Two Telugu NRIs killed, two injured in road accident in Ireland

Hyderabad: Two Telugu NRIs were killed and two were injured in an accident on Friday in Co Carlow of Ireland. The two victims have been identified as Bhargav Chitturi (23) and Suresh Cherukuri (24).

Both the victims, who went to the United Kingdom for pursuing higher education, are natives of Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh.

According to local news websites of Ireland, the accident occurred when the car in which they were driving, rammed into a tree on the N80 at Graiguenaspiddoge, in Leagh, Rathoe at 1.15 am on Friday.

PM Modi hails Union Budget 2025 as 'Janata Janardan Ka Budget'



GNS News Agency, fEB 1

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday lauded the Union Budget 2025, calling it a "Janata Janardan Ka Budget" and emphasising its people-centric approach that will propel India's development journey.Sharing his thoughts on the Budget, PM Modi described it as a significant milestone in India's growth trajectory."This is a budget for the aspirations of 140 crore Indians. It will fulfill the dreams of every citizen. We have opened up several sectors for the youth, and the common people will be at the heart of India's mission to become a developed nation. This Budget is a force multiplier," he said.

He further highlighted that the Budget would acceler-

ate investment, consumption, and growth. "I congratulate Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and her team for presenting a people's Budget -- 'Janata Janardan Ka Budget'," he added. The Prime Minister pointed out a fundamental shift in the approach of this Budget, stating that while most budgets focus on filling government coffers, this one is dedicated to ensuring more money in the hands of citizens.

"This Budget is focussed on how the pockets of the countrymen will be filled, how they would increase their savings, and how they would contribute towards the development of the country. This Budget lays a strong foundation for this," he remarked.Discussing key reforms introduced in the Budget, PM Modi termed the decision to include the private sector in nuclear energy as "historic." He explained that this move would significantly boost India's civil nuclear energy sector and contribute to national progress.Highlighting employment-driven initiatives, the Prime Minister underscored the importance of giving infrastructure status to shipbuilding.

"With this status, large-scale ship construction in India will be encouraged, providing a fresh impetus to the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' campaign. Shipbuilding is a sector that generates extensive employment," he noted.PM Modi also stressed the potential of India's tourism sector, announcing that hotels would be constructed at 50 key tourist destinations."By bringing hotels under the infrastructure category for the first time, the tourism and hospitality sectors will receive a major boost. These industries play a crucial role in employment generation," he said. The Prime Minister reiterated that India is progressing with the mantra of 'Vikas bhi, Virasat bhi (Development and Heritage together)."He highlighted initiatives like the 'Gyan Bharatam Mission' and the 'National Digital Repository' as key steps in preserving India's rich heritage while advancing its modern infrastructure.

Tax booster for middle class: No income tax payable on income up to Rs 12 lakh

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

In a big boost to the Indian middle class, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday announced that there will be no income tax payable for incomes up to Rs 12 lakh, and Rs 12.75 lakh for salaried taxpayers (including standard deduction).In the new tax regime, the revised tax rate structure is Rs 0-4 lakh (zero tax), Rs 4-8



Hyderabad cybercime arrest five persons involving in job fraud

Hyderabad: The Hyderabad Cybercrime police arrested five persons on charges of cheating job aspirants to the tune of several lakhs by promising part-time task based jobs with hefty salaries, police said on Saturday.

The arrested persons are P Devakrupa, V.V.Shiva Shankar, Balaraju, Prajwal Reddy and C Vijay Sagar.

Police said the fraudsters with the help of several bank accounts, as per their well-orchestrated plan, impersonated as organizers of reputed companies with lucrative returns on the investments. They cheated job aspirants to the tune of several lakhs.

Telangana gets a big zero in 2025-26 Union Budget



GNS News Agency, fEB 1

Hyderabad: The BJP-led Central government has once again demonstrated its apathy toward Telangana by completely ignoring the State's Budget proposals, despite a formal request for Rs 1.63 lakh crore in allocations for crucial infrastructure projects.Not a single rupee was allocated to the State in the Union Budget 2025-26, further deepening the financial injustice meted out to Telangana.Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Finance Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka had submitted detailed proposals to the Centre, seeking funds for key projects such as the Regional Ring Road, Hyderabad Metro Rail Phase II, Musi River Development, a Railway Coach Factory in Kazipet, Bayyaram Steel Plant, Navodaya and Kendriya Vidyalayas, and other commitments made under the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act. However, Telangana's proposals found no mention in the union Budget presented in the Parliament on Saturday, leaving the State emptyhanded.Economic experts point out that the State's priorities were not aligned with the Centre's funding patterns, which may have contributed to the neglect.

They argue that while the previous BRS government focused on irrigation projects, the current Congressled government failed to clearly communicate its top priorities. However, this does not justify the union government's outright rejection of Telangana's proposals, particularly when States aligned with the BJP continue to receive generous allocations. The glaring indifference in budgetary allocations raises serious questions about the Centre's commitment to cooperative federalism. Telangana, a State that contributes around 5.1 per cent of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), finds itself treated as an outsider, while other NDA-led States benefit from substantial allocations. The latest budget has once again exposed the Centre's step-motherly attitude, reinforcing the growing sentiment that Telangana is being systematically sidelined in national development planning. Proposals for critical investmentsRegional Ring Road: Project estimated at Rs.34,367 cr, crucial for bolstering industrial growth, logistics, pharmaceutical sectorHyderabad Metro Rail Phase-2: 76.4-km expansion, costing Rs 24,269 crore, proposed as joint State-Centre ventureMusi RiverfronDevelopment: Comprehensive project seeking Rs 14,100 cr to enhance urban infrastructure, secure 220 acres of defence land

KTR slams 2025-26 Union Budget, demands apology from BJP and Congress MPs

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

Hyderabad: BRS working president KT Rama Rao rubbished the Union Budget 2025-26 over the Centre's stepmotherly treatment of Telangana.He said the BJP-led Centre was deliberately sidelining Telangana while favouring poll-bound States. Telangana puts high hopes on Union Budget 2025-26; submits proposals for Rs.1.63 lakh croreHe also lambasted Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Telangana MPs from both the BJP and Congress for their failure to secure even a single rupee for the State, demanding that they apologise to the people for their inaction.

"The Union Budget has once again proved that national parties can never protect Telangana's interests. The



lakh (5 per cent), Rs 8-12 lakh (10 per cent), Rs 12-16 lakh (15 per cent), Rs 16-20 lakh (20 per cent), Rs 20-24 lakh (25 per cent), and above Rs 24 lakh (30 per cent).

"The new tax structure would substantially reduce tax for the middle class," announced FM Sitharaman.Presenting the Union Budget 2025-26, FM Sitharaman said that the tax deduction at source (TDS) rates will be rationalised and the limit for tax deduction for senior citizens will be doubled to Rs 1 lakh.FM Sitharaman also proposed to extend the time limit to file the updated return from two years to four years.The threshold to collect TDS on remittances under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) would be increased to Rs 10 lakh from Rs 7 lakh and an annual limit of Rs 2.4 lakh for TDS on rent has been raised to Rs 6 lakh.Delay for payment of TCS up to the due

date would be decriminalised, according to the Finance Minister, adding that TCS on remittances, if a loan was taken for education, has been waived. The Union Budget also proposes to exempt withdrawals from National Savings Scheme (NSS) accounts on or after August 2024 from tax. The Budget Session of Parliament, which commenced on Friday, will be conducted in two phases - the first started on January 31 and will conclude on February 13, while the second phase will begin on March 10 and end on April 4.

Government to set up daycare cancer centres in all district hospitals over next three years: Sitharaman



GNS News Agency, fEB 1

The government will facilitate setting up of daycare cancer centres in all district hospitals over the next three years and 200 of these will be established in 2025-26, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced on Saturday.Presenting the 2025-26 Union Budget, her record eighth, Sitharaman said gig workers will be provided healthcare facilities under the PM Jan Aarogya Yojana (PM-JAY).In the next year, 10,000 additional seats will be added in medical colleges and hospitals towards the goal of add-ing 75,000 seats in the next five years.

