma India's captain Rohit Sharma walks off the field after losing his wicket during play on the last day of the fourth cricket test between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne, Australia, Monday, Dec. 30, 2024. India Test captain Rohit Sharma is set to be 'rested' for the fifth and final Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against Australia. In his place, paceman Jasprit Bumrah is likely to walk out for the toss on Friday morning at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG). The Indian Express understands that Rohit has informed coach Gautam Gambhir and chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar of his decision to opt-out. The duo, it is learnt, have agreed.

This could also mean that the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne could have been Rohit's last for India given he might not be in the scheme of things for the next World Test

Championship Cycle, which begins with a tour to England in the summer. It is unlikely that India will qualify for the WTC final in the current cycle. Shubman Gill, who was dropped from the Melbourne Test, will return to the playing 11 in place of Rohit. He will bat at number three while KL Rahul will open the innings with Yashasvi Jaiswal. Rishabh Pant, meanwhile, is set to retain his spot in the team and Prasad Krishna will replace an injured Akash Deep, who was ruled out of the series finale on Thursday.

During training on match eve, Gambhir was seen having long, intense conversations with Bumrah while the fielding drills were going on. Rohit made a brief appearance at the nets and batted with side-arm bowlers — he, in fact, was among the last to walk in for practice. He was also missing during the routine slip practice sessions. Earlier in the day, when Gambhir was asked about Rohit's place in the playing 11, he remained non-committal. "Everything is fine with Rohit. We are going to have a look at the wicket and announce the playing XI tomorrow," Gambhir added. Rohit has of late struggled in Tests, averaging a mere 6.2 in the last three Test matches he played in Australia and 10.93 in the last nine Tests. His captaincy has also come under scanner following the whitewash suffered at the hands of New Zealand and home, and the two defeats to Australia in the ongoing series after India won the opening Test under Bumrah's leadership. Bumrah will have another opportunity to lead the team in the all-important fifth Test, which India must win to level the series 2-2 and retain the Border Gavaskar Trophy.

## Mid-Season Manager changes in the Tournament so far

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Liverpool leads the Premier League after 18 games of the 2024/25 season, just ahead of Arsenal. Wolves, Ipswich Town, Leicester City and Southampton are at the opposite end of the table, with Gary O'Neill and Russell Martin both fired on December 15th due to poor performances. Despite struggling in the early months of the season, Erik ten Hag was the first manager to be fired on October 28th, following Manchester United's worst start to a Premier League season. Steve Cooper was fired just over a month later, following a succession of ineffective Leicester City games that left them just above the bottom three. Last season, nine clubs switched managers, and four have already opted to make a change so far. Ruben Amorim was appointed as United's new head coach on November 1, 2024, and his official stint began ten days later. During his gardening vacation from Sporting CP, he scored a significant victory over Pep Guardiola's Manchester City, 4-1 in the UEFA Champions League, which provided hope for United fans. On November 24, his first match as head coach was against newly promoted Ipswich Town. Although Marcus Rashford scored in the second minute, the Red Devils were unable to preserve their lead, as Omari Hutchinson equalized for the home team.

Ten Hag's future at United was called into question in the summer after the club finished ninth in the Premier League. He won the FA Cup final, defeating Manchester City at Wembley Stadium. This achievement secured the Dutchman's employment during an end-of-season evaluation by new co-owners INEOS in June 2024. A month later, he signed a new contract with the club through June 2026. However, the Red Devils' results and performances were underwhelming in August and September, with only two wins in their first six matches. Furthermore, they went winless in all three Europa League games, finishing 21st out of 36 clubs. Ruud van Nistelrooy

Following the dismissal of ten Hag, van Nistelrooy was named temporary head coach as United looked for a long-term replacement. He won three of his four matches and drew one versus Chelsea. Two of the three victories came against Cooper's Leicester, 5-2 in the League Cup and 3-0 in the Premier League, both at Old Trafford. Amorim chose not to keep van Nistelrooy on his coaching staff, therefore



he departed the club to pursue his aim of becoming a Premier League manager. He didn't have to wait long, as Leicester signed him on November 29th for a two-and-a-half-year contract. Ben Dawson was the temporary manager for the Foxes' 4-1 defeat to Brentford on Saturday, November 30th. Van Nistelrooy's debut game in command of the Foxes took place on Wednesday, December 4th, against Julen Lopetegui's West Ham at the King Power Stadium. They won this game 3-1, then drew with Brighton & Hove Albion and lost to Newcastle United in their following two encounters. Vitor Pereira

