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## Fire engulfs residential building in Bahadurpura

Hyderabad: Several people had a miraculous escape when fire broke out late on Saturday night at a residential building in Bahadurpura. Fire started in the cellar of a ground plus four storied building located at Kishanbagh, a little after midnight. It spread rapidly to the ground and upper floors. On noticing thick smoke engulfing the building, in order to escape the inmates tried to rush towards the ground floor only to notice that they could not move out due to thick smoke. They managed to reach the first floor balcony and sought help. The locals who noticed the people trapped inside the building placed ladders and rescued those trapped inside after breaking the windows and brought them out safely.

## Customs duties rationalised in Budget to strengthen India's economy: FM

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

New Delhi: The Centre has introduced customs duty rationalisation to ensure that the Indian economy becomes self-reliant, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in a post-budget interview with NDTV. Sitharaman was responding to NDTV Editor-in-Chief Sanjay Pugalia's question on whether the budgetary announcement of reducing customs duty on many automobiles, which will benefit companies like Tesla and Harley Davidson, is a signal amid US President Donald Trump's tariff announcements.

"We are looking at our own economy. We are looking to strengthen the foundation of the Indian economy, to make it a manufacturing hub," she said. The Finance Minister added that the announcement in the Union Budget of reducing customs duties aims at making cheap raw materials available for MSMEs, getting critical minerals and allowing Indian companies to import materials and export a finished product of high value.

Tariffs on Harley Davidson bikes were reduced further ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposed visit to the US. For motorcycles with an engine capacity not exceeding 1600 cc, the duty on CBUs (completely built units) has been slashed from 50 per cent to 40 per cent. For larger



motorcycles with engine capacity exceeding 1600 cc, the reductions are higher. Though basic customs duty on the import of cars and other motor vehicles has also been reduced, it is not clear whether their effective duty rates will change. The Finance Minister said the government has created a balance between strengthening the foundation of a 'Viksit Bharat' and equally focusing on key sectors like health, nutrition and education through welfare schemes. She also rejected criticism by the Opposition that the BJP-led Centre was only trying to woo voters in Bihar and Delhi through the announcements in the Union Budget.

## Congress slams government over 'neglect' of MGNREGS

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

The Congress on Sunday (February 2, 2025) lashed out at the government over keeping the MGNREGS budget stagnant and said the "neglect" of this crucial safety net exposes its indifference to rural livelihoods. The allocation for the flagship rural employment scheme Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Development Scheme (MGNREGS) was ₹86,000 crore, the same as last year.

In 2023-24, the allocation for MGNREGS was ₹60,000 crore, but additional funds were provided and the actual expenditure stood at ₹89,153.71 crore, the Budget document showed. No additional allocations for MGNREGS were made in 2024-25. In a post on X, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said that despite rising rural distress, the government has kept MGNREGS's budget stagnant at ₹86,000 crore for 2024-26. "This effectively represents a decline in the real (adjusted for price rise) allocations made to MGNREGA," he said. "To add insult to injury, estimates suggest that about 20% of the budget is paid towards clearing dues from previous years," Mr. Ramesh said. "This effectively reduces MGNREGA's reach, leaving drought-hit and poor rural workers stranded," he added.

It also precludes any increase in the wages paid to workers, Mr. Ramesh said. "Even in this ongoing Financial Year, the minimum average notified wage rate was in-



creased by only 7%. This is at a time when Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation is estimated to be 5%. MGNREGA is therefore ground zero for the national crisis of wage stagnation," he said. The government's neglect of this crucial safety net exposes its indifference to rural livelihoods, Mr. Ramesh said. The MGNREGS provides guaranteed 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to at least one member of every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. It keeps at least one-third of jobs for women. In the Covid pandemic year of 2020-21, when MGNREGS proved a lifeline in providing employment in rural areas amid huge reverse migration in the lockdown period, 1,11,169 crore was spent on the scheme, according to previous budget documents.

## Complaint filed against Sonia Gandhi in Bihar court for remark on President



Murmu was not tired. Rashtrapati Bhavan condemned the remark, without naming Sonia Gandhi. "While reacting to the media on the Hon'ble President's address to Parliament, some prominent leaders of the Congress party have made comments that clearly hurt the dignity of the high office, and therefore are unacceptable," Rashtrapati Bhavan said in a statement.

## Five pilgrims killed, several injured as bus falls into gorge in Gujarat



GNS News Agency, Feb 2

Five persons were killed and 17 others suffered grievous injuries after a private bus carrying pilgrims fell into a deep gorge in Gujarat's Dang district early Sunday (January 2, 2025) morning, police said.

The accident occurred at around 4.15 a.m. when the driver of the bus lost control over the wheels near the Saputara hill station, in-charge Superintendent of Police SG Patil said. The bus, carrying 48 pilgrims, broke the crash barrier and fell at a depth of about 35 feet into the gorge, he said. Five persons — two women and three men — died on the spot, the official said. "Ashok Nagar districts of Madhya Pradesh, the official said.

## Leopard sighted on a tree triggers panic among villagers in Asifabad

Kumram Bheem Asifabad: Sighting of a leopard in a forest near Chintapalli in Tiryan mandal, panicked locals on Sunday. Certain residents of the village spotted a leopard found on a tree when they were crossing the forests. They alerted the forest officials who visited the spot and advised the villagers not to use the route. The officials told the villagers to avoid sudden confrontation with the carnivore. They stated that steps were taken to divert the animal deep inside of the forests. Meanwhile, a video clip of the leopard went viral on social media platforms. Users of WhatsApp widely shared the clip on the groups of the instant messaging application.

## Vote BJP to power, I will personally serve Delhiites: PM

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

New Delhi: Calling himself a public 'sevak', Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday guaranteed Delhiites that he will toil very hard to address the problems of people from slum dwellers and the middle class after a BJP government is formed in the city. Addressing an election rally in R.K. Puram, PM Modi said he delivers what he promises as he highlighted the income tax benefits included in the Union Budget 2025-26 to put more money in the pocket of the middle class. He also hit out at the AAP government for a series of scams and said AAP leaders would be held accountable -- "Jinhone loota hai, unhe lotana hi padega" (The looters will have to pay back). Highlighting the Union Budget 2025-26, he said it is a guarantee for fulfilling Modi ki Guarantee to the four pillars of Viksit Bharat -- Garib, Kisan, Yuva and Nari.

"It is a Budget addressing the aspirations of Janata Janardan," he said, highlighting the economy's rise from 10th position to 5th position. The middle class will save thousands of rupees as tax on income up to Rs 12 lakh was made zero. "This is the biggest tax exemption relief offered to an Indian salaried person since Independence," he said. A person earning Rs 12 lakh annual income would have paid one-fourth of the income as tax under the government of PM Jawaharlal Nehru. Under PM Indira Gandhi's government, a person earning Rs 12 lakh would have lost Rs 10 lakh as tax, he said. Till 10 years back, under the Congress government a person earning Rs 12 lakh would have paid Rs 2.60 lakh as tax. But under our government, a person earning Rs 12 lakh would have to pay no tax, he said.



The PM claimed that the BJP's corruption-free government has spent each rupee for the development and welfare of the poor. The government has given free ration and pucca houses to the poor and spent money on building roads, hospitals, flyovers and promoting "Make in India". He said with the advent of Basant Panchmi the season starts changing and after three days Basant of vikas is going to arrive in Delhi with the formation of a BJP government. Pointing to the panic in the AAP, he said the broom's sticks are getting disintegrated as AAP leaders are deserting it, a reference to the recent decision of eight MLAs of the AAP to join the BJP. "The AAP government has been exposed before Delhi voters," he said. Earlier, he sought support from voters that the city needs a government which spends its energies on development and not fighting others. The AAP government has wasted 10 years by seeking votes on old promises. "But now Delhi voters will elect a BJP government," he said.

## KT Rama Rao holds Congress responsible for Telangana's crisis, farmer suicides

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

Hyderabad: Holding the Congress party responsible for the surge in suicide cases and the deteriorating state of affairs in Telangana, BRS working president KT Rama Rao on Sunday expressed concern over the State's fall from a prosperous "Annapurna" to once again a land plagued by starvation deaths and suicides. In a post on X, Rama Rao recalled that under the leadership of K Chandrashekhara Rao, Telangana had emerged as a significant agricultural hub, regarded as the "Annapurna" of the nation. His administration was credited with boosting the agricultural sector and instilling confidence among farmers. But the shift in governance to the Congress party has led to severe challenges. The State, once known for its agricultural prosperity, is now facing a lack of irrigation water, electricity shortages and an absence of support for farmers. These issues have contributed to a surge in farmer suicides. Other projects like the cleaning of the Musi River have reportedly disrupted the real estate sector, causing financial strain on aspiring entrepreneurs. Rama Rao criticised the current administration, led by A Revanth Reddy, for its inability to provide es-



sentia services and support to farmers. The lack of crop procurement, failure to deliver on promises of farmer support and unfulfilled loan waivers have left farmers in despair, he said. This shift from a prosperous State to one grappling with multiple crises has raised concerns among citizens. The call for action is growing louder as people demand a return to effective governance and support for the agricultural sector, he remarked.

## Trisha shines as unbeaten India trumps South Africa to clinch second successive U-19 Women's T20 World Cup title



GNS News Agency, Feb 2

Kuala Lumpur: An utterly dominant India flaunted their embarrassment of riches to win a second successive U-19 Women's T20 World Cup title with a nine-wicket shellacking of South Africa here on Sunday, the triumph giving a peek into the game's most perfectly calibrated youth structure. Having outclassed every team during their march to the final, India asserted themselves yet again, getting the job done with as many as 52 balls to spare while also becoming the first team to win the tournament without dropping a single game. The biggest star of the day was all-rounder Gongadi Trisha, who complemented her excellent 3/15 with an unbeaten 33-ball 44 while batting. South Africa, led by Kayla Reyneke, opted to bowl first, but their decision backfired quickly as India's three-pronged spin attack bowled them out for 82. Left-arm spinner Aayushi Shukla was the star of the show with figures of 4-2-9-2, while leg-spinner Trisha, who has also been a revelation with the bat, further underlined her all-round capabilities with her triple strikes with the ball. Trisha once again anchored India's chase with an unbeaten knock that was studded with eight fours. Vice-captain Sanika Chalke (26 not out; 22 balls, 4x4) sealed the victory with a powerful heave to the square-leg boundary, forcing the young Indian players, draped in the Tricolour, to break into wild celebrations. "I've dreamt of this moment for the past two years, and I can't believe I hit the winning runs — it's truly surreal. My teammates' support made all the

difference, and this moment is one I'll cherish forever," said Sanika after the match. Left-arm spinner Parunika (4-0-6-2) provided India with an immediate breakthrough, dismissing opener Simone Lourens for a duck as South Africa struggled from the outset. Right-arm seamer Shabnam Shakil (2-0-7-1) then removed the dangerous Jemma Botha, reducing South Africa to 20/2 by the end of the fourth over. The pressure intensified when Aayushi bowled Diara Ramlakan, further denting South Africa's innings.

## Kavitha raises concern over cut in funds for census

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

Hyderabad: Stating that the delay in conducting the Census was hindering India's growth, BRS leader and MLC K Kavitha has raised concerns over the big reduction in funds allocated for the Census, from Rs 8,754 Cr proposed in 2019 to just Rs 574 Cr now. She said the roadmap to progress cannot be built on mere idealistic statements but requires solid data and surveys that define the true picture of India. She stressed that data drives progress. Kavitha questioned how growth can be planned without understanding the people it serves and the socio-economic fabric of society. She highlighted that the absence of Census and caste data makes it challenging to formulate progressive policies that enable inclusive development. Kavitha demanded that the central government make an announcement regarding the Census and address the issue promptly.

Kavitha also pointed out that the drastic reduction in funds allocated for the Census is a significant concern. The initial proposal in 2019 was Rs 8,754 Cr, which has now been reduced to just Rs 574 Cr. This reduction in funds is seen as a major obstacle to conducting a comprehensive and accurate Census. Without adequate funding, it is challenging to carry out the necessary surveys and data collection that are essential for understanding the true demographic and socioeconomic landscape of the country.

# Indian Chronicle

English Daily

## World chess champ

IT'S been Gukesh Dommaraju's year. In September, he led the Indian team to a historic gold medal at the biennial Chess Olympiad. Now, the 18-year-old prodigy from Chennai has fulfilled a childhood dream by becoming the youngest world champion in chess history. He is the first Indian to hold the title after Vishwanathan Anand. Twists and turns marked the 14 games in Singapore. Gukesh and China's Ding Liren, the reigning champ, were tied with two wins each before the final game. Just when a draw seemed imminent, setting the stage for high-speed games to break the tie, Ding committed a dramatic blunder. He was gracious in defeat, marking the end of the three-week match that kept fans riveted across the globe. Former world champions Magnus Carlsen and Vladimir Kramnik may have criticised the quality of play, but in the larger scheme of things, it's the game of chess that won.

Gukesh's victory signals a generational shift in the chess world. Yet, the new champion does not harbour any illusions. He remains outside the world's top three by rating, and is not even the highest-rated Indian. That spot goes to 21-year-old Arjun Erigaisi. In his post-match press conference, Gukesh acknowledged that "becoming the world champion doesn't mean that I'm the best player in the world, there's obviously Magnus." The 34-year-old Norwegian, who is regarded as possibly the greatest chess player of all time, said Gukesh has shown the potential to establish himself as the 'number two player in the world, who knows, maybe the number one'.