The government will facilitate setting up of daycare cancer centres in all district hospitals in the next three years, she said. She said, "200 centres will be established in 2025-26 itself." Sitharaman further announced that gig workers will be provided healthcare facilities under PM-JAY and this measure is likely to assist nearly 1 crore workers. On adding seats in medical colleges and hospitals, she said, "Our government has added almost 1.1 lakh undergraduate and postgraduate medical education seats in 10 years, an increase of 130%.""In the next year, 10,000 additional seats will be added in medical colleges and hospitals towards the goal of adding 75,000 seats in the next five years," she

CM Revanth Reddy Invited to Sri Jogulamba Ammavari Brahmotsavams & Maha Shivaratri Celebrations.

said. The minister also informed that broadband connec-

tivity will be provided to all government secondary schools

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

and primary healthcare centres.

Gadwal : Former MLA and AICC Secretary Dr. SA Sampath Kumar, along with Jogulamba Temple Committee Chairman Nageshwar Reddy, Executive Officer (EO) Purender, Chief Priests, and temple committee directors, formally invited Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to attend the grand celebrations of Sri Jogulamba Ammavari Annual Brahmotsavams and Sri Bala Bhrameshwara Swamy Maha Shivaratri Utsavams. The Brahmotsavams are scheduled to take place from January 30 to February 3, with the Vasantha Panchami celebrations being a significant highlight. Devotees from across the state are expected to participate in the religious events. The Maha Shivaratri Utsavam of Sri Bala Bhrameshwara Swamy is also set to be a grand occasion, drawing thousands of devotees. Temple authorities and religious leaders have made elaborate arrangements to ensure a smooth and spiritually enriching experience for all devotees. The invitation extended to CM Revanth Reddy signifies the importance of these sacred celebrations in Telangana's cultural and religious calendar.

BJP's 'double-engine' government claim has been exposed as a farce," he said, adding that the BJP and Congress MPs have brought zero funds to Telangana, proving their complete incompetence. In a statement, Rama Rao said Revanth Reddy's frequent visits to Delhi were not for securing funds but to serve political interests. He charged Revanth Reddy with making a secret pact with the BJP, leading to Telangana's continued neglect. "Even with eight MPs from the Congress and BJP each, Telangana got nothing. These MPs have only pleased their Delhi bosses instead of raising Telangana's voice in Parliament," he said.

The BRS working president criticised the BJP government at the Centre for prioritising BJP-ruled States in Budget allocations while sidelining Telangana. He said BJP MPs from other States have secured substantial funds for their regions, whereas Telangana BJP MPs and the two union Ministers have been ineffective and powerless. He termed them as inefficient and powerless, who failed to bring even a single rupee while BJP representatives from other States secured massive allocations.

Rama Rao was outraged that Telangana was not even mentioned in the Budget, calling it a grave insult to the State's four crore people. He pointed out how poll-bound Bihar received massive allocations, while Telangana was denied





GNS News Agency, fEB 1

Dubai: The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has been allocated a budget of Rs 20,516 crore for the fiscal year 2025-26 in the Union Budget, a notable decrease from last year's revised allocation of Rs 25,277 crore. Though there is significant increase in allocation for the last few years compared with the past, the allocation this time is yet not at par with India's growing global clout and ambitions. The vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 hinges on sustained global partnership. Despite its challenging mandate in making India into a leading power and influential entity among the nations of the world, MEA remains one of the least funded Central Ministries. The MEA's allocation not only reflects the government's foreign policy priorities but also its capacity to deliver on its global ambitions and commitments. Though Rs. 4,206 crore was allocated to expenditures for embassies and missions, an increase from last year's revised layout of Rs.3,969 crore, the budget for women welfare abroad this year remained dismal with only a sanction of Rs. 1 crore. The budget also allocated a significant amount of Rs.1,913 crore for passport and emigration where the Ministry is intended to usher electronic passports. Bhutan remained India's top recipient of foreign aid with allocation of Rs. 2,150 crore from total aid outlay of Rs. 6,750 crore.

Opposition walks out duringNirmalaSitharaman's Budget speech

In the Budget session of the Parliament, Opposition parties walked out of Lok Sabha in protest on Saturday (February 1, 2025), after their demand to discuss the Maha Kumbh stampede was not accepted.At least 30 pilgrims died and 60 were injured in a stampede at the Maha Kumbh on January 29th, 2025, when a large number of pilgrims reached the sacred Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj to take a holy dip on Mauni Amavasya.

even its rightful dues. "The Centre has given financial aid to the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, but has ignored the long-promised Bayyaram Steel Factory, ITIR project and national status for our irrigation project as promised under the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act," he said.

He also criticised the lack of higher educational institutions such as IIT, IIM, IISER, NID and IIIT in Telangana, calling it a severe injustice to students and youth. The former Minister charged the BJP government of favouring its ownruled States, while neglecting Southern States that contribute heavily to the national treasury."The Centre's attitude is a blatant attack on federalism. Their step-motherly treatment towards Telangana and other Southern States exposes their true priorities," he said. Reiterating that only the BRS would fight for Telangana's rights, Rama Rao said the people of Telangana have realised the importance of regional parties in securing the State's rights and understood the betrayal by both the BJP and Congress."The Central government's discriminatory approach towards Telangana has once again been exposed in this Budget. Both the BJP and Congress will pay the price for their failure," he warned.

INDIAN CHRONICLE

Indian Chronicle English Daily Sobering Survey

The pre-Budget Economic Survey offers a sobering picture of the Indian economy, which is expected to exand by a modest 6.3-6.8 per cent in the coming financial ear. This figure is nowhere near the growth rate of nearly per cent that is required over the next two decades to chieve the grand goal of becoming a developed nation Viksit Bharat) by 2047. India continues to be the fastestrowing major economy in the world, but sustaining the nomentum would not be easy in the face of international rade tensions and Trump-induced protectionism. The urvey has insisted on greater deregulation and reforms o enhance economic freedom and spur growth. The mesage to the states is loud and clear: Liberalise standards and controls on businesses to improve ease of doing busiess. This is an unusual throwback to then Finance Minster Manmohan Singh's landmark 1991 Budget, which ad unleashed the animal spirits of the economy. It seems he BJP-led Union Government has not managed to renain oblivious to MMS's pathbreaking policies, which have vitnessed a revival of keen interest after his recent death.

The 'Make in India' initiative, launched in 2014 with he objective of transforming the country into a global hub or design and manufacturing, remains a work in progress. t's a major challenge to dovetail this flagship mission with he 'Make for the world' goal, which needs a booster shot o scale up India's export competitiveness and enhance ts participation in global supply chains. The facts are inescapable: Merchandise exports have grown moderately due o sluggish global demand, while imports have increased significantly amid strong domestic demand. When it comes o trade deficit — the difference between imports and exorts — India finds itself in an unenviable position vis-ais the majority of its top trading partners, particularly China. Signs of a thaw in bilateral ties might further skew the trade situation in favour of Beijing.

1970 Budget: Indira Gandhi's socialism push

We approach problems of growth with Social justice and stability", voiced India's first female Finance Minister Indira Gandhi, in her maiden budget presentation. Aspiring to mobilise ?170 crore from taxation alone, Ms. Gandhi – as some critics held, was pursuing her "first instalment of socialism". The paradigm encompassed personal incomes as well as consumer items with some marginal concessions at lower level – a seemingly symbolic gesture to the common, The Hindu's reportage held. Other than the aspects about economic policies and political opposition, the budget initiated a first by regularising the introduction of the Finance Bill within four hours, meeting at 10 p.m. the same night.

In 1969-70, India had overcome the problems of food, inflation and external viability. It began focusing on long termgrowth with the initiation of the fourth five-year plan. Clocking a growth of 5% (+0.5%), the ratio of tax revenue to national income stood at 13% as the Central and state governments augmented its resources with additional taxation measures and large borrowings from the market. Wholesale prices remained continued its upward trajectory in January 1970 - rising by 6.8%. Imports declined 8% and foreign exchange reserves rose by 50-75 crore. The latter was scaled after a net repayment of 125.2 crore to the International Monetary Fund.