Wolves confirmed on December 19th that Al-Shabab manager Vitor Pereira had replaced Gary O'Neill as Wolves coach. The 56-year-old has led 13 different clubs throughout his coaching career and won league titles in Portugal, Greece, and China. The Premier League club had to pay Al-Shabab £825,000 in compensation to lure him away from the Saudi Pro League club. Pereira will play his first game against Leicester City this weekend at the King Power Stadium. Wolves are now five points from safety in 19th place, with the opportunity to narrow the gap to two with a win at Leicester. Simon Rusk Interim Southampton manager Simon Rusk believes it will be a "great honour" to lead the squad against Liverpool, they lost the match to Liverpool and the next three games led by him. Rusk, who joined the club as manager of the under-21s in the summer, has been appointed interim manager following Russell Martin's dismissal on the 16th of December following the Saints' 5-0 home defeat to Tottenham. Southampton's under-21s are 16th in the Premier League 2 table, with 13 points from 10 games. Having only had one permanent role as a first-team manager when asked in his pre-match press conference if this would rank among his experiences.

## Rohit Sharma's place in the XI hanging by a thread, here is a look at the Predicted XI for the SCG Test



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India vs Australia, IND vs AUS 5th Test Predicted Playing 11 Today Match: With the fifth and final Test of the Border Gavaskar Trophy set to begin on Friday at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG), India see themselves faced with a plethora of decisions to make, none that would be easy. Doubts have already begun to spark as Gautam Gambhir attended the press conference without the company of Indian captain Rohit Sharma, and when asked about his absence, the head coach simply said it is enough for the head coach to be attending the conference. Questions were also raised about the finalisation of the Playing 11. "We will have a look at the pitch, and then decide the playing 11," said Gautam Gambhir. Another setback that crept up on the Indian team was that Akash Deep sustained a back injury, and will not be playing the next match as confirmed by Gambhir. Looking at his performances in India A vs Australia A, Prasad Krishna could be the one to take Akash Deep's place, if not for Harshit Rana. It is imperative for India to win the match in Sydney, not only to retain the Border Gavaskar Trophy, but to also have a chance at the final spot in Lord's for the World Test Championship final. And looking at his performances throughout the year, there are rumours that Rohit Sharma could potentially step down from captaincy for the upcoming match, if not exclude himself from the 11. Head Coach #GautamGambhir

addresses Here are the Predicted XI for both the teams, should Rohit Sharma not be included in the team India Predicted XI: Yashasvi Jaiswal, KL Rahul, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Rishabh Pant(wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Nitish Reddy, Dhruv Jurel, Prasad Krishna, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj. Australia Predicted XI: Pat Cummins (C), Sam Konstas, Usman Khwaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Beau Webster, Alex Carey (wk), Mitchell Starc, Scott Boland, Nathan Lyon.

## Debates in dressing room should not come out, says Gambhir

Sydney: Asserting that "debates" in the dressing room should not come out in public domain, India head coach Gautam Gambhir on Thursday said he has had some "honest" conversations with his players as only performance can help them stay in the set-up.

Amid reports of unrest in the dressing room, Gambhir sought to douse the fire by declaring that they were "just reports, not truth". "Debates between coach and player should remain in dressing room. Stern words. They were just reports not truth," Gambhir said in the pre-match press meet ahead of India's fifth and final Test against Australia, beginning here on Friday. "Indian cricket will be in safe hands till honest people stay in the dressing room. Only thing that keeps you in the dressing room is performance," he added. "There were honest words and honesty is important," he asserted. Gambhir also said he did not have any discussion with senior batter Virat Kohli and skipper Rohit Sharma except for strategies on how to win the Test matches. "Every individual knows what are areas to work on. We have only had one conversation with them (and that is) how to win Test matches," he said.