The surging popularity of chess as a spectator sport could ignite a new wave of enthusiasm. Gukesh's achievement also cements India's growing influence in the chess world. What's needed is more government and private support to nurture a robust ecosystem.

## How bloodied suitcase at railway station led police to unravel revenge murder of Mumbai man with speech and hearing impairment

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

On the night of August 4, Railway Police Constable Santosh Kumar Yadav was on patrolling duty at platform number 11 of the Dadar railway station when he noticed a man struggling to push a red trolley bag. Yadav approached the man to offer assistance but found the bag too difficult to move. Sensing something was amiss, he looked closely and spotted blood seeping from the suitcase. At that moment, the police unknowingly uncovered a murder: that of a 40-year-old man in a small apartment in Mumbai's Pydhonie area earlier in the day. The police immediately detained the man with the suitcase, identified as Jay Chawda, but were confronted with a new challenge: Chawda could not communicate with them, as he had hearing and speech impairment.

The railway police prompted their teams to search for someone who could communicate in sign language. Word of the need for a sign language specialist began to spread in the night and a Mumbai police constable, who was on bandobast duty, volunteered to help. His son also had a hearing and speech impairment, making him fluent in sign language. The constable's son communicated with Chawda at the Government Railway Police (GRP) office in Dadar, where the mystery began to unravel. Mumbai Yadav approached the man to offer assistance but found the bag too difficult to move. Sensing something was amiss, he looked closely and spotted blood seeping from the suitcase.

"Chawda used sign language to explain the situation to the constable's son. The son then communicated the information to his father, who passed it on to us. We learned that the murder took place in Chawda's apartment at Chatriwala Mansion on Kika Street in Pydhonie and that another person had fled the scene," said a GRP officer. The police later found that the victim, identified as Arshad Ali Sadiq Ali Shaikh, also had hearing and speech impairment. The Dadar GRP registered a murder case against Chawda and handed over the investigation to the Pydhonie police station, where Inspector Nitin Pagar was assigned to crack the case. During the course of the inquiry, a second accused, Shivjeet Singh, was identified and arrested the next day from his house in Ulhasnagar.

Murder streamed to fellow conspirator in Belgium Soon after the two accused were arrested, several people from a community of hearing- and speech-impaired people visited the police station and showed a few videos that had become viral within their chat groups. "At the time of the murder, Chawda had allegedly video-called a man based in Belgium, Jagpal Preet Kamal Singh, and showed him the killing. In the video, it was clearly seen that Shivjeet was brutally assaulting Shaikh inside a room, while Chawda indicated to Jagpal that they were murdering him," said a police officer.

The police later learned that Jagpal had screen-recorded the video call and forwarded it to others in the community. As Chawda kept misleading his interrogators, the Pydhonie police reviewed his call history. It came to light that he had made a video call to Shaikh's wife Ruksana on the night of August 4. It was later revealed that she allegedly was in an extramarital relationship with Chawda. As her role was identified, she was arrested later that week. "Our teams subsequently learned that Jagpal was the mastermind of the crime, as all the people involved in the case have hearing and speech impairment and belong to a close-knit community in which Jagpal has a huge following. Shaikh suddenly gained popularity within the community, and it sparked jealousy in Jagpal, who then devised a plan to eliminate him," said an officer. The police said Jagpal then communicated with Chawda, who further colluded with Shivjeet and called Shaikh to Chawda's room in Pydhonie on the day of the murder. Chawda got a red trolley bag during the day and also brought liquor. "He then served alcohol to both Shaikh and Shivjeet. Later, Chawda and Shivjeet brutally assaulted Shaikh, who died from multiple injuries. The duo wrapped his body in the bag, and Shivjeet left for his house in Ulhasnagar," said an officer. The police said Chawda had planned to dispose of the body by throwing it onto the tracks of a long-distance train. He initially went to the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) railway station in a taxi, but fearing that he would be caught due to the additional security there, he then went to Dadar railway station. The police said Chawda was about to board the Tutari Express when the constable intervened to help and was caught.

## Parents filing fake child sexual abuse cases to settle scores, flags Maharashtra child rights body



GNS News Agency, Feb 2

Earlier this week, the MSCPCR heard 35 cases related to the POCSO Act and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act concerning complaints received under the POCSO Act. Earlier this week, the MSCPCR heard 35 cases related to the POCSO Act and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act concerning complaints received under the POCSO Act. Pointing out that nearly 30 per cent of the complaints they receive alleging lack of police action in child abuse cases were false, Maharashtra State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (MSCPCR) chief Susieben Shah said on Wednesday that she would write to the law and judiciary department and seek action against those who use children as pawns to settle scores. "For example, in

one case, one of the parents going through a divorce gave a complaint that their child was being inappropriately touched by the other and hence custody should not be given to that person. The allegation was found to be false. I will be writing to the law and judiciary department recommending action against those giving false complaints," Shah told The Indian Express.

In child sexual abuse cases, the police register offences under the Protection Of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The complainant has to approach the local police where an FIR is registered. In cases where the complaint is not taken or the complainant is unhappy, he or she can approach the MSCPCR. Earlier this week, the MSCPCR heard 35 cases related to the POCSO Act and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act concerning complaints received under the POCSO Act. Shah said that during the hearing it was revealed that many of the complainants have filed false complaints with mala fide intention. "One has to be careful in such cases as generally, it takes a lot for families to come forward and give complaints in cases of sexual harassment. This should not prevent genuine cases from coming out," an activist who did not want to be named cautioned. In 2022, former Mumbai police commissioner Sanjay Pandey had raised a similar concern about the PoCSO Act being misused and had issued a circular saying prior approval of the zonal deputy commissioner of police was needed before registering an offence under the Act. However, the circular was withdrawn after criticism from various quarters.

## Bombay HC grants bail to accused, says 'has already suffered incarceration' for over 12 years



GNS News Agency, Feb 2

arun tikku murder Vijay Palande, one of the accused in the case along with Dhananjay Shinde, Manoj Gajkosh were produced in the Andheri court killing of Delhi-based businessman Arunkumar Tikku. The Bombay High Court Wednesday granted bail to an accused booked for the murder of Delhi-based businessman Arunkumar Tikku, the father of a Bollywood actor, in the Oshiwara suburb of Mumbai in 2012, saying he has been in jail for nearly 13 years with

the trial still underway. Dhananjay Shinde, who was arrested along with three others, was granted bail. Shinde sought bail through his lawyers Prashant Pandey and Pranay Saraf on grounds of long incarceration and pending trial. He also sought bail on grounds of parity, citing the bail granted to another accused, Manoj Gajkosh, by the Bombay High Court in 2022. "The record shows that the applicant was arrested as far back as April 10, 2012, thereby demonstrating that the applicant has already suffered incarceration for more than 12 years and 8 months. The trial being completed at the earliest does not appear to be possible, considering the fact that the prosecution intends to examine 9 further witnesses," Justice Manish Pitale said. The murder of Arunkumar Tikku came to light on April 8, 2012, after a resident of a 25-storey high-rise in Oshiwara saw him banging on the window before being pulled in by another man. The police later found Tikku's body in the flat's bathroom. The police arrested Shinde and co-accused Gajkosh on charges of murder. They later arrested the main accused Vijay Palande, claiming he wanted to usurp the property belonging to Tikku after murdering him. They also said the accused conspired to kill his son Anuj Tikku, who appeared in films like Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi and No One Killed Jessica.

## Didn't get support from Bengal police for Jan Sunwai event: NCW

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

Vijaya Kishore Rahatkar, new NCW chief, NCW chief appointment, Rekha Sharma, BJP Mahila Morcha, Indian express news According to Archana Majumdar, a member of the NCW, the Jan Sunwai aims to address women's grievances at grassroots levels. (

The National Commission for Women alleged that the Kolkata Police and West Bengal police did not "cooperate" with the NCW for "Jan Sunwai" meetings for women from December 11 to December 13. According to Archana Majumdar, a member of the NCW, the Jan Sunwai aims to address women's grievances at grassroots levels. The hearing aims to "resolve" pending cases related to women's issues and provide immediate solutions wherever possible, she said. "At the 11th hour, we got an intimation from a senior Kolkata Police officer, but by then we had made all the necessary arrangements and informed the police that changing the venue would no longer be possible," Majumdar told. Majumdar had earlier taken to social media to claim that the police administration initially didn't support them. "This lack of support is deeply disappointing. This initiative is a vital step toward justice and protecting women's rights. We urge @MamataOfficial to support this important initiative," she had posted on X on Tuesday. She told The Indian



Express, "Initially, the Jan Sunwai was to be held in Lalbazar. We had issued letters for permission to all departments... After waiting we decided to make the necessary arrangements on our own and thus selected the National Library." Officials of West Bengal police and the Kolkata police commissionerate declined to comment. Former Chairman of NCW Rekha Sharma also told, "They (the police) in West Bengal never cooperated in our time as well. I could never hold a Jan Sunwai in West Bengal in my time. You can't do any welfare even if you want to as the Chief Minister of West Bengal is against the welfare of women."

## Marginalised women farmers of Maharashtra to meet in Pune to discuss experiences on climate resilient farming

Amid stir, subsidy to Punjab farmers, MSP bill in focus The women who are part of the farming initiative, which was started during Covid, belong to areas that are rainfed and affected by climate variability in multiple ways. Around 80 women, including widows of Maharashtra farmers who died by suicide, sugarcane field migrants, marginalised farmers and those from the Adivasi community, will meet at a convention in Pune this month to share their experiences on agroecology farming method that does not use chemical fertilisers, weedicides or pesticides. Soppecom and Makaan, who have been working on climate resilient farming, are hosting the meet

at Navi Peth in Pune on December 15 and 16 to address agrarian distress and to ensure food and nutrition security for the women. According to Seema Kulkarni, senior fellow of Soppecom and national facilitation team member of Makaan, agroecology is a model that is fast gaining recognition as it has the potential to transform the social and economic dimensions in agriculture. The women who are part of the farming initiative, which was started during Covid, belong to areas that are rainfed and affected by climate variability in multiple ways. This is the region of cotton, soybean and toor fields. "The activity of empowering the women to make a transition from chemical-intensive agriculture to mixed farming, which uses no chemicals or external inputs, has been attempted since Covid, a time when the public distribution system was not very well streamlined and there was a crisis in the movement of food and other essentials," says Kulkarni. Agroecology focuses on

food and nutrition security that is appropriate to the local cultures and ecologies and the health of the ecosystem rather than productivity and profits.

Agroecology is not just a set of alternate practices and agricultural inputs that increases the sustainability of the environment but rather a movement that questions the power dynamics in the present food regime or the corporate and industrialised form of agriculture, she says. As part of the initiative, agriculture experts interacted with the women by asking them to grow food for themselves in their small plots of land, which measure between half-acre and three acres. They started with almost 35 different crops, such as cereals, pulses, vegetables and various root crops, but balanced with cotton, soybean, toor and other cash crops. Significantly, they did not use hybrid or GM varieties but local, improved varieties of seeds that were sourced from farmer networks. The women follow a scientific sowing of interdependent crop mix, organically increasing the productivity and quality of the soil and using techniques of building populations of insects, among others. "If we are looking to address the climate events and agrarian crisis in these areas, which are hitting small and marginal farmers, particularly women, in a disproportionate way, this kind of model shows potential. We are now in the fourth year," says Kulkarni. The convention, being held for the second year, is meant to review the work and give a platform to farmers to share their challenges of crop growing, animal attacks and climate events. "In that larger context, how do we improve and adapt our models and what are the plans for next year?"

## Murder convict escapes from Pune's Yerawada open jail, second incident this year



GNS News Agency, Feb 2

A convict in a murder case escaped from the open jail in Yerawada Central Prison in Pune on Wednesday, the police said. The police said Anil Meghdas Patoniya, 35, a native of Titwala in Thane district, was reported missing during the attendance conducted by the prison staff on Wednesday afternoon. Patoniya was convicted in a 2016 murder case and was awarded life sentence in December last year. Initially lodged in Nashik jail, he was shifted to the Yerawada Central Prison in June this year. Due to good behaviour, he was later shifted to the open jail, said an officer. Senior prison officer Rajendra Marale lodged a separate first information report (FIR) against Pateniya at Yerawada police station, as per Section 262 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), for jailbreak. A police team under Assistant Police Inspector Vishal Takale has launched a search for the accused. In August this year, another murder case convict Raju Dusane, 43, had escaped from the open jail in Yerawada. He was nabbed within three days, the police said.

## Scientist's minor son confesses to killing his mother after initially misleading the probe



GNS News Agency, Feb 2

A scientist's minor son has allegedly confessed to killing his mother at their home here, days after he misled his father and police, claiming she died of an accidental fall, officials said. Aarti Verma died after her son, a class 11 student, pushed her and her head crashed against a wall on December 3, police said. The revelation came to light during a detailed investigation. Superintendent of Police (North) Jitendra Kumar Srivastava said. "After two hours of questioning, the teenager admitted that he pushed his mother during an argument, leading to a fatal head injury," he said.

When Aarti's husband Ram Milan, an assistant scientist at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in Chennai, found her phone switched off for two days, he sent his sister-in-law to check the house on December 7. The house was locked from outside. On returning to Gorakhpur the following evening, Milan found his wife's body on the floor, police said. Their son, found near a Shiva temple, initially told police and his father that his mother died after a fall. He claimed he locked the house from the outside in panic and wandered aimlessly for four days, police said. However, the post-mortem report contradicted his account, they said.