Whilst the Prime Minister exuded satisfaction about the overall economic situation, she made a case for expanding newer technology in agriculture to cover wheat, rice, coarse grains, puises and commercial crops to ensure so cial justice, avoid social tensions and maintain a sustained increase in production. Cautioning about visible shortages in steel, staple fibre, aluminium and consumer goods, she contended about increasing capacity in the near future. Export promotion, mobilisation of resources, improved productivity, a healthy climate for investment and involvement of larger section of people in development were all residing in the Prime Minister's aspiration list. With respect to direct taxes, a uniform exemption limit was fixed for incomes up to ?5000 per annum. Rates of income-tax on personal incomes over ?40,000 were to be stepped up on a progressive basis, going up to 85 per cent on the highest income slab of over ? 2 lakhs. Additionally, with a surcharge of 10% of the basic income, the maximum resulting rate was to be 93.5% for the highest slab. Wealth tax on individuals and Hindu undivided families were hiked gradually by 0.9 to 5% on land and buildings priced up to ?5 lakhs. The properties in excess of the threshold were to be taxed at 5%. Finally, value of land exceeding ?10 lakh was to be taxed at 7%. The upper limit of the gift tax was revised from 50% to 75%. The lower limit of 5% remain unchanged. Additionally, the exemption limit was reduced from 10,000 to 5000. Among the other notable measures, entertainment expenditure within the country as well as money spent on maintenance of guest houses were disallowed in calculation of profits and losses for an entity starting February 28, 1970. These changes to were estimated to add ?20 crore to the Centre's revenue kitty via income tax and ?16 crore via wealth tax. With respect to indirect taxes, import duties on machinery was hiked to 35%, doubled for certain plastic materials, electrical resistance wires and nichrome. Motor vehicle parts, pharmaceutical chemicals and non-electrical instruments and appliances were to be taxed at 10%. Duty on wines, whisky was also hiked. Export duty on tea was abolished while duty on jute canvas, webbings, tarpaulin cloth and manufactures were reduced from ?500 per tonne to ?200 per tonne. This was to cost the Centre ?9.75 crore in revenue. Excise duties were levied on a fresh slew of commodities - typewriters, metal containers, stainless steel blades, slotted angles, iron safes and safe deposit vaults. A 10% duty was levied on soda ash, caustic soda, aerated water, 25% on sanitaryware, glazed tiles, porcelain and 53% on room air conditioners and large refrigerators. Only cold storage plants, hospitals run by the governments, factories and charitable trusts were exempt from this. Baby foods and 'Desi ghee' were exempt from duties. Television sets which were exempt from duties were slapped with a 20% duty, while duties on polyester fibres, artificial silk, motor spirit, kerosene, furnace oil, tea were also hiked minimally. Agricultural outlay increased by ?39 crore, power by 31 crore, transport and communication ?84 crore and social services (also encompassing including Family planning) ?28 crore. Notably, the Centre had just kicked off its family planning programme which took a controversial turn in 1975 when thousands of men were forcibly sterilised. Allocation to States was also stepped up from 615 crore to 735 crore. This was in addition to ? 275 crore ear-marked for programmes included in the five-year Plan.

AI centre of excellence on education, digitisation proposed



GNS News Agency, fEB 1

In addition to centres of excellence on Artificial Intelligence in agriculture, health and sustainable cities, this budget has proposed to set up an AI centre of excellence on education. A Bharatiya Bhasha Pustak Scheme to provide digital-form of Indian language books for school and higher education. Five third-generation IITs set up after 2014 such as IIT Goa, Dharwad and so on will be supported to take in

6,500 more students. IIT Patna to have expanded hostels and other infrastructure capacity. The budget speech notes that the total number of students in 23 IITs has more than doubled -- from 65,000 to 1.35 lakh in the past 10 years. Ten thousand more seats in medical colleges and hospitals will be added this year as part of an initiative to add 75,000 seats in the next 10 years. The Economic Survey had said: "The WHO standard norm of 1:1000 seems to be attainable by 2030 with a conservative 50,000 doctors being licensed every year till 2030." A key new initiative is the setting up of 50,000 Atal Tinkering Labs will be set up in government schools "to cultivate the spirit of curiosity and innovation, and foster a scientific temper among young minds." This will come on top of providing broadband connectivity to all government secondary schools and Primary Health Centres in rural areas. On skilling, the budget talks about setting up five National Centres of Excellence for skilling with global expertise and partnerships to equip our youth with the skills required for "Make for India, Make for the World" manufacturing. The partnerships will cover curriculum design, training of trainers, a skills certification framework, and periodic reviews.

Why eucation investment is key to India's economic growth



GNS News Agency, fEB 1

The year 2025 brings optimism of India's position as the fastest-growing economy in the world. The International Monetary Fund projects GDP growth rate of 6.5%. These numbers are not just our achievements as a country, but they reflect the resilience and aspirations of a young, dynamic population. However, this growth story is incomplete without addressing critical gaps and raising a significant question - are we truly harnessing the full potential of this demographic dividend?For most countries, achieving their full potential is tied to solving social and economic issues through education. For India, education is not merely a sector but is the backbone of sustainable growth, the ladder that lifts individuals out of poverty, and the engine of innovation.

Yet, India's education system continues to grapple with deep-rooted challenges in quality, equity, and relevance. To sustain this growth and ensure it is inclusive, education must be placed at the heart of our policy priorities. As we await Budget 2025, it is imperative that education takes center stage because without a strong foundation, the promise of our economic success cannot be realized.

More funding for education We allocate less than 3% of our GDP to education, far below the globally recommended benchmark of 6%. For a country with over 260 million school-going children and a rising demand for higher education, this figure is alarmingly inadequate. Countries that prioritize education spending tend to build more resilient and innovative economies, equipping their populations with the skills to thrive in a competitive world.For India, this directly ties into the vision of an Atmanirbhar Bharat. Imagine what doubling this investment could achieve: better schools, accessible resources, and equal opportunities for students, even in the most remote corners of Bharat.

spective, Switzerland exempts education services from GST altogether, and in China, the rate is as low as 6-9%. India, too, must recognize that education is not a luxury. Exempting below-poverty-line (BPL) and low-income families from this tax would be a monumental step toward making education more accessible. But access isn't just about affordability, it's also about reach. In a country where over 65% of the population owns a smartphone, digital education holds immense promise. Online platforms can bridge the gap for millions of students who otherwise have limited access to quality teachers and resources. However, this vision comes with its own challenges: unreliable internet in rural areas, lack of affordable devices, and insufficient digital literacy. This is where innovation comes into play. We need to prioritize low-cost, low-bandwidth solutions that make online education viable in even the most remote corners of the country. Imagine a future where a child in a small village in Jharkhand can access the same quality of education as a student in Mumbai, and this is possible with well-designed digital infrastructure supported by public-private partnerships.

Leveraging AI for education The buzzword that's slowly becoming a game-changer. Artificial intelligence has the potential to pivot how we teach and learn. From personalized lesson plans to interactive learning modules, AI can make education more engaging, inclusive, and effective. It can also help address regional disparities by providing localized solutions in multiple languages. But for AI to truly make an impact, we need targeted investments and incentives for companies working in this space. Imagine leveraging AI to train teachers, create custom learning paths for students, and even predict dropout risks so interventions can happen before it's too late. The possibilities are endless, but they require a budget that prioritizes innovation over inertia. One of the biggest opportunities in Indian education lies in collaboration between the government, private players, and universities. By working together, we can design skill-based curriculums that are aligned with industry needs. The National Education Policy (NEP) has already laid the groundwork for increasing creativity and entrepreneurship among students. But policies alone aren't enough. We need to invest in entrepreneurship cells, incubators, and research hubs that encourage young minds to think beyond traditional career paths. Tax incentives for collaborations between academia and industry can further accelerate this process, creating a culture where ideas are nurtured and transformed into real-world solutions. The 2025 budget presents an opportunity for India to solidify its position as a global economic leader and to support the central government's vision of becoming a developed country by 2047. To achieve this, India must prioritize education as a central focus of its long-term strategy. Increased funding for education, smarter allocation of resources, and innovative, inclusive policy reforms are key to ensuring that India's demographic dividend becomes more than just a statistical advantage - it must be harnessed as a real engine for economic transformation.

Challenges in Education Sector Funding and Implementation of NEP



GNS News Agency, fEB 1

Recently, replying to a question from Left MP V Sivadasan in Rajya Sabha, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said the National Education Policy (NEP), started in 2020, unequivocally endorses and envisions a "substantial increase" in public investment in education by both the Union and State Governments so that the expenditure in education reaches 6% of the GDP. "As far as Ministry of Education is concerned, there has been increase in budget allocation from ? 93,224 crore (2021-22) to ? 1,12,899 crore (2023-24), which is around 21.1 % increase," Mr. Pradhan said.