## Anushka Sharma bats for book on landmark judgements on women in India's armed forces



The actor took to the Stories section of her Instagram, and re-shared a post from the publishers of the book. She wrote on the picture, "In Her Defence, a tribute to the strength of women in the Armed Forces. Kudos to @navdeepsinghindia & @lenswandererart for this incredible work." Bollywood actor Anushka Sharma, who is currently on a sabbatical, has lent her support to the book 'In Her Defence: Ten Landmark Judgments on Women in the Armed Forces', authored by Navdeep Singh and Shivani Dasmahapatra.

On Thursday, the actor took to the Stories section of her Instagram, and re-shared a post from the publishers of the book. She wrote on the picture, "In Her Defence, a tribute to the strength of women in the Armed Forces. Kudos to @navdeepsinghindia & @lenswandererart for this incredible work (sic)." Earlier, Anushka lauded cricketer Ravichandran Ashwin after he announced his retirement from international cricket. The actor took to the Stories section of her Instagram, and shared a video from BCCI, and wrote, "A lasting legacy." Ravichandran Ashwin was one of the formidable forces of the Indian squad during his tenure in international cricket, and is considered to be one of the greatest spinners of all time. He was a part of the 2011 ODI World Cup winning squad and also the 2013 Champions Trophy, where in the 2013 final, he bowled the final over which led to India's win. Ravichandran also contributed to Indian cricket with his bat as he gave a strong support in the batting department in the lower order.

Currently, the actor is in Sydney along with her husband, India's batting legend Virat Kohli as the Indian cricket team gears up to take on the mighty Australian cricket team which has dominated team India for the better part of the series so far. Team India won the first match of the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy under Jasprit Bumrah's captaincy. However, the team failed to capitalise in the matches that followed after the skipper duties were transferred to Rohit Sharma. Sharma, who realised team India's dream of owning a World Cup trophy in June 2024 after the T20 World Cup win, has failed to deliver in the ongoing test series, and appears clueless in the face of inconsistent batting order which collapses easily under high pressure from the Australians. With the last test, India has to level the series by winning the game, to keep the window open for the upcoming edition of the WTC. For team India to qualify for WTC, Australia will be required to lose to Sri Lanka in their upcoming test series even after levelling the ongoing test series.

## The 2025 Formula 1 calendar has been released, Australia takes back season opener spot

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Formula 1 and the FIA released the calendar of the next Formula One World Championship season earlier on Thursday, and the schedule has seen a few changes. The Australian Grand Prix takes back the season opener, and will mark the start of the 75th season of the sport. The changes were made keeping in mind a smooth geographical flow of the season. With Ramadan coming in March next year, the Bahrain and Saudi Arabian Grand Prix have been moved to April, as opposed to March last season. These will return to being Sunday night races next season after being held on Saturday in the previous edition. The Chinese Grand Prix is scheduled to be held before the Japanese Grand Prix making it the second race of the season.

The 2025 F1 season will start two weeks later than usual, giving teams more time to make changes to their machinery ahead of the pre-season testing which will be taking place from February 26 to February 28 in Bahrain. Hungary and Belgium switch positions, with the



former taking back the spot of the final race before the summer break. It will be a double header between Belgium and Hungary which will then be followed by the summer break, during which the mandatory factory closure will take place. There will be six sprint races taking place this year, each happening in China, Miami, Belgium, USA, Brazil and Qatar, with Belgium being the new host over Austria.

## Rohit counsels Bumrah, Gambhir-Bumrah have long chat, Gill gets a tap on the shoulder and Jurel lines up for extended session

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Perhaps the clearest giveaway was Gautam Gambhir saying that they would look at the pitch before taking a call on Rohit Sharma — a rare utterance about a captain, and the signs were evident. Later, Sharma batted much later in the nets, and only for some casual throwdowns. Chances of him sitting the Sydney Test out, and Bumrah taking over, looked imminent. But it wasn't all gloomy. Earlier, Sharma, Jasprit Bumrah, and Gautam Gambhir had been chuckling away like kids. They sat in the bucket-seats outside their dressing room, at the end of a chaotic afternoon at the SCG where the head coach Gambhir had said a couple of hours earlier that the pitch will decide their final eleven when a specific question was asked if Rohit is certain to play the Test. Rohit had spotted something funny in the ground in front of him, pointed it out to Bumrah and even as both were laughing their heads off, Gambhir joined them. Rohit said something to him and the three musketeers of Indian cricket couldn't hold themselves back, doubling in laughter, and backslapping. Once the laughter subsided, they chatted for 5-7 minutes, before Gambhir gestured to them that it was time to go. The team had filed out already and when everyone was inside the bus outside the gate, Rohit walked out to a deafening roar from a small crowd lined up from the gate to the bus. "Rohit! Rohit!" went up the chants, and Rohit beamed a big smile as he sauntered into the bus.