Further investigation raised suspicions as bloodstains were found at two different spots, indicating the body was dragged. CCTV footage confirmed that no outsider had entered the house, as per police. Police allegedly recovered large amounts of cash in denominations of Rs 500, Rs 200, and Rs 100 from the boy's room, they said. "During interrogation, the boy confessed on Tuesday evening that on the morning of December 3, his mother asked him to go to school. When he refused, a dispute over money ensued, and his mother threw cash at him in frustration," Srivastava said. "In a fit of rage, he pushed her, causing the fatal injury," he added. The teenager has been taken apprehended, police added.

## 'Fire tax' among key proposals in Rajkot Municipal Corporation's Rs 3,112-crore annual budget

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

The budget, titled 'Liveable Rajkot', also proposes to create an "inclusive, sustainable, and thriving urban environment" besides an increase in taxes pertaining to property and door-to-door garbage collection. The budget, titled 'Liveable Rajkot', also proposes to create an "inclusive, sustainable, and thriving urban environment" besides an increase in taxes pertaining to property and door-to-door garbage collection.

The Rajkot Municipal Corporation (RMC) in Gujarat has proposed a "fire tax" on residential and non-residential properties in its Rs 3,112.29 crore budget for 2025-26 tabled by Municipal Commissioner Tushar Sumera before the Standing Committee Friday. The move comes in the wake of the massive fire at the TRP Game Zone in the city's Nana-Mava locality that killed 27 people in May last year.

The budget, titled 'Liveable Rajkot', also proposes to create an "inclusive, sustainable, and thriving urban environment" besides an increase in taxes pertaining to property and door-to-door garbage collection.

The proposed fire tax aims to overhaul and strengthen the city's fire safety infrastructure and will be calculated at Rs 15 per square metre for residential and Rs 25 per square metre for non-residential properties.

Property tax has been proposed to be raised from Rs 11 per square metre to Rs 15 per square metre for residences, while for non-residential properties it has been proposed to be revised from Rs 25 per square metre to Rs 30 per square metre. This revision will help the civic body earn an additional Rs 40 crore.

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

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

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

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

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



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

## Haryana to launch awareness campaign for New Education Policy

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

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

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

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



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

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

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

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

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



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

## Sugar industry in Maharashtra flags concern as individual awards for record tonnage find no eligible candidates

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

Only six of the 12 awards for sugarcane production by individual farmers were presented by the Vasantdada Sugar Institute (VSI) during its annual general body meeting in Pune Thursday, prompting industry insiders to flag concerns. Given the sharp increase in the state's cane-crushing capacity, it is worrying that the institute was unable to find farmers meeting the quality criteria to be eligible for the awards.

The VSI's annual Oosh Bhushan awards are bestowed on individual farmers as well as sugar mills for technical and financial efficiency. Individual farmers qualify for the awards based on their tonnage per acre (total weight of produce per acre). However, on Thursday, the institute announced that no farmer met the eligibility criteria for the awards which are given division-wise for Pre-seasonal, Suru and Ratoon cane. While the first two are plant cane grown from seedlings, the third one is grown from the stubble of an already harvested crop. On Thursday, no awards were given for any of the categories in the North West Division. No one cleared the quality criteria set by VSI for the Suru

and Pre-seasonal awards for the Middle Division. In the South West division, no farmer qualified for Suru plantation. The VSI's parameters indicate that to qualify for the production award for Suru crop, the farmer should be able to report production above 250 tonnes per hectare for their pre-seasonal crop. Similarly for the Suru and Ratoon crops, the per-hectare yield should be more than 200 tonnes and 175 tonnes, respectively. The farmer should have a holding of over 20 guntas or 0.5 acres. Also, the crop should not be grown for seed or fodder, i.e. it should be grown to be sold solely to mills. This failure to get farmers to meet the production criteria comes as the state reports a rise in the crushing capacity of its mills which is now at 9.75 lakh tonnes per day. During 2021-22, the state had an aggregate crushing capacity of 8.01 lakh tonnes per day. Lower availability of cane would mean that the mills have to crush below their full capacity which would translate into financial loss. "With the area of production being limited, the only way to ensure enough cane is to increase per-acre yield. Clearly, the absence of awardees for production shows that this is not happening in many areas," said an industry insider.

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

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

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

What is the Conduct of Election Rules?

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

What is the amendment?

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

Why has the amendment been brought in now?

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

Why are the transparency activists protesting?

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



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

What does the Opposition say?

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

earlier met Chinese Premier Li Qiang and agreed to work for a "constructive and stable" relationship, the Japanese news agency Kyodo said.

China and Japan are key trading partners, but increased friction over disputed territories and military spending has frayed ties in recent years. Beijing's more assertive presence around disputed territories in the region, meanwhile, has sparked Tokyo's ire, leading it to boost security ties with key ally the United States and other countries. Tense ties in August, a Chinese military aircraft staged the first confirmed incursion by China into Japanese airspace, followed weeks later by a Japanese warship sailing through the Taiwan Strait for the first time. Beijing's rare test launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile into the Pacific Ocean in late September also drew strong protests from Tokyo, which said it had not been given advance notice. Tensions between the two sides also flared last year over Japan's decision to begin releasing into the Pacific Ocean some of the 540 Olympic swimming pools' worth of reactor cooling water amassed since the 2011 tsunami that led to the Fukushima nuclear disaster — an operation the U.N. atomic agency deemed safe. China branded the move "selfish" and banned all Japanese seafood imports, but in September said it would "gradually resume" the trade. On Wednesday, the two ministers affirmed their support for that plan.

China imported more than \$500 million worth of seafood from Japan in 2022, according to customs data. Japan's brutal occupation of parts of China before and during World War II remains another sore point, with Beijing accusing Tokyo of failing to atone for its past. Visits by Japanese officials to the Yasukuni shrine that honours war dead — including convicted war criminals — regularly prompt anger from Beijing.

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



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

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

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

## Vocal on growth, silent on inflation

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

## Indian in the White House? Meenakshi Ahamed, author of 'Indian Genius', wouldn't be surprised

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

The 2024 U.S. elections threw up many surprises, but they also saw the Indian-American community come into its own — with a record six Indian-Americans being elected to Congress for what's now called the 'Samosa Caucus'. Also, many from the community, including Vivek Ramaswamy and Kash Patel are among President Donald Trump's top nominees for positions in the administration. Journalist Meenakshi Ahamed's latest book *Indian Genius: The Meteoric Rise of Indians in America* is a look at successful Indians in a number of spheres, with exclusive interviews with them. Edited excerpts from an interview.

Is this election a coming of age of the Indian American community on the American political landscape?

Oh, I definitely think that the Indians have 'arrived'. In 2020, 99 Indian-origin Americans ran for elected office up and down the ballots. Not just Congress or Senate, but also state assembly seats, council seats, and local elections. That was a pretty big phenomena and we now have six congressmen elected. We had one senator, Kamala Harris, who was partially Indian. When Biden was vice president, he was the first one to celebrate Diwali, and it has now become an official holiday in New York and several other states. This is now an indication of not only the acceptance of Indians, but Indian culture into the mainstream.

At the same time, it does seem as if there is a door closing for new immigrants into the U.S. Trump has promised mass deportations. If Kamala Harris had won and become president, a lot of people were saying about my book, *Indian Genius*, that everyone would be talking about how many Indians have risen in America. But now it is equally important, because there's a MAGA [Make America Great Again] fight going on within the Republican Party about immigration, where you have Elon Musk and the tech [business leaders] who want to continue the H-1B visa programme and bring in technically proficient people from India and other places. On the other hand, you have the conservative sort of Steve Bannon crowd, who have said things like, 'No, America was built by white Americans, and we don't need Indian invaders.' And so it'll be interesting to see where the chips finally fall. Influential Indian Americans: (Clockwise from top left) Ro Khanna, U.S. representative from California; Second Lady Usha Vance; Vivek Ramaswamy, American entrepreneur and politician; Suhas Subramanyam, U.S. Representative from Virginia; and Nikki Haley, former governor of South Carolina. Influential Indian Americans: (Clockwise from top left) Ro Khanna, U.S. representative from California; Second Lady Usha Vance; Vivek Ramaswamy, American entrepreneur and politician; Suhas Subramanyam, U.S. Representative from Virginia; and Nikki Haley, former governor of South Carolina.

Your book makes the point that there have been waves of anti-immigrant feeling from a century ago when Indians couldn't even become U.S. citizens. How have they overcome these battles for acceptance?

As my book points out, discrimination is nothing new in America. When the Irish came in, they were discriminated against. When the Italians came in, they faced discrimination. And so did the Jews. But they all ended up becoming mainstream. Indians began to migrate in big numbers only in the 1960s. One factor was that president Johnson passed the Medicare Act, giving millions of Americans access to health care. Except, the American medical system didn't have enough doctors. India was a prime place [to recruit from] because [prime minister] Nehru had invested in medical institutes. Excellent doctors were com-



ing out of there, and they spoke English. Another factor that helped Silicon Valley was that Russia launched Sputnik [the first artificial satellite], and America thought it was going to lose the arms race against the Soviet Union in the Cold War. And so they went out and started recruiting engineers. That is when people like [businessmen] Kanwal Rekhi and Vinod Khosla came in, and others like them flooded into Silicon Valley.

What is the Eight Dollar Club?

That includes me! India had a shortage of foreign exchange back in the 60s, when it was a socialist country. When we left to study abroad, we were only allowed to exchange up to \$8. So, you came to the U.S. with \$8 in your pocket. This meant you had to have someone at the other end picking you up, taking you to where you had to go, because the fare to your university was more.

You've broken up your book into three kinds of Indian immigrants — the techies, the healers, as you call doctors, and the influencers. Why did it take so long for Indian Americans to break into this area of public affairs, policy and politics?

It really hasn't taken them that long, if you think about it. Most [Indians] came after 1965 and it takes a generation to have economic security. So, the first generation is busy making money, then the second generation are the children, and they grow up with certain comforts, and they can afford to think about other careers and give back. They don't want to just do medicine or tech like their parents. So, they went into law like Neal Katyal, who has argued more cases now in front of the Supreme Court than any other minority person, and he really sees himself as a complete and total American. Meenakshi Ahamed

In 2024, there was Kamala Harris, and Usha Vance as part of the presidential race. What about 2028? Do you foresee a face-off between two people of Indian American origin, Ro Khanna vs Nikki Haley?

It's entirely possible. If Donald Trump wasn't running, Nikki Haley had a very good chance. She was a serious candidate, got 30% of the Republican vote, and certainly got him worried. [Politician and lawyer] Ro Khanna is very thoughtful, an intellectual, and he is definitely ambitious. He does think about whether he should run for president, and I wouldn't be surprised if he runs in 2028.

Do you think that the U.S. is ready for a president of Indian origin?

I'm not sure. There will certainly be a segment of the population that will not be able to tolerate it, but I think there's another 45% that it wouldn't bother at all, as long as they were smart and a good candidate. My worry about Trump 2.0 is that he really changed the culture of the U.S. when he was president, in the sense that it became more divided. I worry that an unfettered Trump might damage the country culturally in ways that will have very long lasting repercussions, and that might also impact the Indian community negatively.

## What to know about US birthright citizenship?

Seattle: President Donald Trump's executive order denying US citizenship to the children of parents living in the country illegally faced the first of what will be many legal tests on Thursday. It didn't fare well. A Justice Department lawyer had barely started making his arguments in a Seattle courtroom when US District Judge John C Coughenour began blistering him with questions, calling the executive order "blatantly unconstitutional." Coughenour went on to temporarily block it pending further arguments. Here are some things to know about the decision and the lawsuits challenging Trump's order.

What is birthright citizenship?

Birthright citizenship is the principle that someone born in a country is a citizen of that country. In the United States, it's enshrined in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which states: "All persons born or naturalised in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside." It

was ratified in 1868 to ensure the citizenship of former slaves after the Civil War. Critics of unfettered immigration have argued that provides an incentive for people to come to, or remain in, the US illegally: They know that if they have children in the US, those children will be citizens, who might later petition for them to become legal permanent residents.

In an effort to curb unlawful immigration, Trump issued the executive order just after being sworn in for his second term on Monday. Trump's order drew immediate legal challenges across the country, with at least five lawsuits being brought by 22 states and a number of immigrants rights groups. A lawsuit brought by Washington, Arizona, Oregon and Illinois was the first to get a hearing. What's next for the legal challenges? The judge's ruling on Thursday was a temporary restraining order. It blocked the administration from enforcing or implementing Trump's order nationally for the next 14 days. Over the next two weeks, the sides will submit further briefings on the legal merits of the executive order.