Citing "Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education 2019-20 to 2021-22", he said the total expenditure on education (including all Central Ministries and all States/UTs) as percentage of GDP stands at 4.12% (for the year 2021-22). The Centre's budgeted expenditure for education, however, is 0.4% of the GDP according to Mr. Pradhan's reply.As Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presents her eighth Union Budget on February 1, an allocation of 6% of the GDP to the education sector looks like a distant dream. The implementation of the NEP has proven to be a costly affair for the sector, especially for State governments-run education institutions. Ms. Sitharaman had also held a meeting with the stakeholders in the education sector to know their views for the budget.Last budget's allocation for school education was ? 73,008 crore, about ? 5,000 crore more than the budget of 2023-24. Similarly, the allocation for higher education was ? 47,620 crore, which was an increase of more than ? 3,000 crore than the budget of the previous year. Out of this, the allocation for Grants-inaid to States and UTs - for both school and higher education - was more than ? 60,000 crore. The States have been demanding more from the Centre as grants to implement the NEP-recommended measures such as the Four Years Under-graduate Programme (FYUP). The States have been saying that to implement FYUP, they have to build new classrooms, find new faculty and other infrastructure and it will not happen without the help of the Centre.

Many students are worried about the decreasing number of scholarships given by the Union Government. According to the Ministry, the number of beneficiaries of various higher education and research scholarships have come down to 34,732 students in 2020-21 from 46,092 in 2016-17. However, there is a marginal increase in the amount paid as scholarships. It has to be seen whether the Finance Ministry will release more funds towards the scholarships. "The government must reconsider the current fellowship hike and increase it to a minimum of 40% to account for the rising costs of living and inflation. The disbursement of fellowships must be made in a timely and regular manner to ensure that researchers can focus on their work without financial worries," the Students Federation of India had demanded from the Centre recently.Public funding of universities The Centre's data says in 2019, 5.86.337 people migrated to foreign countries for higher studies, while in 2023, the number reached 8,92,989. While 2,34,473 students migrated to the United States, 2,33,532 people went to Canada for higher studies in 2023 alone. Students associations have been arguing that a lack of support mechanism has beer ailing the country's public universities. The payment of salaries of faculty in colleges and universities as per the UGC scale has also been an issue as the Centre's grant was ended in 2019. For example, Kerala State claims that it spends about ? 1,822. 35 crore for the payment of salary and other expenses to 13 State-run universities. But if the draft UGC guidelines of faculty and vice chancellors' appointments are implemented, the State fears that it will have no role in the appointments, though it pays their salaries. This federal issue may also come up for discussions in Parliament during the debate on the budget.

But it's not just about spending more, it's about spending smartly. We need funding models that are tied to outcomes. The programmes should be funded based on measurable academic and social impact. It's an approach that rewards results and ensures that every rupee spent contributes directly to the betterment of our students. Now let's talk about affordability. Education is often referred to as the great equalizer, but how equalizing can it really be when it's taxed at 18% GST? For many families, this tax rate is a barrier to accessing quality education. To put this into per-

A note for New Delhi on dealing with 'Trumperica'

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

With a flourish of his pen, United States President Donald Trump waded through dozens of files within hours of being sworn in, with executive orders (EOs), revocation orders of Biden-era decisions, campaign commitments to the 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) base and exit orders from a number of multilateral agreements and organisations. The decisions, which the White House referred to as '100s of Executive actions in the first 100 hours to kick off America's Golden Age', will, no doubt, have lasting implications for the U.S and for the world. For India that has seen a year-on-year improvement in ties with the U.S. for the past quarter-century - the visible signs from the Trump administration have been positive, given India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to the Trump inauguration, the meeting of the Quad Foreign Ministers and the bilateral with his counterpart Marco Rubio - which was Mr. Rubio, the new U.S. Secretary of State's first - followed by the Trump-Modi call. On closer analysis of the economic impact, however, these optics may be deceptive. As New Delhi prepares for a visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington, and Mr. Trump's visit to India later this year, a detailed analysis over the issues that will most affect India, with the duopoly of immigration and taxes at the forefront, is necessary.

The immigration crackdownOn immigration, Mr. Trump's specific orders on securing borders, guarding against "invasions" by illegal aliens, designating cartels as foreign terrorist organisations and advanced vetting of the visa issuance process on the one hand, as well as raids and arrests by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency on the other make it clear that this is a major priority. While New Delhi has reacted to these measures with sanguine statements on taking back all illegal immigrants who are verifiably Indian, it would be short-sighted not to see the deeper, three-pronged economic effect on India.

Indians are now the second largest group of citizens being granted U.S. citizenship legally (after Mexico) and have cornered a predominant share of H-1B visas; but they are also the third largest in terms of illegal entry. Mr. Trump's actions will affect not just thousands of Indians who undertake perilous journeys by air and sea, and then by foot over

South and Central America and Canada to the U.S.'s land borders, but also those currently in the U.S. A Pew Research analysis of ICE numbers says 7.25 lakh Indians are amongst about 14 million in the total undocumented migrants, with more than 18,000 Indians in detention centres on a "final removal list" for deportation.

First, if the Trump administration does escalate deportation flights — as it did in its first term — over the next four years, India will have to deal with the loss of remittances and provide for the returnees, adding to the unemployment crisis in India.Second, as Mr. Trump has shown by successfully strong-arming Colombia into accepting deportations without conditions, or face the imposition of 25% tariffs instead, any refusal to do so would also incur economic costs.

Third, these migrant numbers refer largely to blue-collar workers, but other measures by Mr. Trump are also aimed at the white-collar, middle-level managers, engineers and other professionals. Mr. Trump's EO to end citizenship birth rights may be struck down by the judiciary, but the message from the move, that follows restrictions on H-1B spousal work privileges in his first term, is clear - the welcome mat for those seeking to move permanently and raise families in the U.S. is being removed. This will require a reassessment of India's own education and skilling policies to ensure that all the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduates who would be impacted can be absorbed. Trade and the weaponisation of tarifflf the impact of immigration actions takes some imagination, the result of Mr. Trump's trade policy plans needs none whatsoever, going by his pronouncements and the harsh punitive measures he undertook in his first term. On inauguration day, Mr. Trump's EOs and Exit Orders included an "America First Trade Policy" and a directive to Mr. Rubio to implement an "America First Foreign Policy". India must be prepared for how it will respond to the U.S.'s weaponisation of tariffs as a means to enforce Trumpian diktats. During Trump 1.0, New Delhi quietly accepted the withdrawal of its Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) status, and Mr. Trump's order to end all oil imports from Iran and Venezuela. In Trump 2.0, such actions might not only enable the U.S.'s bully-tactics further, but it may also incentivise others such as China to follow suit.



The U.S.-China relationship has confused many over the past week: Mr. Trump's threat of 10% tariffs on China is far lower than the 60% he had said he would impose, while his invitation to China's President Xi Jinping for the inaugural, a U-turn on the TikTok ban and Mr. Rubio's contention that the "US does not want Taiwanese independence" could upset many calculations. While previous attempts by earlier Presidents for a U.S.-China "G-2" have been short-lived, Mr. Trump's description of his call with Mr. Xi on January 17, where they had agreed to do "everything possible to make the world more peaceful and safe", suggests he is also attracted to some version of the idea, which will affect an Indian economy now primed for the U.S.-China rivalry to escalate, bringing in an inflow of investments. In addition, Washington's withdrawal from the World Health Organization, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Global Tax Deal, the Paris accord on climate changes, the freezing of USAID funding worldwide, and its revocation of previous mandates for green businesses, electric vehicles and wind and solar power will also carry a cost for India, that had been promised by the U.S. of funding for its development and energy transition.

On an 'AI-Pocalypse'The biggest economic consequences of Trump 2.0's measures, will however come from his overdrive on artificial intelligence (AI). In the inaugural seating plan, tech tycoons eclipsed top members of the Trump cabinet on the dais. The launch of the \$500 billion Stargate AI Infrastructure project by Mr. Trump, to be built by a group of tech companies, was another marker of this priority for the new administration.