It was a bizarre day to say the least. First the press conference by Gambhir, slated to start at 1:10 pm, started nearly half-an-hour later as word came out that the team was in a meeting. Outside, for a while, Gambhir and Bumrah were engrossed in a chat before Rohit joined them. We shall come to Gambhir's press conference later, but before that a few images from training that followed it. The first point of attraction was the slip cordon that took catching-practice to seamers. Rishabh Pant was the glove man, and standing next to him was Virat Kohli at first slip, KL Rahul at second, Nitish Reddy at third, and Yashasvi Jaiswal at the fourth. For the simulation of slip catchers for spinners, standing close to the catcher, were Shubman Gill and Rahul. While all this was going on, Gambhir and Bumrah were closeted in a long chat, just outside the Indian dressing room. A short while later, Gambhir went down to the arena, fist-bumped Gill and patted him on the back. Gill immediately found Bumrah approaching him — a shake of hands ensued before Bumrah patted him on the arm. It did seem like the moment Gill was possibly told that he will play.

Meanwhile, in the spot outside the dressing room vacated by Bumrah-Gambhir, were Rohit and Washington Sundar. Another long chat between the two with Rohit sitting and Sundar, standing and nodding away. Not long after Gill, Rohit, and Bumrah too were closeted at the same spot,

chatting away.

Later in the batting nets, Dhruv Jurel batted in the first lot at the nets, a scene that hasn't possibly played out in the series before as he would usually bat much after the main batsmen. Virat Kohli and rest joined him, while Rohit finally emerged from the dressing room, and took his position at the far end of the nets, standing and chatting with the video analyst Hari. Bumrah joined him shortly and both had a laugh. Kohli meanwhile, finished batting at the outdoor nets, went back in and emerged on the other side of the dressing room that overlooked the playing arena. He sat alone for 10-15 minutes, gazing into the distance. On the big screen, flashed a promo of India Australia Test series. An airplane flew above, and Rohit yanked his head up to look at the skies. A short while later, he left the nets, but emerged again with pads and took some throwdowns. He didn't face any bowlers, and at one point a yorker jammed into the bottom of his bat... "Mera bat yaar!" he would say. Unfortunately for him, that played out again, and once again he screamed in agony. It was a very casual throwdown session from him, that took the mind back to what Gambhir said in the press conference an hour or two earlier.

Gambhir had then walked the corridor into the press-room, taken his seat, and addressed a packed room of reporters from India and Australia. Initially, it seemed as if the combative persona of Gambhir was in attendance. Very early on, an Australian journalist asked about the traditional pre-game presser being for captains to address, and "is everything alright with Rohit?" Gambhir stiffened up, "Everything is fine with Rohit and I don't think it's anything traditional. The head coach is here and that should be fine."

Slowly he began to relax a bit more, and even smiled, a rare visual from him, though after an appeal to nationalism. Asked how he is handling the tough period of transition in the team, he said, "It's the role of not only the support staff but you people (the media) as well. How can you probably not only criticise them but try and help them out as well. Transition is not only for us. Transition happens for the entire country and all of us are in it together." As ever with Gambhir there were some frank talks. He talked about how the Indian team has "lacked fight" at times in this series. "We've got to keep fighting and that's why we love, every one of us love watching, playing, being part of Test cricket. I know we got to fight it out. And that's probably one area where we've lacked in this series." He was specifically asked about the reports of him giving a stern talk to the dressing room, as reported by The Indian Express, and he would admit that honest words were spoken. "There have been reports about your talk to the players; can you give us an insight of what your main message was to the group following Melbourne?" "Those are just reports. That's not the truth. And I don't think I need to answer to any reports to be honest," he stated.