## Donald Trump orders release of JFK, RFK, Martin Luther King assassination records



GNS News Agency, Feb 2

President Donald Trump has ordered the release of thousands of classified governmental documents about the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, which has fueled conspiracy theories for decades. The executive order Mr. Trump signed on Thursday (January 23, 2025) also aims to declassify the remaining federal records relating to the assassinations of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. The order is among a flurry of executive actions Mr. Trump has quickly taken the first week of his second term. Speaking to reporters, Mr. Trump said, "everything will be revealed." Mr. Trump had promised during his reelection campaign to make public the last batches of still-classified documents surrounding President Kennedy's assassination in Dallas, which has transfixed people for decades. Mr. Trump made a similar pledge during his first term, but ultimately bent to appeals from the CIA and FBI to withhold some documents. Mr. Trump has nominated Kennedy's nephew, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., to be the Health Secretary in his new administration. Kennedy's father, Robert F. Kennedy, was assassinated in 1968 as he sought the Democratic presidential nomination. The younger Kennedy has said he isn't convinced that a lone gunman was solely responsible for the assassination of his uncle, President Kennedy, in 1963. The order directs the director of national intelligence and the attorney general to develop a plan within 15 days to release the remaining John F. Kennedy records, and within 45 days for the other two cases. It was not clear when the records would actually be released. Mr. Trump handed the pen used to sign the order to an aide and directed it to be given to Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Only a few thousand of the millions of governmental records related to the assassination of President Kennedy have yet to be fully declassified. And while many who have studied what's been released so far say the public shouldn't anticipate any earth-shattering revelations, there is still an intense interest in details related to the assassination and the events surrounding it.

"There's always the possibility that something would slip through that would be the tiny tip of a much larger iceberg that would be revealing," said Larry J. Sabato, director of the University of Virginia Center for Politics and author of "The Kennedy Half-Century." "That's what researchers look

for. Now, odds are you won't find that but it is possible that it's there," he said. Kennedy was fatally shot in downtown Dallas on November 22, 1963, as his motorcade passed in front of the Texas School Book Depository building, where 24-year-old assassin Lee Harvey Oswald had positioned himself from a sniper's perch on the sixth floor. Two days after Kennedy was killed, nightclub owner Jack Ruby fatally shot Oswald during a jail transfer. In the early 1990s, the federal government mandated that all assassination-related documents be housed in a single collection in the National Archives and Records Administration. The collection of over 5 million records was required to be opened by 2017, barring any exemptions designated by the president. The order notes that although no congressional act directs the release of information on the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy or King, those governmental records being made public "is also in the public interest."

During his first term, Mr. Trump boasted that he'd allow the release of all of the remaining records on the president's assassination but ended up holding some back because of what he called the potential harm to national security. And while files have continued to be released under President Joe Biden, some still remain unseen. Sabato, who trains student researchers to comb through the documents, said that most researchers agree that "roughly" 3,000 records have not yet been released, either in whole or in part, and many of those originated with the CIA. The documents released over the last several years offer details on the way intelligence services operated at the time, and include CIA cables and memos discussing visits by Oswald to the Soviet and Cuban embassies during a trip to Mexico City just weeks before the assassination. The former Marine had previously defected to the Soviet Union before returning home to Texas. King and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated within two months of each other in 1968. King was outside a motel in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968, when shots rang out. The civil rights leader, who had been in town to support striking sanitation workers, was set to lead marches and other nonviolent protests there. He died at a hospital less than an hour later. James Earl Ray pleaded guilty to assassinating King. He later though renounced that plea and maintained his innocence up until his death. FBI documents released over the years show how the bureau wiretapped King's telephone lines, bugged his hotel rooms and used informants to get information against him. The agency's conduct was the subject of the recent documentary film, "MLK/FBI." Robert F. Kennedy, then a New York senator, was fatally shot on June 5, 1968, at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles moments after giving his victory speech for winning California's Democratic presidential primary. His assassin, Sirhan Sirhan, was convicted of first-degree murder and is serving life in prison. There are still some documents in the JFK collection though that researchers don't believe the President will be able to release. Around 500 documents, including tax returns, weren't subject to the 2017 disclosure requirement. And, researchers note, documents have also been destroyed over the de-

## Trump signs executive order on developing artificial intelligence 'free from ideological bias'

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

President Donald Trump signed an executive order Thursday that will revoke past government policies his order says "act as barriers to American AI innovation." "To maintain global leadership in AI technology, "we must develop AI systems that are free from ideological bias or engineered social agendas," Trump's order says. The new order doesn't name which existing policies are hindering AI development but sets out to track down and review "all policies, directives, regulations, orders, and other actions taken" as a result of former President Joe Biden's sweeping AI executive order of 2023, which Trump rescinded Monday. Any of those Biden-era actions must be suspended if they don't fit Trump's new directive that AI should "promote human flourishing, economic competitiveness, and national security."

Last year, the Biden administration issued a policy directive that said U.S. federal agencies must show their artificial intelligence tools aren't harming the public, or stop using them. Trump's order directs the White House to revise and reissue those directives, which affect how agencies acquire AI tools and use them. Biden's executive order, the Trump administration said, "established unnecessarily burdensome requirements for companies developing and deploying AI that would stifle private sector innovation and threaten American technological leadership." Trump's order also calls for the development of an AI action plan within 180 days. Leading the work will be a small group of White House tech and science officials, including a new Special Advisor for AI and Crypto — a role Trump has given to venture capitalist and former PayPal executive David Sacks. Trump repealed Biden's 2023 guardrails for fast-developing AI technology just hours after returning to the White House on Monday.

The new actions threaten to erase some of the Biden administration's efforts -- championed by then-Vice President Kamala Harris -- to curb government use of the kinds of AI tools that have been found to amplify gender or racial bias, from medical diagnosis chatbots spouting false information to face recognition technology tied to wrongful arrests of Black men. Until Thursday, it wasn't clear if Trump planned to replace Biden's signature AI policy with his own order. Trump had also signed executive orders on AI in his previous term, including a 2019 order directing federal agencies to prioritise research and development in AI that is still on the books.

Alondra Nelson, former acting director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy under Biden, said Trump's order seemed "backward looking" because agencies would be tasked with reviewing initiatives "that are already helping people, with an implicit intent to unwind them." "The Biden administration's AI policies, she added, were aimed at protecting both innovation and the public. "In 60 days, we'll know which Americans' rights and safety the Trump Administration believes deserves to be protected in the age of AI, and if there will be a level playing field for every technologist, developer, and innovator or just the tech billionaires," Nelson said.

Much of Biden's 2023 order set in motion a sprint across government agencies to study's AI impact on everything from cybersecurity risks to its effects on education, workplaces and public benefits, with an eye on ensuring AI tools weren't harming people. That work is largely done. One major piece that remained — until Trump rescinded it Monday — was a requirement that tech companies building the most powerful AI models share details with the government about the workings of those systems be-



fore they are unleashed to the public. The Trump order's focus on "human flourishing" echoes the language of his campaign's long-held promise to cancel Biden's AI policy once back in the White House. It's also in line with ideas espoused by Trump adviser Elon Musk, who has warned against the dangers of what he calls "woke AI" that reflects liberal biases. In a statement, Americans for Responsible Innovation, a nonprofit organisation, said Trump has "made it clear from day one that his top priority on AI is out-innovating the rest of the world." "Today's executive order is a placeholder until the administration has a chance to develop a full strategy for executing that vision," said the organisation's executive director, Eric Gastfriend. Agencies had already frozen work on AI policies initiated by the last administration following Trump's repeal of Biden's executive order on Monday, Gastfriend said.

## Indian Grandmaster Iniyar Panneerselvam wins title in Malaysia



GNS News Agency, Feb 2

New Delhi: Indian Grandmaster Iniyar Panneerselvam clinched the 9th Johor International Open chess tournament title in Malaysia with a dominating performance. The 22-year-old from Erode in Tamil Nadu accumulated 8.5 points in nine games. He finished 1.5 points ahead of his nearest rival, winning against four International Masters and one Grandmaster. The nine-round tournament, which ended on Thursday, had 84 participants from eight countries, out of which 24 were titled players. In fact, at the end of the penultimate round where he beat Indonesian IM Nayaka Budhidharma.

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



GNS News Agency, Feb 2

Davos: US President Donald Trump has invited global businesses to manufacture their products in the US and promised them lower taxes but also issued a stern warning that if they choose to produce their goods elsewhere, they would have to pay tariffs worth 'billions and trillions' of dollars. Virtually addressing the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, on Thursday, Trump promised substantial tax cuts to businesses that choose to produce in the US. "My message to every business in the world is very simple. Come make your product in America, and we will give you among the lowest taxes of any nation on Earth. We're bringing them down very substantially, even from the original Trump tax cuts," he said. For businesses choosing not to manufacture in the US, Trump warned, "But if you don't make your product in America, which is your prerogative, then very simply, you will have to pay a tariff differing amounts, but a tariff which will direct hundreds of billions of dollars and even trillions of dollars into our treasury to strengthen our economy and pay down debt." He further asserted that there is "no better place" than the "good old USA" to create jobs and build factories under the Trump administration.

"Under the Trump administration, there will be no better place on earth to create jobs, build factories, or grow a company than right here in the good old USA," he added. Trump has proposed a 15 per cent corporate tax rate for companies that manufacture in the US, subject to approval from Congress. Trump began his presidency on Monday without immediately imposing the tariffs he had prom-

ised during his election campaign, including a 10 per cent duty on global imports and 60 per cent on goods from China. But he said at that time that Canada and Mexico faced a 25 per cent duty on February 1 on goods they send to the US because of illegal immigration and illicit drug shipments, including fentanyl, across their US borders. Trump on Tuesday extended the February 1 deadline to China, threatening a 10 per cent duty. Referring to the relations with Canada, the US President, noted that the US has been at a deficit of nearly \$200 billion or \$250 billion with Canada, which he argued was unfair.

He again reiterated his point to make Canada the 51st US state, adding that in that case, there would be no need to impose a tariff on it. "Canada, we have a tremendous deficit with Canada. We're not going to have that anymore. We can't do it. It's, I don't know if it's good for them. As you probably know, I say you can always become a state. Then if you're a state, we won't have a deficit. We won't have to tariff you," he said. But Canada has been very tough to deal with over the years, and it's not fair that we should have a \$200 billion or \$250 billion deficit," he added. Trump also highlighted that the US no longer relies on Canada for products like cars, lumber, and oil. "We don't need them to make our cars and they make a lot of them. We don't need their lumber because we have our own forests... We don't need their oil and gas. We have more than anybody," he said. Recently, Trump announced that his administration is planning to impose 25 per cent tariffs on imports from Mexico and Canada. The US President, for some time, has been saying that Canada should be made the 51st US State to avoid facing these tariffs. He even referred to outgoing Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as "Governor of state of Canada". He said he plans to ask Saudi Arabia and the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to cut the price of oil they produce to boost the global economy. He contended that if the current global oil price — about \$77 a barrel — is cut, "the war in Ukraine will end immediately." Russia uses revenue from its own oil production to help fund its three-year war on neighbouring Ukraine. Trump said that in the global economy, the US "just wants to be treated fairly by other countries". He said the US wants to have a "fair relationship" with China, the world's second-biggest economy. "We don't want to take advantage," he said of Washington-Beijing relations.

## Trump revokes Biden executive order on addressing AI risks

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday revoked a 2023 executive order signed by Joe Biden that sought to reduce the risks that artificial intelligence poses to consumers, workers and national security. Biden's order required developers of AI systems that pose risks to U.S. national security, the economy, public health or safety to share the results of safety tests with the U.S. government, in line with the Defense Production Act, before they were released to the public.

The order also directed agencies to set standards for that testing and address related chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and cybersecurity risks. Biden's order came as U.S. lawmakers have failed to pass legislation setting guardrails for AI development. The 2024 Republican Party platform vowed to repeal the order that it said hinders AI innovation and added "Republicans support AI development rooted in free speech and human flourishing." Generative AI, which can create text, photos and videos in response to open-ended prompts, has spurred excitement as well as fears it could make some jobs obsolete or have other negative consequences. Last week, the U.S. Commerce Depart-



ment issued new restrictions on AI chip and technology exports that drew criticism from industry including companies like Nvidia.

Biden issued a separate executive order last week to provide federal support to address massive energy needs for fast-growing advanced AI data centers, calling for leasing federal sites owned by Defense and Energy departments. Trump did not repeal that order.

## Microsoft relaxes data center grip on OpenAI amid \$500 billion joint venture

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

Microsoft on Tuesday said it has changed some key terms of a deal with OpenAI after the ChatGPT creator announced a joint venture with Oracle and Japan's SoftBank Group to build up to \$500 billion of new AI data centers in the United States. President Donald Trump gathered the leaders of the "Stargate" effort at the White House on Tuesday to announce the deal, saying it was intended to help keep the United States ahead of China and other rivals in the global AI race, using chips from Nvidia. Since 2019, Microsoft has had arrangements with OpenAI that gave the Redmond, Washington-based company the exclusive right to build new computing infrastructure for OpenAI. Microsoft, in a blog post, said it has "approved OpenAI's ability to build additional capacity, primarily for research and training of models." "That opened the door for OpenAI to work with Oracle.

A person familiar with the deal said that Stargate is a joint venture structured as new entity in which OpenAI has an equity stake, governance rights and operational control. It will have a separate board appointed by the founding members and its own CEO, this person said. The venture will also have other investors including United Arab Emirates firm MGX. Microsoft, along with Nvidia and Arm, will be a "technology partner" in the new venture, but is not listed as an equity funder. SoftBank CEO Masayoshi Son will be the entity's board chairman, according to a statement from



OpenAI posted on social media site X. But Microsoft said that it still retains the exclusive right to offer OpenAI's API-technology shorthand for application programming interface, which is the main way that software developers and business customers buy OpenAI's services. That means Oracle will not be able to host OpenAI's primary source of revenue. "The key elements of our partnership remain in place for the duration of our contract through 2030, with our access to OpenAI's IP, our revenue sharing arrangements and our exclusivity on OpenAI's APIs all continuing forward," Microsoft said. Microsoft also said "OpenAI recently made a new, large Azure commitment that will continue to support all OpenAI products as well as training," referring to Microsoft's Azure cloud computing service.