Navigating AI in education: challenges, ethics, and the need for comprehensive policies



GNS News Agency, fEB 1

In November last year, a law student from a private university took his university to court for failing him in an assignment on the allegation that it was completed with the use of AI. His argument was largely that the university had not explicitly prohibited use of AI, illustrating the urgent need for a thought-out policy for use of AI in academic and research work. On the one hand, the government has pushed for integration of artificial intelligence in higher education. On the other, growing use of AI tools by students has been a cause for concern as the distinction between assistance and plagiarism becomes hard to tell. Given all this, a comprehensive AI policy is found lacking in the domain of higher education

The 2018 AI strategy paper by NITI Ayog talks about the potential of AI in "supplementing pedagogy", facilitating lesson planning, customised learning content for multi-level classrooms, automating resource allocation, and so on. As far as usage by students is concerned, Intelligent Tutoring Systems are seen as the pathway. However, the way that Niti Aayog envisions customised learning, the assumption is that the tools will stay largely in the hands of teachers or administrators who will use AI for assistance. The use of freely available AI tools independently by students remains largely unaddressed.

The Indian Council for Medical Research is possibly the only significant national body in India so far which has laid down some guidelines on the ethical usage and application of AI.Plagiarism and its detectionAs such the University Grants Commission (UGC) adopted the 'Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism in Higher Education' regulations in 2018 which set upper limits for how much percentage of the content can be copied, and how it should be acknowledged and referenced. But at the outset, detection itself remains a major challenge.Vaibhav Narawade, president of Mumbai University College Teachers' Association said, "Al tools are being used by students and teachers in a helpful way but the drawback is that students are increasingly using it to substitute original and creative thinking. We have some software that can detect plagiarism and AI use. But that is limited to thesis or dissertation and research submissions. The regular assignments and internal assessments are largely handwritten and there is no way to check those for plagiarism or Al use."Moreover, as generative Al gets better with time, plagiarism detection software like Turnitin have themselves acknowledged that there can be a possibility of inaccurately detecting Al-use. Ethical considerations

Even when detected, the dilemmas are many. On the one hand, it is argued that the data generated from freely accessible tools is openly available so the individual using it should not be held accountable. On the other, the person using it is not the one who created it, so, strictly speaking, should not get the credit for it.

Apart from plagiarism, there are concerns that include but are not limited to the quality of academic output, perpetuation of inherent biases in AI, erosion of critical thinking skills in students, data privacy concerns and intellectual property rights. Prof Arun Tangirala, Dean of Competency and Outreach at IIT Tirupati, said, "While talking about ethics of AI usage by students, one will be remiss not to mention the ethical concerns that abound in the very development and maintenance of AI models. There are examples where individuals' content on certain platforms has been used for developing AI models without any permissions even from the platform. So the questions of originality, copyright

and so on are built into the tool as well."Apart from that, Al tools collect our data and given the lack of awareness around data privacy, our personal information is susceptible to misuse, he pointed out.Comprehensive legislation at an international level to address these concerns or regulate the dynamic domain of generative AI and its consequences to intellectual property rights have themselves been at a nascent stage. So the confusions and gaps among academics and institutions about AI usage are but natural. In the meantime, some best practices have been adopted by some institutes or academics. "AI is here to stay, the question is how can we use it responsibly?" asks Prof. Tangirala. For teachers like Manjula Venkataraghavan, Associate Professor at Manipal Institute of Communication, MAHE, transparency and a focus on responsible usage has been the way to go. She said, "As faculty, we are ourselves having workshops and training on how to leverage AI for academic as well as administrative purposes. Students will also inevitably use it. We use plagiarism-detection software but they are not foolproof and there are freely available tools which can help students humanise AIgenerated data. So what we have been telling them is how to use it correctly, whether it is to structure their text or for a literature review in research.'

A team of two Senior Writing Tutors and one Senior Writing fellow at the Centre for Writing and Communication of Ashoka University have been conducting a project assessing AI tools for academic writing in the field of humanities and social sciences. Neerav Dwivedi from the team said, "Since 2022, we've found a large dependence on AI tools amongst the student community. When interacting with students, we often emphasize the importance of including an AI information use statement where they declare how and why they have used AI for specific writing tasks. Sarah Eaton's concept of post plagiarism is productive to think through these evolving concerns."

In a collective statement, the team said that AI should be used thoughtfully. One can ask clarifying questions, challenge assumptions, critique writing, and prompt deeper analysis and counterarguments. When used responsibly, it can enhance accessibility by assisting students-especially non-native English speakers—in refining clarity and structure. "For students not having proficiency in certain disciplines and familiarity with new topics, AI often serves as an accessible starting point for learning", said the statement.

The team said the role of AI should remain that of a supplement rather than a substitute for intellectual engagement. "Al aids in synthesizing large volumes of literature, identifying key themes, and facilitating an iterative writing process through structured feedback and revision. By focusing on ethical use and integrating it as a supportive tool rather than a substitute for intellectual effort, academic institutions can harness its potential to enrich learning and research while maintaining academic integrity", they said.Cambridge International put out a policy statement on the use of generative AI in student work submitted for assessment stating, "AI to create or enhance student work without acknowledgement risks being classed as plagiarism and, like other forms of malpractice, may be subject to penalty." They laid down that all use of generative AI programs to conduct initial research, create text, images, sound or video or plan a project must be acknowledged in the work and AI-generated material must be clearly referenced.In Australia, institutes are slowly coming up with rules around this and some schools are saying that two things are necessary, shared Assistant Professor Tangirala. "One is declaring the tool that has been used. Second is the series of prompts that were given to arrive at that result. The logic here is transparency as well as demonstrating the way in which the AI-tool was used, which is also a skill."The adjacent question is that of the skill sets needed in the future, he stresses. "What we need is a new skill set. Before calculators were introduced in school exams, there were a certain kind of questions that could be asked. When calculators



GNS News Agency, fEB 1

Focusing on climate adaptation as a key goal, the government in the 2024-25 Economic Survey, tabled in Parliament on Friday (January 31, 2025) said that India will need to continue "efforts to maximise the efficiency of its existing fossil fuel resources in the medium term". The Survey pointed to developed countries prematurely shutting down thermal power plants without viable alternatives, and said that widespread adoption of renewable energy remains challenging

The Economic Survey recognises air pollution as a major concern for north India, especially for people in the Delhi NCR region where unhealthy air has almost become a staple in the winter months. In 2024 (until December 27, 2024), Delhi saw 155 days of 'poor', 'very poor', or 'severe' air quality, with an air quality index (AQI) of 200 or more. For the first time in six years, the city did not witness even one day of 'good' air quality days (AQI lesser than 50) in 2024. Even on the day the Economic Survey was tabled in Parliament, the air quality was recorded in the "very poor" category at 9 a.m., with an AQI of 349 - and this was two days after stage 3 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) was invoked in NCR on January 29, 2025 as the air quality deteriorated.

Quoting the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Economic Survey says that 99% of the world breathes air that exceeds WHO guideline limits and contains high levels of pollutants, but people in low and middle-income countries suffer the most. The document recognises the role of human activities like vehicular traffic, agricultural practices, and use of coal and wood for cooking, it also puts the blame on geography and wind direction. The Survey focuses on government programmes like the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) and actions like GRAP that have been designed to tackle the problem of air pollution. "The NCAP emphasises the implementation of City Action Plans (CAPs) through the convergence of resources from various central government schemes such as Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban), AMRUT, Smart City Mission, SATAT, and Nagar Van Yojana, as well as through resources from state governments/UT administration and agencies like municipal corporations and urban development authorities," the Survey states. However, a report published in The Hindu on April 28, 2024 analyses how implementation of Clean Air Action Plans under NCAP has been inconsistent.

"The NCAP was well-intentioned, and a significant sum of money has been allocated. However, as Economic Survey shows, not much progress has been made in Delhi. This is because the NCAP is focused on cities. But air pollution is a truly national phenomenon, with our rural communities also experiencing bad air quality because of sources such as wood, waste, and agricultural residue burning and informal industries (e.g. brick kilns). These emissions from outside the non-attainment cities pollute our villages and contribute to urban air pollution," R Subramanian sector head (air quality) at CSTEP told GRAP is a series of restrictions imposed in response to air pollution levels, but in December 2024, when Delhi NCR was going through yet another bout of air pollution, Supreme Court compared the plan to "medicine given to an already critical patient", raising doubts on its efficacy. The Economic Survey says that India's climate efforts keep the country's 2070 net-zero emissions target in mind, and climate mitigation and adaptation should be included in its growth strategy to achieve this goal without comprising on economic development.

Phone calls offering MPSC exam question paper for Rs 40 lakhs: 3 arrested

Economic Survey 2024-25 | What

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

Pune city police have arrested three people in connection with a case relating to phone calls asking aspirants to pay Rs 40 lakh in order to question papers for the Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC), ahead of the exams.Police have identified the accused persons as Deepak Gayaram Gaydhane (26), Sumit Kailas Jadhav (23) and Yogesh Surendra Waghmare.