## US Senate confirms John Ratcliffe as CIA Director

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

Washington: The US Senate has voted to confirm former Director of National Intelligence (DNI) John Ratcliffe as the next Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director under President Donald Trump. The Upper Chamber on Thursday voted 74-25 to approve the nomination of Ratcliffe, who served as Trump's Director of National Intelligence for the last eight months of his first term, Xinhua news agency reported.

Confirming the news, the White House shared a post on X and wrote, "@JohnRatcliffe's confirmation as Director of the CIA marks a significant step in advancing President Trump's vision to restore America's strength on the world stage." "As DNI Director, Ratcliffe led a shift in the US Intelligence Community's priorities to gain a decisive strategic advantage over China and provided oversight of numerous operations to remove designated terrorist leaders from the battlefield. Director Ratcliffe also made the historic decision to elevate space to a priority intelligence domain by adding

the US Space Force as the 18th member of the US Intelligence Community and received the National Security Medal, the nation's highest honour for distinguished achievement in the field of intelligence and national security, according to White House. As a Congressman, Ratcliffe was a leading policy maker on national security issues as a member of the House Intelligence, Homeland Security and Judiciary committees. Ratcliffe previously served as a US House representative for Texas's 4th congressional district from 2015 to 2020. Twenty-one Democrats joined Republicans in supporting Ratcliffe's nomination, indicating bipartisan support in a divided political climate. Thursday's vote took place three days after the Senate unanimously confirmed US Senator from Florida Marco Rubio as Secretary of State, just hours after Trump's inauguration, making it the second major appointment for the new administration. Senate Majority Leader John Thune has set up votes for more of Trump's nominees, including Pete Hegseth, nominated for Secretary of Defense.

## Small ticket SIPs of Rs 250 on cards: All you need to know about SEBI's 'sachetisation' plan for mutual funds investments



"Sachetisation", or the strategy of offering products in small yet affordable units, has been a roaring success in India's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector, allowing FMCG majors to penetrate the price-sensitive rural and low-income consumer segments. For many, shelling out money worth a full bottle of quality shampoo in one go may be difficult, but when that same shampoo is available in a one-time use sachet worth Rs 2 or 3, it becomes affordable and accessible to them. In large price-sensitive markets, the approach can be effective in various sectors, including financial services. It is no surprise that India's capital market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) wants to "sachetise" mutual fund investments made through monthly systematic investment plans (SIPs).

In December 2023, SEBI Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch had announced that the regulator was working with the mutual fund industry to see how SIPs worth just Rs 250 a month can be made viable, in order to facilitate better participation in mutual funds from "the bottom of the pyramid" for greater financial inclusion. The market regulator wanted India's mutual fund market to "explode", similar to what sachetisation did to the shampoo segment. Just over a year later, SEBI has floated a consultation paper seeking views on "promoting financial inclusion" through "sachetisation" of investment in mutual funds. The proposal envisages a sachetised mutual fund product—a small ticket SIP of Rs 250. In a bid to push the mutual fund industry to offer small ticket SIPs, SEBI has convinced mutual fund industry intermediaries to charge discounted rates for small ticket SIPs, apart from proposing to reimburse certain costs for fund houses from the Investor Education and Awareness Fund. According to the regulator, sachetisation will enable small ticket investments in mutual funds gradually on a periodic basis. "This can assist in financial empowerment of the underserved section of the economy and nudge fund houses to expand their footprints to even remote locations in the country," SEBI said.

While there are some asset management companies that offer small ticket SIPs as low as Rs 100 under some of their mutual fund schemes, most schemes require a minimum SIP of Rs 500. The Rs 250 SIP proposal, SEBI says, provides an opportunity to the entire industry to participate in the "cause of financial inclusion". Over the past few years, mutual funds have become hugely popular, particularly among India's middle-class investors. Assets under management (AUM) of the mutual fund industry have multiplied to Rs 68 lakh crore (as of November 2024) from Rs 10 lakh crore in 2014. Total number of unique investors of mutual funds has grown from 1.7 crores as of March, 2018 to 5.2 crore as of November 30, 2024. Clearly the growth has been astronomical, but SEBI feels that the low-income strata of the population have not been able to participate in this growth story. "...there is a considerable opportunity for increasing the reach of the Mutual Funds to all sections of the society, to enable every individual to have access to this financial product," the regulator said in the consultation paper, adding that sachetisation of mutual fund investments can assist in financial empowerment of the economy's "underserved section" and nudge fund houses to expand their footprint to even remote locations in India.

It appears that SEBI wants the sachetised SIP offering to be targeted largely towards new mutual fund investors from low-income groups, and not for retail investors in general. According to the consultation paper, an existing mutual fund investor will "not be considered as a small ticket

SIP investor" for any investment at the industry level. Moreover, if any investor initiates an SIP investment other than small ticket SIP, or makes a lump sum mutual fund investment, she or he will not be considered a small ticket SIP investor. Also, a maximum of three Rs 250 SIP plans—one each in up to three asset management companies (AMCs)—per investor will qualify for discounted rates offered by intermediaries. AMCs can offer more Rs 250 SIP plans to such investors, but any investment beyond the three first three plans will not be eligible for discounted rates from intermediaries. Additionally, small ticket SIPs are proposed to be offered in any mutual fund scheme, except debt schemes, sectoral and thematic schemes, and small-cap and mid-cap equity schemes. Small-cap and mid-cap segments of the equity market are prone to significantly more volatility than the large-cap segment, and the regulator does not seem to want new investors from lower-income groups to make high-risk investments. SEBI has also proposed that the small ticket SIP may be offered under the growth option of the investment plan. Under the growth option, profits made by the fund are reinvested in its underlying securities to drive future growth and fund value. "Commitment by an investor under a small ticket SIP scheme should be for 5 years i.e. 60 investments. However, if an investor desires to stop SIP or withdraw the SIP investment prematurely, there should be no restriction on it," SEBI said in the consultation paper. Bringing down costs to push small ticket SIP penetration

SEBI said that industry participants involved in the mutual fund space have agreed to offer discounted rates to enable faster break-even for AMCs on cost incurred towards these investments. Besides, part of the cost of investment for AMCs and certain incentives for financial inclusion are proposed to be compensated from the Investor Education and Awareness Fund to further reduce the break-even time for AMCs and encourage further penetration. "With subsidised charges offered by intermediaries and reimbursement of certain costs from the Investor Education and Awareness Fund, it is expected that the cost of small ticket SIP of an investor new to the mutual fund industry would break-even for the AMCs within 2 years," SEBI said. The regulator said that the small ticket SIP is primarily for monthly SIPs. The option of fortnightly small ticket SIPs may also be enabled, as the same will reduce the transaction cost due to fixed quarterly Unified Payment Interface (UPI) charges, which could further reduce the breakeven time for AMCs. Considering the higher cost of investment through the available alternate modes, SEBI has proposed that small ticket SIP investments should be restricted to National Automated Clearing House (NACH) and UPI auto pay mode only. Additionally, to encourage distributors and execution only platforms (EOPs) to participate in this financial inclusion cause, SEBI has proposed to give an incentive of Rs 500 per investor, if the investor completes 24 instalments of the small ticket SIP.

Notably, while SEBI had been working with industry stakeholders on small ticket SIPs, the consultation paper comes at a time when India's equity markets are grappling with heavy selling by overseas investors due to various factors, including global volatility, uncertainties under the Donald Trump administration in the US, slowing economic growth and corporate earnings in India, and high stock market valuations, among others. Domestic investors, institutional as well as retail, have been carrying the Indian markets on their shoulders. Mutual fund inflows, particularly through the SIP route, have helped support the Indian stock markets despite the storm of heavy selling by foreign investors. Even going forward, domestic investors in equities, including those who invest through mutual funds, are likely to be a critical factor in how the stock markets fare. Although it is not clear when SEBI wants small ticket SIPs to be made available for investors—deadline for submitting views on the consultation paper is February 6—deepening of the market is bound to lead to more inflows. To that end, this offering could over time lead to more domestic investment flows in equity markets, providing more cushion against vagaries of overseas investors. The expectation would be that first-time mutual fund investors from under-represented sections would gradually go beyond the small ticket SIPs in their investment journey.

## Should you be sanitising your toothbrush? A dentist weighs in on this hygiene habit

Maintaining good oral hygiene goes beyond just brushing and flossing; it also involves how we care for our toothbrushes. The question of whether to sterilise your toothbrush has sparked discussions online. According to content creator Dr Joyce Kahng, "There are actually many ways to sanitise a toothbrush. A lot of people out there never sanitise their toothbrushes and leave it out in the open next to a toilet." For many, the idea of sanitation might stem from concerns about germs, especially in households with bathrooms located near toothbrush storage.

But is it absolutely necessary?

Dr Ramakrishna Tanguturi BDS, MDS, maxillofacial and dental surgeon at Dental Profiles, says, "Yes, not sanitising your toothbrush regularly can pose risks. Over time, a toothbrush can harbour bacteria, fungi, and even viruses, especially if it is stored in a moist environment. While many of these microorganisms are harmless, some — such as Streptococcus mutans, a bacteria responsible for cavities, or even Escherichia coli (E. coli) from bathroom exposure — can multiply." Repeated use of a contaminated toothbrush increases the likelihood of introducing these pathogens into the mouth, leading to infections like gingivitis, periodontitis, or even reinfection after a recent illness.

How do bacteria from a toothbrush impact oral health?

"Bacteria on a toothbrush can reintroduce harmful microorganisms into the mouth, contributing to plaque buildup, tooth decay, and gum disease. Some studies suggest that pathogens on toothbrushes could exacerbate conditions like bad breath or worsen pre-existing gum issues," informs Dr Tanguturi. Store it upright and allow it to air dry. Bacteria thrive in moist environments, so keeping the toothbrush dry is critical. Avoid covering the toothbrush with airtight caps, as this promotes moisture buildup and microbial growth.



Replace your toothbrush every 3-4 months to ensure bristles are effective and reduce bacterial buildup. Boiling a toothbrush for a few minutes can eliminate bacteria, but it may damage the bristles if done too frequently. Boiling a toothbrush for a few minutes can eliminate bacteria, but it may damage the bristles if done too frequently. Specific sanitisation methods Several methods can be used to sanitise toothbrushes, Dr Tanguturi says, with varying degrees of effectiveness. Among the most recommended methods:

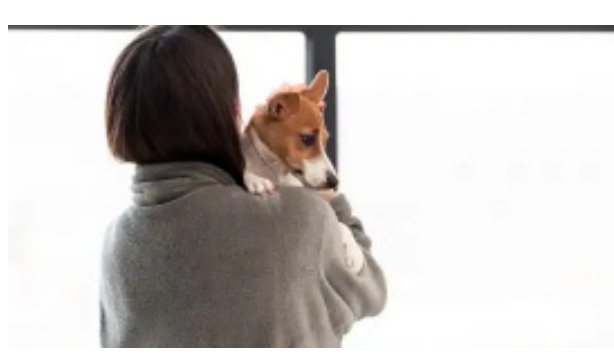
UV light sanitisers: These devices emit ultraviolet rays that kill bacteria and viruses by disrupting their DNA. Studies show UV sanitisers can reduce bacterial load by up to 99% on toothbrushes. Soaking in antibacterial mouthwash: This method is effective in killing bacteria present on the toothbrush bristles. It's simple, readily available, and effective. Boiling water: Boiling a toothbrush for a few minutes can eliminate bacteria, but it may damage the bristles if done too frequently.

## Your stress levels affect your dog

Dogs have lived alongside humans for thousands of years. They have been used to hunt, guard, herd and perform many other tasks, but today they mainly act as companions. While their lives today may seem easy compared with their ancestors, they still face many stresses — including visits to the vet. A couple of years ago, researchers in France showed that how a dog owner behaves at the vet affects their pet's stress levels. The study showed that negative owner behaviour, such as scolding, increased dog anxiety during a veterinary examination.

But before our recent research at Queen's University Belfast, no one had investigated the effect of owner stress on their dogs in a controlled environment. Our study differs from the research above, as it looks specifically at the effect of owner stress, measured through heart rate changes, on the stress experienced by their dog when at a vet. Twenty-eight owners and their dogs took part in our experiment. Both owners and dogs wore heart-rate monitors throughout the experiment so that we could monitor and record their heart rate and heart-rate variability — to measure stress levels. We then exposed the owners to either a stressful or a stress-relieving intervention and monitored the effect it had on them as well as on their dogs. The stressful intervention consisted of a digital stress test, which required owners to perform a mental arithmetic task, as well as a verbal presentation task. The stress-relieving intervention was a five-minute guided breathing meditation video. We found that dogs' heart rates decreased as they got used to the veterinary clinic environment. This suggests that vets should give dogs time to get used to the clinic before examining them. Not only will this reduce their stress, it may also improve the validity of any examinations or tests performed, as measures such as heart and respiratory rates can be elevated as a result of heightened stress.

Emotional contagion We also found that changes in the owner's heart rate from before the experiment to during the experiment could predict the heart rate changes of their dog. If the owner's heart rate increased or decreased during the experiment, their dog's heart rate was also likely to increase or decrease in tandem. These results suggest that dogs may recognise stress in their owners, and this could influence their own stress levels, through the process of "emotional contagion". This is a phenomenon where people, and other animals, may "catch" or mimic the emotions and behaviour



of those around them, either consciously or unconsciously.

It may also indicate that dogs look to their owners to inform their response to new environments. Owners were asked not to interact with their dogs for the duration of the experiment. So any assessment of owner stress made by their dogs was done without direct communication between owner and pet. stress, dog owner A couple of years ago, researchers in France showed that how a dog owner behaves at the vet affects their pet's stress levels. So what does this mean for the average dog owner? If our stress has the potential to influence our dogs, then this should be considered when we visit the vet. If vets help owners feel more calm while attending the clinic, it could help their dogs feel more at ease, too. A holistic approach to veterinary care, where the animal, their owner and the environment are all taken into consideration, is likely to result in the best welfare outcomes. While our research primarily focused on the bond between dogs and their owners, a recent study investigating canine behaviour found that the smell of sweat from a stressed human, who was unfamiliar to the dog, affected the learning and cognition of that dog during a cognitive bias test. The test measures whether an animal is in a positive or negative emotional state, and whether they are likely to make decisions with an optimistic or pessimistic outlook. This shows that dogs may be affected by the stress of strangers, as well as that of their owners. What is clear from our latest research is that dogs are perceptive animals that are influenced by the world and the people around them. People caring for or working with dogs should bear in mind that their own stress may affect that of their dogs.

## 'Woh bhaag gaya bechara': Manoj Pahwa on how his trainer gained 5 kilos instead of helping him and co-actor Ninad Kamat lose weight

Manoj Pahwa, known for his captivating performances in films, theatre and television, recently shared a humorous anecdote about his fitness journey — or lack thereof — while working on a project. In an interview with Hindi Rush, the actor who appeared alongside his wife Seema, revealed how his fitness trainer abandoned his sessions after just a few days. The reason? Pahwa's routine of indulging in lavish breakfasts overshadowed his workouts.

"Hum dono (Manoj and Ninad Kamat) ko yeh hua ki thoda apne aap ko fit rakhte hain. Aur jo apna staff leke jaate the, uss mein ek trainer leke jayenge. Toh, Ninad aur maine share kiya ek trainer. Aur trainer ek mahine baad 5 kilo wazan badha ke aaya tha, kyuki uski duty yahi hoti thi ki, 'Wahan chale jao Makhana Bhog, aur kachoriyan bann rahi hongy. Subhe 7 bajee shooting pe aane se pehle Netram Puri wala se jaake aana... hum toh jaa rahe hain set pe, aap ek kaam karo 7-7.30 bajee Netram se 20-25 puri le aana," Pahwa recounted. Eventually, he admitted that the fitness trainer became a makeshift spotboy for them. Soon after, he decided to leave, with Seema recalling, "Woh bhaag gaya." Pahwa added, "Woh bhaag gaya bechara, kehne laga, 'main kya karu mere ko hi barbaad kar denge.' Toh woh chala gaya 10-15 dinn baad." This light-hearted reflection raises an important question: What strategies can someone follow to maintain fitness while juggling irregular schedules and food indulgences?

Kanikka Malhotra, consultant dietician and certified diabetes educator, tells indianexpress.com, "Maintaining fitness with irregular schedules and indulgences requires strategic planning. Prioritise short, effective workouts like HIIT, even for 15-30 minutes, and treat them as non-negotiable appointments. Prepare nutrient-dense meals in advance to avoid unhealthy choices, focusing on fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains. Stay active throughout the day by incorporating movement. Lastly, prioritise quality sleep and recovery to support overall health and performance. These strategies ensure fitness is maintained despite a busy lifestyle." How fried foods like kachoris and puris regularly impact long-term health and weight goals Regular consump-



tion of heavy, fried foods like kachoris and puris can significantly impact long-term health and weight goals, agrees Malhotra, adding that these foods are typically high in calories, unhealthy fats, and trans fats, which contribute to increased calorie intake and can lead to obesity. "Due to their adverse effects on cholesterol levels and blood pressure, foods rich in fried foods are associated with a higher risk of developing chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension," she stresses. Malhotra adds that the oils used for frying, often high in saturated fats, can clog arteries and disrupt metabolic processes, promoting fat storage and increasing appetite. Moreover, the glycemic index of refined ingredients like maida (used in many fried snacks) can spike blood sugar levels, further exacerbating weight gain and metabolic disorders. Therefore, limiting the intake of such foods is crucial for achieving sustainable weight management and reducing the risk of chronic diseases. Practical ways to modify traditional comfort foods for a healthier lifestyle To make traditional comfort foods healthier without compromising taste, Malhotra suggests, substitute refined grains with whole grains (e.g., brown rice or whole wheat flour) and high-fat meats with lean proteins like chicken or turkey. Incorporate more vegetables into dishes to boost nutrition and flavour. "Opt for healthier cooking methods like baking, steaming, or grilling instead of frying to reduce unhealthy fats — practice portion control by pairing smaller servings of rich dishes with larger portions of vegetables or salads.

## India poised to lead in AI; sustained 6-8% economic growth, says IT Minister



artificial intelligence, Ashwini Vaishnaw, IT services, IT services artificial intelligence, Indian express news, current affairs Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting and Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw India is poised for a global leadership position in the area of artificial intelligence (AI) just like it has proven its mettle in IT services, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Thursday. The minister for electronics and information technology said all necessary regulations would be in place for AI while maintaining a balance with innovation, while speaking to news agency PTI at the World Economic Forum, being held in Davos. Talking about a united India face at Davos this time, the senior minister said, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi had told us clearly that the Indian pavilion this time in Davos should integrate all states. That has sent a very good signal this time for a unified image of the country. Leaders from 5-6 different parties came together on one stage," he added. Vaishnaw said people across the world now understand how India could stay on a sustained growth path when many other countries went deep under debt. On misinformation and mistrust emerging as biggest threats globally as identified by the World Economic Forum and challenges posed by AI, he said we will definitely need to take necessary safeguards but the opportunities presented by AI are also huge and they must be tapped responsibly. "The way India has proved its mettle in IT services, a similar opportunity is there in terms of AI. For that we need to prepare our youth." "Like we started 5G labs in 100 universities for telecom and the way we equipped 250 universities with latest semiconductor design tools, the same we are starting AI-ready courses in 200 universities

to prepare our youth to ensure leadership position for India in the AI space," he said. Asked about new regulations for AI, Vaishnaw said there must be a balance between regulation and innovation so that both can move together. Speaking during a panel discussion in Davos, Vaishnaw said that India will comfortably maintain a 6-8 per cent economic growth rate while keeping inflation under check in the years to come. He also said that simplification of tariffs and customs laws are among key focus areas for his government to boost exports. Vaishnaw said the talent available in India is unmatched across sectors and the world today trusts India because of its policies. Companies are shifting their factories and value chains to India, he added. Vaishnaw said the simplification of tariffs and customs laws are among the key focus areas of the government, and export-led growth can be a key differentiator.

## Bank of Japan raises interest rate, highest in 17 years

TOKYO: The Bank of Japan (BoJ) raised its key interest rate to about 0.5% from 0.25% on Friday, January 24, noting that inflation is holding at a desirable target level. The rate was increased for the first time in 17 years in March last year, ending its negative interest rate policy, which amounts to negative borrowing rates. BOJ Governor Kazuo Ueda, set to speak to reporters later in the day, repeatedly indicated the move was coming. Government data released hours before the decision showed consumer prices, excluding volatile food prices, rose last year at an average rate of 2.5%, marking the third straight year of increase. The consumer price index, excluding food, for the month of December alone showed a 3% rise. Another long-term concern was wage growth. Recent data show Japanese workers are gaining better wages and are generally set to receive solid pay raises in their upcoming annual union negotiations. The labour ministry adjusted its wage data for November to a rise of 0.5%, instead of a decline, helping to support the Bank of Japan's decision. The central bank has signaled that more interest rate raises may be coming, while stressing it plans to be extremely cautious to ensure the economy holds steady.

## 'Real Oscar is love of audience': Sonu Sood on Laapataa Ladies not making the cut for the Oscars



said we have to make a song for Fateh, it reminded me of nearly sixteen years ago when I worked in a studio in Mohali. At the time, I wasn't a thing in Bollywood, but in Punjab, I was a successful music director who made really futuristic tunes." He added how Sonu recommended his name to other producers, "I showed him my Brown Rang, Angrezi Beat, and other songs, and he said, 'Brother, your time will come, and Bollywood will come to you.' I asked him, 'Does it really seem that way to you?' Then, he went to Mumbai and referred my name to all the big music directors, producers, film directors, and filmmakers in the industry, saying there's a guy in Mohali who's creating amazing sounds. But nobody claimed it; nobody came. However, when people finally started coming, and Bollywood started happening, I met Sonu again in Bombay and told him that his vision had come true." "Sonu is a visionary and a brother who always helps others in difficult situations.

He helps his own people, and the entire world knows he does a lot for people he doesn't even know. He risks all for others. So, rather than being a filmmaker or actor, a person who has dedicated his entire life to serving others has a heart that simply wants to serve people. I've seen it; he's always on the phone, helping someone. If people like him don't succeed, then who will?" he shared. Earlier, the makers shared the teaser of the film. Sonu took to his official social media handle 'X' and dropped the teaser clip. The teaser starts with the statement, 'Never underestimate a nobody.' It then cuts to a voiceover in which Sonu Sood is heard conversing with another individual, correcting that he killed 50 people on March 19, not 40. "You'll never find those ten bodies," he said and also added, "Bhagvaan unki atma ko shanti de." Sood, while sharing the teaser, wrote on X, "AA RAHA HOON... Action speaks louder than words. #Fateh! Brace yourselves for the biggest action-packed thriller!" Produced by Sonali Sood for Shakti Sagar Productions and Umesh KR Bansal for Zed Studios, Fateh is slated to release on January 10, 2025.

Director Kiran Rao's film Laapataa Ladies, India's official entry for the Best International Feature Film category at the 97th Academy Awards, is no longer in the Oscars race. The film, which had garnered a lot of anticipation after being chosen as India's entry, did not make it to the Academy's official shortlist. However, actor Sonu Sood asserted that the real award for any film is the love and appreciation of the audience. While speaking to the media at a press conference in New Delhi, Sood said, "Real Oscar is the audience who shower their love on the film. What matters is to make a place in the hearts of people; awards just remain confined to the shelves. In September, the Film Federation of India, led by Jahnvi Barua, selected Laapataa Ladies from a list of 29 films in several Indian languages, including Payal Kapadia's All We Imagine As Light and the National Award-winning Aattam. Actor Sonu Sood, who is making his directorial debut with Fateh, has collaborated with Yo Yo Honey Singh for the track 'Hitman'.

While sharing his working experience with Sonu Sood, the ace singer said, "So, when Sonu paaji came to me and

## Kareena Kapoor cheers for Jeh as he performs on stage; Saif Ali Khan and Taimur record his performance.

Kareena Kapoor couldn't contain her excitement as she watched her younger son, Jehangir Ali Khan (Jeh), perform on stage at his school's function. A video has surfaced showing Kareena ecstatically waving at Jeh, who looked adorable performing on stage. Kareena was joined by husband Saif Ali Khan and elder son Taimur Ali Khan at the event. In the now-viral video, Jeh is seen dressed in an elephant costume, dancing with his classmates. His wide smile and evident joy stole the spotlight as he confidently enjoyed his moment on stage. From the audience, Kareena can be seen waving and cheering for Jeh, while Saif and Taimur enthusiastically recorded the performance. Take a look:

Fans quickly drew parallels between Kareena and Kajol's character Anjali from the iconic film Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham. In the film, Anjali is a spirited mother who enthusiastically cheers for her son during a school event. Highlighting the resemblance, a fan commented, "I read a comment where someone said Kareena has turned into real-life Anjali." Another fan wrote, "It's so cute! My dad has a video of my mom clapping for me. Mothers always feel proud of these small achievements." Earlier, in an interview with Filme Shilmy, Kareena shared how her sons, Taimur and Jeh have inherited traits from their father, Saif Ali Khan. She revealed, "They (Taimur and Jeh) are actually both quite



like him (Saif). Jeh just looks like me, but he has Saif's naughtiness. Though Tim (Taimur's nickname) has Saif's sense of humour, he is a bit reserved and doesn't like being clicked, he is more like his father. Jeh is like me in terms of look and vibe, but his naughtiness comes from Saif." On the professional front, Kareena was last seen in Rohit Shetty's Singham Again. She will next be seen in Meghna Gulzar's upcoming film, tentatively titled, which also stars Prithviraj Sukumaran in the lead role.