Dr Suvarna Kharat, secretary of MPSC, lodged the first information report (FIR) in this case at the Bund Garden police station on Friday. The MPSC is conducting examinations for Group B (Non-Gazetted) Services on February 2 across the state. Thousands of students are appearing for the examination.But, in the last few days, some students from Pune received calls on their mobile phones from a person claiming to be an employee of "Rohan Consultancy" in Nagpur, who offered to provide them with question papers for the scheduled MPSC examination on payment of Rs 40 lakh.

An audio clip of this phone call went viral on social media, causing a major disturbance among candidates appearing for the MPSC examination. To prevent any panic, MPSC's secretary Suvarna Kharat held a press conference in Navi Mumbai on Friday, saying that no question papers had been leaked. Kharat also filed a formal complaint with the Pune city police. Subsequently, the crime branch sleuths initiated a probe into it. Based on clues obtained during the investigation, cops arrested Deepak Gaydnane, a native of Bhandara district and Sumit Jadhav of Nashik district, from Chakan area in Pune. Their mobile phones were also seized. Further probe revealed that Gaydhane and Jadhav are factory workers, who got hold of a list of 24 candidates appearing for the MPSC examination, from one Yogesh Waghmare of Nagpur on January 24, 2025. The duo had then contacted at least two candidates whose contact numbers were mentioned in this list, police said. A police team was dispatched from Pune to Nagpur to arrest Waghmare.



Taking swift action, Nagpur police nabbed Waghmare and handed him over to the Pune cops on Saturday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (crime) Nikhil Pingle of Pune city police said that so far there is no evidence to show that MPSC question papers may have been leaked."An investigation is on to know from where the accused got a list of the candidates appearing for the MPSC examination. We are probing whether they got this information from any coaching classes. We suspect the involvement of more persons in this crime. So far, we have not found involvement of any MPSC staffers in this case," said Pingle.Police have booked the accused persons under section 62, 318 (4), 353 (1), 353 (1)(b) of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS) for allegedly cheating the candidates and causing fear and panic among a section of society by spreading false information. Assistant commissioner of police Rajendra Mulik produced the accused Gaidhane and Jadhav before a magistrate court in Pune on Saturday. Public prosecutor Dilip Gaikwad sought police custody of the two accused for 14 days for further investigation. Police are probing the mobile phone calls and financial transactions of the accused persons. Police suspect the role of an organised group that wanted to cheat multiple candidates. The court remanded Gaidhane and Jadhav to police custody till February 7.

were allowed, students no longer needed to be tested on their computational abilities. Instead, we could now give more complex questions requiring students to think differently."So, instead of testing a student on their ability to write code, which AI can easily do now, we can test the student's ability to understand and evaluate the best out of three programs performing the same task.

Why there's a hype behind **DeepSeek's new AI model: In Charts**

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

China-based startup DeepSeek's latest AI models, primarily the DeepSeek-R1 reasoning model, has caused a stir in the world of Large Language Models (LLMs) which has been dominated by giants like OpenAI. Apart from being on par with OpenAl's flagship o1 model on multiple benchmarking tools, the DeepSeek-R1 model is also available at a fraction of the cost, which has disrupted the techworld order.On January 28, 2025, DeepSeek's AI assistant also overtook OpenAI's ChatGPT to become the toprated free application on Apple's App Store in the United States. One of the benchmarks used to grade the performance of a LLM is the Massive Multitask Language Understanding (MMLU), which consists of 16,000 multiplechoice questions across 57 academic subjects. Despite some critique, the MMLU is still one of the prominent benchmarking tools used. In the MMLU, DeepSeek-R1's performance is comparable to OpenAl's o1 (and the o1 'Pro') model, where the former scored a 90.8 while the latter scored 92.3, as shown in the plot below. DeepSeek-R1, which can be scaled to 671 billion parameters, surpassed Meta's flagship Llama 3.1 (405 billion parameters) and Antropic's famous Claude 3.5 Sonnet which was released in June 2024. Human domain-experts are estimated to achieve a score of 89.8 in the MMLU.DeepSeek's technical paper, available for everyone to see on the model's GitHub page, demonstrates the R1's score in across benchmarking tools used to grade English, code, math, and Chinese.In language expertise, out of OpenAI and Anthropic's most powerful models, the R1 performed competitively on most except the SimpleQA, where it scored a 30.1 which was over 35% lower than o1's score of 47, as shown in the plots below. While the R1's performance was the best in the LiveCodeBench benchmarking tool, with a score of 65.9, it's performance in the rest of the tests shown in the graphic below is comparable to o1 and the Claude 3.5 Sonnet. The R1 is in the top two ranks in each of the tools used to grade a model's coding capabilities

DeepSeek-R1 outperforms the powerful o1's excellent score in the MATH-500 and AIME 2024, scoring 97.3 in the former and 79.8 in the latter, whereas OpenAl's o1 scored 96.4 and 79.2, respectively.DeepSeek's R1 and V3 models scored highest in benchmarking tools used to grade a models' compatibility with the Chinese languages.

DeepSeek-R1's cost efficiencyIn what seems to be

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DeepSeek-R1 outperforms the powerful o1's excellent score in the MATH-500 and AIME 2024, scoring 97.3 in the former and 79.8 in the latter, whereas OpenAl's o1 scored 96.4 and 79.2, respectively

the most attractive aspect of the model, the DeepSeek-R1 is available for users for only a fraction of the cost when compared to its closest rival, OpenAl's o1. To access R1's API (Application Programming Interface), the input cost which is the cost incurred to feed in prompts in the model's textbox which then generates a response - is just \$0.55, as compared to o1's \$15, for 1 million tokens. A 'token' is essentially the smallest unit of text data (a few characters) that is broken down for the LLM to process. Claude 3.5 Sonnet costs \$3 (almost six times that of R1) for an input of 1 million tokens.R1's output costs (which is the cost of the output generated by the model) are also significantly more affordable when compared to OpenAl's o1, o1-mini, GPT 4o as shown in the graphic below. DeepSeek-R1's output cost per million tokens is over 25 times cheaper than OpenAl's o1.DeepSeek-R1's release disrupted the global Al sector and also led to the biggest market cap loss in the US where Nvidia lost \$590 billion as the company's stocks fell 17% on January 27, 2025.

Chennai: Man, daughter found dead; doctor close to the family held

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

The bodies of a 78-year-old man and his 36-year-old daughter were found in a locked apartment under suspicious circumstances. Police identified the deceased as Samuel Sankar, 78, and his daughter Ann Cynthia, 37, both from Vellore. The duo had been residing in Thirumullaivoyal in order that he can get dialysis treatment at a private hospital in the city. According to police sources, relatives grew concerned after repeated attempts to contact them failed. When no response was received to phone calls, the Thirumullaivoyal Police were alerted. Officers traced the location using mobile phone signals and, upon breaking open the locked apartment, discovered the decomposed bodies.

Inspector George Miller of Thirumullaivoyal Police sent the bodies for postmortem and launched an investigation. Scrutiny of Cynthia's call records led them to Samuel Ebinezer, 34, a native of Orikkai, Kancheepuram district, who had studied medicine in Vienna and was reportedly in close contact with Cynthia. Police detained Ebinezer, who was staying in the same apartment complex. Initial inquiries revealed that Cynthia, estranged from her husband, had moved to the apartment with her father based on Ebinezer's suggestion. He had allegedly been providing medical treatment to her father, including dialysis procedures

Investigations suggest that Samuel Sankar died in September, allegedly due to improper treatment. A dispute



between Cynthia and the doctor ensued, during which Ebinezer allegedly pushed her, rendering her unconscious. Panicking, he fled the scene, locking the apartment without informing authorities.Police are now probing whether Sampath's death resulted from medical negligence or natural causes. Additionally, they are investigating the exact circumstances that led to Cynthia's death.Authorities also noted that the air-conditioner had remained on for some time after the deaths. Police suspect that a chemical, possibly camphor, was used to suppress any odour, as no neighbours had reported anything unusual. Further investigations are underway to corroborate the doctor's confession and establish a clear sequence of events.

Cleanup drive at Indira Park: 40kg of discarded manja collected in 3 hours

Sangareddy: As many as 40 volunteers of Animal Warriors Conservation Society, Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), and HCL Foundation collected 40 kg of discarded nylon manja from the trees in Indira Park during a clean-up drive on Saturday.

They could remove the manja from 60 trees during a three-hour-long effort. Santoshi Nair, a member of AWCS, said that still they could hardly clean 10 per cent of Indira

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Park. She said they would take up another clean-up drive next Sunday by involving more volunteers. The GHMC officials arranged multiple boom lift vehicles to help the volunteers remove the manja from trees. The forest department, GHMC, AWCS, and HCL foundation collaborated for the clean-up drive as the AWCS had rescued 28 birds trapped in manja during January.Out of these 28, seven died while four of them were disabled permanently.



SUNDAY 2 JANUARY 2025

School enrolment down by over 1 crore in 2023-24, says govt. report

Ranga Reddy

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

The total enrolment of students has dropped by over a crore in 2023-24 as compared to the previous years, shows the latest data released by the Ministry of Education (MoE). A total of 24.8 crore students enrolled in the academic year 2023-24, Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) report released by the Ministry said. Over the last four years, the enrolment data has hovered around 26 crore

Education officials have stated in the report that the data observes some real changes from the previous years as this exercise of maintaining a separate student base is totally different, unique and incomparable to that of 2021-22 or the previous years. The UDISE+ facilitates online uploading of data at school level with inbuilt validation checks and the subsequent data verification at the block, district and State level ensures data reliability and timely completion. In 2018-19, the total enrolment of students in school was 26.02 crore, which increased in 2019-20 by 1.6% and crossed 26.45 crore, an increase of more than 42 lakh students. The enrolments slightly fell in 2020-21 as compared to 2019-20. In 2021-22 as compared to 2020-21. total enrolment increased by 0.76%. Even according to data from back in 2012-13, the total enrolment was 26.3 crore.

In 2022-23, there was a drop in enrolment with 25.18 crore students being registered and there was a further fall

in 2023-24 to 24.8 crore in the total enrolment, a drop of 6% (nearly 1.22 crore students) as compared to 2018-19.In 2022-23, MoE started a revitalised UDISE+ ecosystem which captures data on more than 60 fields for each student and to maintain the uniqueness of the child the Aadhaar details were also collected on voluntary basis. In the latest report, more than 19.7 crore students provided Aadhaar numbers by 2023-24 voluntarily, the report said. Officials have stated that UDISE+ 2022-23 data is not strictly comparable with the previous reports on various educational indicators like Gross Enrolment Ratio, Net Enrolment Ratio, dropout rates and so on. Since 2022-23, more efforts have been put in accurately establishing student and teacher credentials to weed out duplicate or ghost entries for specific identification of beneficiaries for various educational schemes. Apart from Aadhaar, a separate unique educational ID (EID) for every student has been created in the UDISE+ portal to cover each and every child under the ecosystem of UDISE+, officials said."Through the creation of unique student and teacher identities, credentials of individuals students and teachers in the education ecosystem can be established more accurately leading to weeding out of duplicate or ghost entries resulting in precise identification of beneficiaries for benefit transfers of Samagra Shiksha scheme, PM POSHAN Scheme, National Scholarship scheme etc. (and) can bring significant savings to government in future years," the report said. While in 2018-19, 13.53 crore boys were enrolled, this saw a drop to 12.87 crore enrolments in 2023-24 a decrease of 4.87%, while enrolment of girls decreased from 12.49 crore in 2018-19 to 11.93 crore in 2023-24, a decrease of 4.48%. States like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra saw among the highest drop in enrolments. In 2018-19, Bihar reflected an enrolment of over 2.49 crore students which dropped to over 2.13 crore (a dip of over 35.65 lakh students) in the respective years UDISE+ report data. Similarly, Uttar Pradesh had shown enrolment of 4.44 crore students in 2018-19 which dropped by 28.26 lakh to 4.16 crore in latest data. Maharashtra recorded a decrease of 18.55 lakh students from over 2.32 crore to 2.13 crore in the latest report

after signing on to PM-USHA



GNS News Agency, fEB 1

Four months after Odisha signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Centre to implement the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA), the State's higher education institutions are set to receive ? 676.7 crore for infrastructural development and their transformation into world-class multidisciplinary universities.Under Multi-Disciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERU) Category, four universities will receive 400 crore with ? 100 crore each. This major fund has been evenly distributed in four different regions representing Ravenshaw University in east, Berhampur University in south, Maharaja Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo University in north and Sambalpur University in west. While Berhampur and Sambalpur universities are old universities, Ravenshaw and Maharaja Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo are newer ones. At a time when administrative costs, including salaries, consume over 50% of the total budget allocation for the State's Higher Education Department, minimal resources remain for developing infrastructure to support quality education. The State was urgently requiring a much needed infusion of funds for capital expenditure. The funds were allocated following the decisions made during the third Project Approval Board meeting of the Ministry of Educa-

tion. This allocation was made against the backdrop of political controversy, as the previous Naveen Patnaik-led government had reportedly shown little interest in the Central scheme.In 2023, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan had written two letters urging the State government to sign the MoU necessary to access PM-USHA funds. However, it was only after the BJP came to power that the Odisha government signed the MoU for the scheme.According to State Higher Education Minister Suryabanshi Suraj, out of the total fund, 408.7 crore will come from the Central Government while 268 crore will be contributed by the State. "This funding aims to strengthen the infrastructure and enhance human resource development, research and skill-building initiatives in universities and colleges across Odisha. It also seeks to promote employable education for students," said the Minister.A statement from Higher Education says the funds will be utilised for setting up smart classrooms, laboratories, computer laboratories, academic buildings and libraries. Additionally, advanced research infrastructure will be developed to support highquality education. Under Grants to Strengthen Universities Category, five universities will get ? 100 crore with ? 20 crore each. Under Grants to Strengthen Colleges category, 24 colleges will receive 120 crore with ? 5 crore each.Under Gender Inclusion and Equality Initiatives 10 crore will be provided to five districts - Bhadrak, Kandhamal, Mayurbhani, Nabarangpur and Sambalpur. Three districts Kandhamal, Mayurbhanj, Nabarangpur are dominated by tribals. After approval, the State government has expedited the process asking nodal officers to prepare detailed project report to utilize the fund and achieve the objective of gender inclusion and equality in higher education."The scheme focuses on inclusive education, ensuring no student, including women and differently-abled students, is left behind. The scheme also emphasizes skill development, self-defense training and employability enhancement, paving the way for students to secure better career opportunities," said Mr. Suraj.Odisha has 18 government universities and seven private universities. There are 1,058 colleges available in different disciplines. It is to be noted that Rashtriva Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) 1.0 and RUSA 2.0, both centrally sponsored schemes, have been implemented in Odisha since 2014-15 and 2017-18, respectively. Under RUSA 1.0, the Centre has given ?331.75 crore while State share was ? 220 crore. Under the RUSA 2.0, the State had submitted proposals worth 290 crore with Centre.

Peek into the world of Bengaluru's smallest inhabitants

GNS News Agency, fEB

Did you know ants once shared the planet with dinosaurs like the T-Rex and the Velociraptor? Or that termites cultivate food gardens of fungi within their large, intricately constructed mounds? And that it isn't just honey that will go missing in a world without bees, but also many fruits, vegetables, grains and nuts. Also, not all spiders build webs, cockroaches are a lot more than irritating house pests, butterflies can taste food with their feet, and male cicadas serenade potential mates using a unique soundproducing organ on their abdomen called the tymbal?The world of these minibeasts is indeed both enigmatic and fascinating, as a new book, Commonly Spotted Insects & Spiders in the City of Bengaluru, reinforces repeatedly. "The lives, survival strategies and nature history stories of insects and spiders can range from the calmly simple (or at least what we know so far) to the bizarrely complex," states the introduction to the book, which has been co-authored by Vena Kapoor, Priya Venkatesh and Vaidva R., designed by Pratyush Gupta and enabled by the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum's Small Grants Programme.Filled with mind-boggling facts and gorgeous pictures, it offers a ringside view of the lives and natural histories of some of the city's many six- and eight-legged creatures around 135 insects and 25 spiders - serving as "an easy-to-use tool to help you identify and get to know more about the some of the commonly found insects and spiders living their lives around us."As Vaidya points out, most of the images in the book were not shot in farflung, wooded areas with many trees but bang amid the concrete jungle that is Bengaluru. "Most of them have been shot right at homes or just outside them, in gardens, etc," says the Bengaluru-based nature enthusiast and photographer. "The main point we are trying to emphasise is that there is a lot of biodiversity, even in your backyard."Arthropods, the phylum which includes insects, spiders, scorpions, centipedes, millipedes, crabs, prawns and even head lice, is the most successful animal group on the planet, consisting of over 800,000 described species, with many still undiscovered. First emerging in the water around 500 million



are millions of organisms years ago, before colonising around us, playing such cruland a few million years later, cial roles and that we are arthropods are found in evonly just scratching the surery nook and cranny of the face and getting to know planet today. So ubiquitous them. "They are as messy are these tiny creatures that as human beings with bithe combined biomass of