## Sheeba Akashdeep, Salman Khan's 1992 Suryavanshi co-star, calls him 'sweetest': 'Koi unhe arrogant bolta hai toh...

Sheeba Akashdeep, known for her memorable roles in Suryavanshi, Pyar Ka Rog, and other classics in the 90s, recently made a big-screen comeback with Rocky Aur Rani Ki Prem Kahani and Jigra. In an exclusive conversation with SCREEN, she opened up about her hiatus from the industry, the changes she has witnessed in cinema, and her journey back to the spotlight. Talking about her absence from films in the 2000s, Sheeba cites a combination of personal priorities and dwindling offers. "I had my kids and was enjoying watching them grow up. At the same time, I was working with my production company. There wasn't any tearing hurry to work, and frankly, there weren't people breaking my door with offers either," she said. "It just fizzled out. I didn't make a conscious decision to step away, nor did I actively seek out work," Sheeba told SCREEN. Sheeba admitted that re-establishing herself in the industry required stepping out of her comfort zone. "I had to put myself out there. You need to be a bit more aggressive in your marketing, which I never was, even at the peak of my career. Nobody is going to wake up one morning and say, 'Chalo Sheeba ko cast karte hain' (Let's cast Sheeba in the film)." Reminiscing about her experience working on Rakesh Kumar's 1992 horror-action drama Suryavanshi with Salman Khan, Sheeba recalled, "Salman and I were relatively new back then, while Amrita Singh was already established. Salman was incredibly sweet. Koi unhe arrogant bolta hai toh hairaani hoti hai (It surprises me when people call him arrogant.) I would say, he was one of the sweetest co-stars I have ever had. I worked with so many 90s stars like Akshay, Saif, Sunil—back then, we were all navigating our careers together." Discussing her comeback,



Sheeba said, "I had to be upfront about my intentions. I'd tell people I was looking to return to acting—not as a heroine, of course, but for any good part." She also said, "I don't live in a fool's paradise. I'd love to play lead roles, but I'm realistic about the competition today. It's not something I expect, nor am I waiting for it." On the transformation of the film industry, Sheeba said, "Today, characters are celebrated; the hero-heroine era is over. Another big change is how production scales have grown. There are rows of vanity vans now—one for the lead actor's gym, one for their staff, and another for the actor themselves. It has become much larger than life now. I come from a generation where we would change costumes right in the middle of the street."

## Rashmika Mandanna celebrates her ultimate 'heroine moment'

Mumbai: Actress Rashmika Mandanna embraced her ultimate 'heroine moment' in a recent social media post. Taking to Instagram, the 'Pushpa' actress shared her stunning photos, accompanied by a note highlighting the effort and determination it takes to achieve perfection. In her caption, Rashmika wrote, "My heroine moment. Just going back in time, I'd always be fascinated seeing models and actors look so perfect and worked really, really hard to achieve it. I have—to some extent—achieved it (I think). But it's mostly about working super-duper hard and having the right people work with you to look a certain way. And of course, there's also the editing and really talented people working behind the lenses. Ok, I am done now."

The photos feature Rashmika exuding elegance in a

stylish black saree paired with statement earrings. She enhanced her look with subtle makeup, including Kohl-rimmed eyes, mascara, and nude lipstick, adding to her timeless charm. Just days earlier, Rashmika shared another series of photos in an orange saree, thanking fans for their love and support for "Pushpa 2: The Rule." In her caption, she expressed gratitude, writing, "You guys were asking me to post this lewk, and here it is! Thank you... THANK YOU for all your love for Pushpa and Srivalli, guys! If you've watched it, I hope you enjoyed it. And if you haven't, please go watch it! Mwah! Loads of love, my loves." On the work front, the 28-year-old actress is basking in the massive success of "Pushpa 2: The Rule," directed by Sukumar and co-starring Allu Arjun and Fahadh Faasil.

## 'Raj Kapoor and wife Krishna fell in love at first sight, she was playing tanpura and he wanted to see her face,' recalls her nephew



Raj Kapoor was 21 when he got married to the 16-year-old Krishna Kapoor and for them, it was love at first sight. In a recent interview, Krishna's nephew Monty Premnath shared the origin of their love story and how they first met each other. He shared that Raj and veteran actor Prem Nath were friends who also worked with each other and Krishna, who was Prem Nath's sister, first ran into Raj when she was playing the tanpura. Talking to Vickey Lalwani on his YouTube channel, Monty said that Raj and Prem Nath were on a holiday in Madhya Pradesh when Raj first heard Krishna's music. She used to play with a veil on her face but Raj insisted on seeing her face. "Krishna, my bua, Krishna aunty was playing the tanpura there. My uncle wanted to see her face but she would stay under a veil," he recalled.

It was then that Prem Nath realised that she might

raise her veil for Ashok Kumar as she was a big fan of the actor. So, he lied and told her that Ashok was accompanying him. Hearing this, she lifted her veil and as soon as their eyes met, they fell in love. "She was a very big fan of Ashok Kumar so my father said 'Krishna, mere sath Ashok Kumar aaya hai (Ashok Kumar is with me) so she picked up the pallu and she saw Raj Uncle and it was love at first sight. And they got married," he recalled. Raj and Krishna's marriage went through many ups and downs but they stayed married until his passing in 1988. Raj and Krishna got married even before he found fame and in the subsequent years, when Raj's marriage went through rough patches amid rumours of his affairs, Krishna stuck by him. As per Rishi Kapoor's memoir, the only time she put her foot down was when he was apparently having an affair with his Sangam co-star Vjayanthimala as she moved into a hotel with their kids. The couple patched up later.

## Mukesh Khanna isn't sold on Ranbir Kapoor as Lord Ram in Ramayana: 'If you're a lampat chhichhora in real life...'

Despite being aware of his habit of stirring the pot, actor Mukesh Khanna seems to have initiated a new controversy, after commenting about the casting of Ranbir Kapoor as Lord Ram in an upcoming adaptation of the Ramayana. Khanna had previously voiced his complaints about the Prabhas-starrer Adipurush, which he repeated once again. In an interview, the actor wondered if Ranbir's real-life image would affect the audience's perception of him in the sacred role. Khanna also hinted that Ranbir's blockbuster film Animal, which was controversial itself, could also impact whether he is accepted in the role of Ram. In an interview with mid-day, the actor initially declined to comment about Ranbir. "I won't say anything about this, if I do, they'll accuse me of commenting about everyone and everything. They've ruined my reputation. I recently commented about Jackie Shroff's son... I'm not rude, but I speak my mind. If they're making a Ramayana, comparisons with Arun Govil will be inevitable," he said, making a reference to the actor who played Ram in the popular television adaptation of the epic.

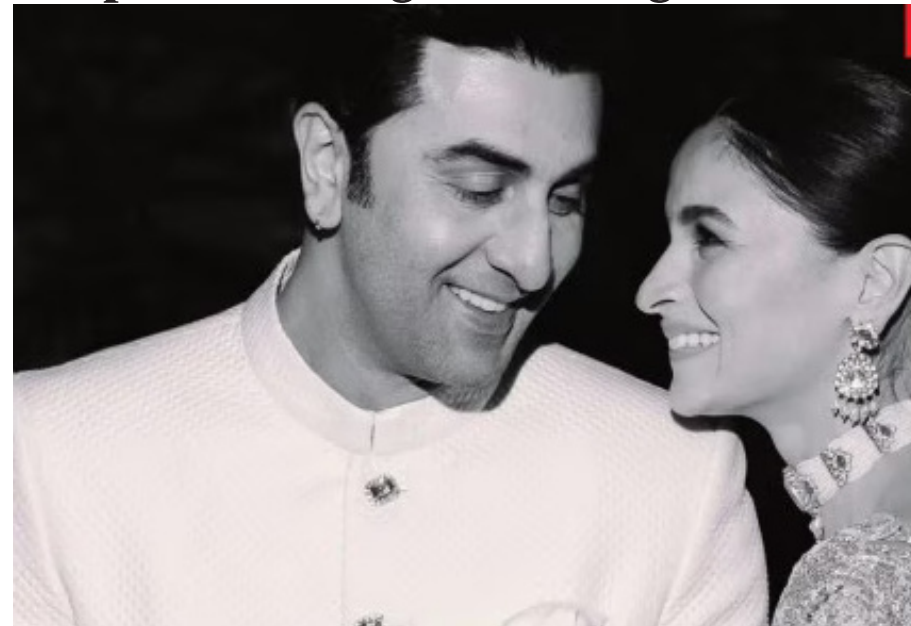
Asked if he feels there is any actor in the film industry right now who would be ideal for the role of Ram, Khanna said, "What Arun Govil did with the role has become the gold standard. All I can say is that whoever plays Ram must embody Ram; he shouldn't look like Raavan. In their real life, if they are a (lampat chhichhora) lewd hooligan, then it will show on screen. If you're playing Ram, you're not allowed to party and drink. But who am I to decide who plays Ram?" he said. Khanna warned filmmakers to 'be careful' about who they've cast to play Ram, and cited the example of Prabhas being rejected in the role. "He wasn't accepted by the public, despite being such a huge star. Not because he's a bad actor, but because he doesn't look like Ram..."



The actor playing Ram now is the beacon of the Kapoor family. He's a fine actor... But I will look at his face, and he should look like Ram. He's just done Animal, and his negative personality was highlighted in that movie. I hope that doesn't disturb this... Directed by Nitesh Tiwari, Ramayana will be presented in two parts, with the first part set for a Diwali 2026 release. The film also stars Sai Pallavi as Sita, and Sunny Deol as Hanuman.

## Alia Bhatt reacts amid trolls attacking Ranbir Kapoor for not giving her attention at Raj Kapoor event, likes post showing his caring side

Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt enjoy a massive fan following, and it's always a treat for fans when Bollywood's 'it' couple appears together, showcasing their chemistry and admiration for each other. However, being a celebrity couple, they often find themselves the target of trolls, who criticise Ranbir for allegedly not giving enough attention to Alia, especially when he is around his family. Recently, Alia addressed these perceptions, emphasising that people don't give enough credit to Ranbir's caring and loving side. A fan page recently shared a video from Raj Kapoor's 100th birth anniversary celebration that highlighted Ranbir's affectionate gestures towards Alia during the event. The clip showed him consistently reaching out for Alia's hand and staying by her side, countering the trolls' narrative. While a section of social media continued to criticise him, the video provided a fresh perspective, showing his caring side. The



side of Ranbir that social media doesn't show, they cut a 2 sec clip out of context and run a whole lot of negative PR with it. Meanwhile, this is the reality. It's crazy to me how easily people can be fooled ?????????? Thank you for this video you showed us all @vardaanvibe ??????,"

they wrote. Interestingly, Alia herself liked the post, subtly supporting the sentiment expressed. Earlier, Ranbir Kapoor was trolled online after a Vogue video of Alia went viral in which she mentioned that Ranbir would ask her to "wipe off" her lipstick because he preferred her natural lip colour. This state-

ment led to intense scrutiny of their relationship. This isn't the first time Ranbir has been trolled for his relationship dynamics. Earlier, a Vogue video of Alia went viral in which she mentioned that Ranbir would ask her to "wipe off" her lipstick because he preferred her natural lip colour.

## Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Rishabh Pant disappoint in rare domestic First-Class outing



GNS News Agency, Feb 2

The return of India's incumbent Test batsmen to the Ranji Trophy turned out to be a calamitous affair. Between Rohit Sharma, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rishabh Pant and Shubman Gill, they lasted only 45 balls and logged in merely 12 runs. Virat Kohli and KL Rahul skipped the penultimate round, while Washington Sundar and Nitish Kumar Reddy are with India's T20I squad. Worryingly, it's not only the lack of runs that would haunt them, but the methods of their dismissals too. Only Ravindra Jadeja remained anomalous, nabbing five wickets and belting a 36-ball 38.

Rohit Sharma: c Paras Dogra b Umar Nazir 3 (19) The Rohit Sharma pull was once a stroke of utter beauty, both majestic and emphatic. The swivel of the upper body, the left leg raised in level with his torso, the backwardly arching body when the bat made contact with the ball, the hands sending the ball into the stands or the unattended expanses of the ground, and the content grin on his face. But these days, the stroke that defined him undoes him. In the Test series against New Zealand (at home) and Australia (away), the shot, or the cluttered execution of it, had brought about his downfall. So it turned out to be at the Bandra BKC ground on Thursday. It was not the case of the ball hurrying him, rather the opposite of it. There was too much time to induce a dilemma, whether to sway away from the line, pull it, or just roll his wrists over it. The three-way confusion scrambled Sharma's wisdom and the alignment of his body. He ended up trying to flick the ball off his hips, the bat caught in a diagonal position to the ground, neither fully horizontal nor vertical, and fashioned a leading edge to mid-off.

Yashasvi Jaiswal: lbw b Auqib Nabi 4 (8) The memory of his muscles and the signals of his brain seemed to be stuck in Australia. The ball from Auqib landed a few

centimetres short of what would have been the perfect good length. It lulled the batsman on to the backfoot. For a moment, he thought he could leave it on length, as a ball of similar length in Australia would have flown over the stumps. When the realisation dawned that it was the BKC, Jaiswal was too late to readjust. He looked to defend, relying on his hands to bail him out of trouble. But the extra inward movement with the new ball stunned his reflexes. Until then, though, he had looked largely untroubled. Shubman Gill: c Krishnan Shrijith b Abhilash Shetty 4 (8) Gill is an off-side paradox. He has a gorgeous array of drives, aesthetics accentuated by his languid frame and angular stance, stork-like from a distance. But his front foot sometimes betrays him, especially early in his innings. It freezes after the initial stride and just his hands move towards the ball. He ends up playing away from the body, and hence manages little control. On a surface that allied sufficient but not alarming movement, he pushed at left-arm seamer Abhilash. The ball, at a distance where he could have shouldered arms, shaped a touch back, kissed the inside edge of his bat on its way to the wicketkeeper. The ball was so far away from the stumps that 'keeper Shrijith had already made up his mind to move towards his right. The ball's edgy reroute wrong-footed him, but still he clung onto the offering. Tightening up his off-side game and imbuing discretion would define Gill's English summer.

Rishabh Pant: c Prerak Mankad b D Jadeja 1 (10) He perished playing one of his staple strokes — the slog-sweep off a left-arm spinner. He tried to fetch Dharmendrasinh Jadeja into the Jamnagar Highway outside the stadium, but holed out to Prerak Mankad at deep midwicket. Usually ruthless against spinners, Pant has been prone to miscue as well as misjudge them after his comeback. In the first innings in the Pune Test against New Zealand, he tried a similar shot against off-spinner Glenn Phillips, missed it altogether and was bowled, deceived by the bounce of the good-length ball. In the next Test in Mumbai, he twice misread the length, resulting in an lbw and a bat-pad dismissal. Perhaps, his knees have not found their old strength after the accident, and hence his base, when slog-sweeping, is not as robust as it used to be. At the heart of his recent struggles against spinners, though, is the dilemma whether to fully attack or defend. Whenever he has been short of runs or wickets, Jadeja has returned to his home ground to turn his fortunes around. After two unremarkable series, he celebrated his homecoming with a five-wicket haul and a breezy 38, punctuated with three sixes.

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

GNS News Agency, Feb 2 It's the Grand Slam where Novak Djokovic has had the most success over the course of his professional career, but after walking out of the Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne on Friday, the Serb wasn't a 100% sure if he'd be back one more time. The 10-time Australian Open champion remained coy about his future as a torn muscle ended his quest for a historic 25th Major and a record-extending 11th title Down Under.

Is there a chance this could have been his last appearance at Melbourne Park? "I don't know. There is a chance," Djokovic said in the post-match press conference. "Who knows? I'll just have to see how the season goes. I want to keep going. But whether I'm going to have a revised schedule or not for the next year, I'm not sure. I normally like to come to Australia to play. I've had the biggest success in my career here. So if I'm fit, healthy, motivated, I don't see a reason why I wouldn't come. But there's always a chance, yeah," Djokovic, who had his wife and kids Tara and Stefan present in the stands this year, said. Later, however, he did add that as long as he is able to put up with all this strife on tour and still feel capable of challenging for the Slams, he will continue playing. Djokovic said he had quit the semifinal because of a torn muscle in his left leg after dropping the first set of his Australian Open semifinal against Alexander Zverev. He lost the opener 7-6 (5) in a tiebreaker and immediately walked around the net to concede the match to Zverev. The set had already lasted 1 hour, 20 minutes and included 19 points that lasted nine strokes or more apiece. The first four games alone lasted 31 minutes.

About the injury, Djokovic said he wasn't aware how long this is going to keep him out of action, but thought he could manage it through the rest of the tournament, like he had done a few years ago with an abdominal tear (when he went on to win the Slam). "It was getting worse and worse," Djokovic said referring to the pain in his leg, which he hurt during his quarterfinal victory over Carlos Alcaraz on Tuesday night. "I knew, even if I won the first set, it was going to be a huge uphill battle for me." Djokovic with-



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

## As Novak Djokovic walks out injured from Australian Open semifinal, Alexander Zverev condemns booing crowd: 'If he can't continue...'

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

Alexander Zverev reached his third Grand Slam final under the most extraordinary of circumstances on Friday as 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic retired at the Australian Open semifinal. The Serb decided to call off the match as he hit the volley into the net with Zverev on set point, leaving the court injured after losing the first set 7-6(5). After losing the set, he promptly informed Zverev that he could not go on and shook hands with the chair umpire before exiting, and there were some boos from the crowd mixed with the cheers for one of the all-time greats who had won this Slam 10 times in the past. And Zverev, who has said in the past there is no one he respects more on tour than Djokovic, didn't take kindly to those who jeered the former world No 1 off the court. Djokovic, who was walking off the court with his arms raised initially in acknowledgment of the fans, then stopped to seemingly give a double thumbs-up in a sarcastic fashion as he heard the boos. "The very first thing I want to say is, please guys, don't boo a player when he goes out with injury," Zverev said in his on-court interview as immediately there was a round of applause from



the stands. "I know that everybody paid for tickets and wants to see hopefully a great five-set match. But you got to understand Novak Djokovic is someone who has given to the sport over the past 20 years, absolutely everything of his life," the German added, to more applause. "He has won this tournament with an abdominal tear, won this tournament with a hamstring injury. So if he cannot continue a tennis match, it really means he cannot continue a tennis match. So please be respectful and really, show some love for Novak as well." That was followed by some more cheering

## Manoj Tiwary reveals Gautam Gambhir would scold him 'without any reason' and 'couldn't understand why he would target me'



GNS News Agency, Feb 2

Indian current Head Coach Gautam Gambhir and former Indian player Manoj Tiwary have had their issues in the past. In 2015 during a Ranji Trophy match between Delhi and Bengal, the tempers rose quite high between the duo. Tiwary in an interview would reveal that it was not an isolated incident, there have been other instances during their days at Kolkata Knight Riders which culminated in the altercation in 2015.

"I would get scolded without any reason. I couldn't understand why he would target me. When I came to KKR in

2010, he and I got along nicely. But then he would lose his cool at me out of the blue. He would use very hurtful words. Then, when I started thinking about it, I realized that out of all the local boys at KKR, I was the one who used to perform consistently. And since I was a promising youngster, the media was giving me attention. So, he didn't react to it well. That is what I believe," Tiwary said speaking on Lallantop. "Leading up to our fight at the 2015 Ranji Trophy, he was angry at me. In KKR, we argued. I was constantly getting demoted in the KKR batting order. In one of the friendly matches against Australia, I was the highest scorer. I had scored 129, while he [Gambhir] scored 110. Even then, he lost his cool. I was applying sunscreen when he came to me and shouted, 'What are you doing here? Everybody else is on the ground'. Out of nowhere," the 39-year-old added

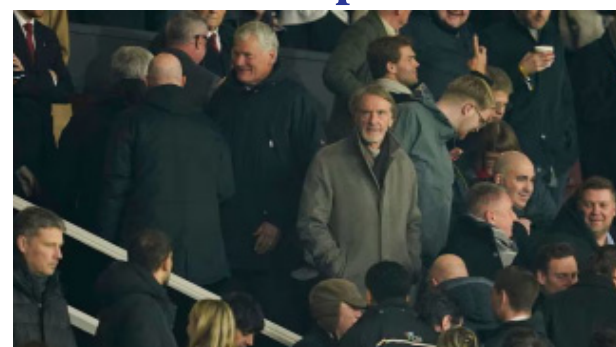
"Once, we had a heated argument about my batting position at the Eden Gardens. I was upset and had gone to the washroom. He barged in and said 'This attitude won't work. I won't give you a game. This and that. I never liked such words. He was giving me a threat. Wasim Akram also came in. He was our bowling coach, so he calmed things down. He said 'You are the captain. Cool down' He understood, he knew what was happening. He had said good things about my talent a few years ago," he revealed.

## Manchester United deems its financial losses 'not sustainable' and defends midseason ticket price hikes

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

Manchester Manchester United owner Sir Jim Ratcliffe, centre right, waits for the start of the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester United and Southampton at the Old Trafford stadium in Manchester, England. Manchester United has told fans it cannot sustain its current financial losses and risks breaching Premier League rules after facing a backlash over rising ticket prices. The record 20-time English champion, which is co-owned by the American Glazer family and British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe, said it had lost more than 300 million pounds (\$371 million) over the past three years. "This is not sustainable and if we do not act now we are in danger of failing to comply with PSR/FFP (financial) requirements in future years and significantly impacting our ability to compete on the pitch," United wrote in a letter to fan group The 1958 and seen by The Associated Press.

Supporters have hit out after United raised its lowest-priced tickets to 66 pounds (\$81) partway through the season. Previously, the lowest priced ticket was 40 pounds (\$49). "We will get back to a cash positive position as soon as possible and we will have to make some difficult choices to get there," United wrote. It said it did "not expect fans to make up all the current shortfall" but would look at its ticket pricing strategy to make sure it was "charging the right amount." The Premier League's profit and financial sustainability rules (PSR) allow clubs to lose a maximum of 105 million pounds (\$132.5 million) over a three-year period or face sanctions such as points deductions. Last season, Everton and Nottingham Forest were deducted points for breaking those rules. There are also sanctions for failing to comply with UEFA's financial fair play (FFP) regulations. While United reported losses last year of 113.2 million pounds (\$140 million) for the year ending June 30, certain areas of spending are not included in the league's PSR



calculations. Still, the club has outlined its concerns about its ability to comply with the rules. Ratcliffe, who is one of Britain's richest people and completed a partial buyout of United last year, has overseen an extensive restructuring program. That has included cost-saving initiatives that saw staff redundancies of around 250 roles. "None of this has been easy, but we believe it is essential to restoring financial sustainability to the club which will underpin us as we work to get back to the top of English and European football," United said. United also fired Erik ten Hag as manager in late October, just a few months after handing the Dutchman a contract extension through next season. Then, in December, the club announced that sporting director Dan Ashworth would leave by mutual agreement less than six months after taking over the role as part of Ratcliffe's overhaul. United's financial issues come at a time when it is need of improvements on the field. Last week, head coach Ruben Amorim said this was "the worst, maybe, in the history of Manchester United" after defeat to Brighton left it 13th in the standings and closer to the relegation zone than Champions League qualification. His need for funds to add to his squad could see the departure of leading players like Marcus Rashford and Alejandro Garnacho during the midseason transfer window.

## Madison Keys hangs tough and unloads to beat Iga Swiatek and reach first Major final in a decade

GNS News Agency, Feb 2

After World No.1 Aryna Sabalenka held up her end of the bargain on Friday, overcoming a tough start to eventually subdue 11th seed, and close friend, Paula Badosa 6-4, 6-2 in the first semifinal, Keys stunned second seed Iga Swiatek in an enthralling classic that went the distance. When Keys, the 19th seed from the United States, finally dispatched Swiatek 5-7, 6-1, 7-6 (10-8) after saving a match point, the disbelief was evident. As she knelt on the court with tears streaming down her face, she could hardly soak up the adoration of the capacity crowd at Rod Laver Arena that stayed for the nail-biting finish past midnight. "I'm still trying to catch up to everything that's happening. I'm in the finals. Woo-hoo! That match was just (at) such a high level... I was just fighting to stay in it," Keys said on court after the match.

Multiple generations of players have passed since Keys's first breakthrough came at Melbourne Park in 2015 as a teenager when she reached the semifinal by beating Venus Williams before coming up short against Serena. In the middle, there was a run to the final at her home Slam in New York in 2017, and a couple of other near-misses. For the once-prodigal talent to have won her first Australian Open semifinal a decade after reaching her first speaks of the steadiness and consistency that she has fallen back on for much of her career, and fell back on once again on Thursday. This was a match marked by the ferocity of Keys's ball-striking, not only in its power but also in its consistency. As Swiatek's level swung from loose to elite in the high-pressure environment of this closely-fought contest, the American stayed consistent from the baseline, even when under the pump, to get over the line. When the going got tough

Swiatek had been peerless in the tournament till then, having not had her serve broken since the first round and dropping only 14 games through her first five matches. But the real test of her resolve was to come when things stopped going her way, in match-ups where she does not enjoy unlimited time to unload her groundstrokes — and particularly her forehand — from the baseline. It has been a sticking point in the 23-year-old's flourishing career, which includes five Majors already, that when the tide turns against her, her response can often be erratic. In that case, a matchup against a solid-serving aggressive baseliner like Keys, who was in good form and can strike the ball as pure as anyone else on tour when it is in her strike zone, was built up to be a bigger challenge than what she had faced in the tournament so far. While Swiatek's response to being put under pressure may not have been steely cool, this result was more contingent on how Keys refused to go away, and dragged herself back from difficult situations by not allow-



ing her level from the baseline to fall. The duo traded breaks early in the first set but it was Swiatek's first-strike aggression that gave her the edge to eke out the first set. But once the windy conditions were subdued with the roof closed, Keys went for broke on her big, flat groundstrokes which skidded on the quick hardcourts and robbed Swiatek of time — especially when big returns were put back into her side of the court.

The second set was a one-sided offensive but Swiatek showed mettle to serve well and keep the knife-edged third set on track, even fashioning some chances on the Keys serve. In an even contest for much of its first and third sets, as the stats and scoreline suggest, Keys held on through the force of a forehand that went big crosscourt and rushed the Swiatek forehand, crushing any neutral balls that were there to be put away. The confidence in her game plan proved telling on the pressure points of the match — when the American was breakpoint down or when she was battling in the deciding 10-point tiebreaker. It made all the difference as she left with the victory. "I've been doing a lot of personal work with all of that. One of the big things, after I lost to Aryna (Sabalenka) at the US Open, I felt like I tried to play safe and wasn't playing how I wanted to in the big moments. That felt so bad," Keys later said, per Reuters. "I didn't want to be in the same situation where I looked back and thought 'Man, I should have gone for it.' I didn't want to have any regrets for not really laying it all out there. Saturday's final is no small task, though. Keys takes on Sabalenka, who is in her fifth consecutive hard court Major final and is bidding to win a third successive Australian Open title. Her form and winning streak are daunting but Sabalenka has not been imperious the way Swiatek had been in the tournament. Instead, she has shown that she is capable of changing gears and raising her game when required the most.