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existed in each group, as in the case of beetles and dragonflies, it was further narrowed down to the most commonly-seen species to "make sure you get the most representative species in

Yuvan

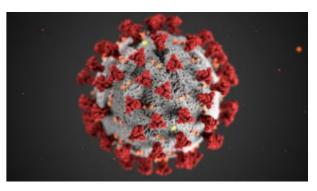
HMPV: Put your masks on, says Punjab health minister

Centre gives Odisha 677 cr for HEIs

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

HMPV Virus: Do not panic, says TN government.Dr Balbir Singh further noted that Union Health Minister JP Nadda had already alleviated fears on Monday, stating that HMPV is not a new virus but one known to cause flu in humansAs the Centre urged states to heighten surveillance amid cases of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV), Punjab Health Minister Dr Balbir Singh on Tuesday urged people to put on their masks while adding that there was no need to panic as no cases had been reported in Punjab so far.Speaking to The Indian Express, Dr Balbir Singh said the state government was in touch with the Centre and prepared for any eventuality arising from the virus spread.

Advising individuals with compromised immunity and those above 60 to wear masks in crowded places, the minister said the virus was not as severe as coronavirus. "It is a mild virus causing flu-like symptoms. It is not fatal. Only those with compromised immunity, such as people with diabetes, or those above 60 and below one year of age, are advised to be cautious. They simply need to wear a mask



virus appeared to be overwhelming the system in China, Dr Balbir Singh said, "It is too early to comment on that. Nothing definitive can be said about China at this stage. We are monitoring the situation closely. We will issue an advisory if required. Otherwise, there is no need to panic at all."The minister, who is a practising doctor, also emphasized the importance of preventive hygiene. "Populations are always advised to wash their hands frequently and avoid touching their face and eyes. This is how infections spread. It is always better to stay cautious. That said, there is currently no surge in respiratory illnesses in Punjab. We are alert," he added. While Punjab has not reported any cases of HMPV yet, the Centre has alerted states to heighten surveillance following confirmed cases in some parts of the country

terrestrial arthropods alone is believed to be roughly 1 billion tonnes, roughly equivalent to the biomass of all human beings and livestock put together, according to a study published in the open-access journal Science Advances in 2023.

Insects, which form the majority of the arthropods, "pretty much rule the world," says Priya, the founder-director of The Naturalist School (TNS), Bengaluru. She considers them "the most diverse and fascinating creatures we have on Planet Earth: they come in all shapes, sizes and colours, are also found everywhere, in the air, land and water" and are "a very important part of the entire food chain because of which the whole planet is going around," she says. Not only are they both prey and predators, but they also play an important role in helping many plants propagate. "Most of the plant kingdom, as you know, are producers, without which there would be no food on this to planet," says Priya. And many of these plants, particularly those that make fruits, depend on insects for pollination. "In that sense, they are very intricately connected to life on earth."Vena, a city-based conservationist and independent nature educator, believes that observing and learning about arthropods is also a great way to get people interested in nature and natural systems. Often, too often, there is a deep cognitive dissociation between human beings and insects, she says. "They are all around us but are often kind of hidden. We don't notice them as much because of their size or the associations we have with them." She finds it pretty humbling to know that there

the

habits and the city."Once the initial masbehaviours."The idea for ter database was created, **Commonly Spotted Insects** images had to be sourced & Spiders in the City of and matched to the various Bengaluru started with the insects and spiders that realisation that there was no were finally selected. While easy-to-use guide on insome of the photos already sects that could help people existed with the co-authors, get more natural history inmany did not, and so "my formation about arthropods, main task was about finding especially insects and spithese images," says Vaidya, ders that they encounter who turned to iNaturalist, even in a city like Bengaluru. reaching out to nature enthu-People would have to troll siasts and naturalists who through popular apps like ihad posted images on it, naturalist or Google it," says such as Jithesh Pai, Vena, who often leads these Anubhav Agarwal, Chandu nature walks. "Nature edu-Bandi and cators, like myself, were Aves.While the initial plan also doing that because we was to create flashcards, had no other means to acafter taking feedback from cess this information."The multiple people, the initiative idea, therefore, was to creevolved into its current forate a resource for beginner mat, a book offering detailed naturalists that was easy to information about some use and understand without common insects and spibeing too heavily scientific, ders in the city, including the she says. The initial plan was tropical fire ant, the carpento create a set of flashcards ter bee, the potter wasp, the about insects, much like the common tree cricket, the giflashcards on common Inant Asian mantis, the flesh dian birds currently profly, the cotton stainer bug duced by the Nature Conand crab spiders."The idea servation Foundation, says was to create a reference Vena. "We pitched this idea book and visual tool that na-Bengaluru ture educators can use while Sustainability Forum's Small taking people out for walks," Grants Programme and says Vena, adding that were, luckily, selected around 100 free print copies among many applicants," of the book will be distributed she says. The next step was free of cost to Bengaluru's selecting the insects and spinature educators. An e-verders that would be featured, sion of the book is also availa mammoth task considerable for free download on the ing the sheer diversity. "We Bengaluru Sustainability Focould have easily done a rum website, and a Kannada book 10 times this size." translation is in the works. They started by first coming "Having the whole book as up with different groups, open source means that such as ants, termites, butpeople can look at it, take terflies, spiders, mantids, printouts for themselves and lacewings, beetles and so use it," she adds.By this ofon, and then identifying the fering, the authors hope that most common species in people will eventually feel a those groups using a comsense of connection to these bination of experience and tiny animals that are such a also by using the iNaturalist crucial part of Planet Earth. database, says Vaidya, add-"The idea is that the more ing that, in some cases, we get to know about the life where quite a few species forms that share our world.

in crowded places. Otherwise, there is nothing to panic about," he said.Dr Balbir Singh further noted that Union Health Minister JP Nadda had already alleviated fears on Monday, stating that HMPV is not a new virus but one known to cause flu in humans. "Hence, there is nothing to worry about. Punjab is prepared for any pandemic. Our hospitals are well-equipped. In any case, this virus will not overwhelm the healthcare system," he assured. When asked why the

HC seeks Haryana's response on elder helpline implementation



GNS News Agency, fEB 1elder helpline punjabThe court was informed that Elderline is a toll-free service (14567) designed to address issues such as emergency assistance, legal aid, healthcare guidance, emotional support, and access to social welfare schemes. The Punjab and Haryana High Court has directed the State of Haryana to file an affidavit detailing the number of districts in which a helpline for senior citizens has been established and, if not, the reasons for the delay. The division bench, comprising Chief Justice Sheel Nagu and Justice Sudhir Singh, issued the directive while hearing a petition filed by Ram Pal Malhotra.

Malhotra, represented by counsels Satyam Tandon, Mahima Dogra, and Nisha Kanojia, sought directions for the establishment and implementation of the "Elderline Helpline" in Haryana for the welfare of senior citizens. The court was informed that Elderline is a toll-free service (14567) designed to address issues such as emergency assistance, legal aid, healthcare guidance, emotional support, and access to social welfare schemes. However, despite the mandate of the Haryana Maintenance of Parents and Senior Citizens Rules, 2009, the helpline has not been established in the state.

The HC issued notices to the Union and Haryana governments. Satya Pal Jain, Additional Solicitor General of India, assisted by Saigeeta Srivastva, senior panel counsel, accepted the notice on behalf of the Union government. Deepak Balyan, Additional Advocate General, Haryana, accepted the notice on behalf of Haryana and the Directorate of Social Justice and Empowerment. The bench directed Haryana to file an affidavit, sworn by a competent officer, detailing the number of districts where the helpline has been implemented and providing reasons for its absence in

others."The timeline for the establishment of the Elderline helpline under Rule 23(2)(x) of the Haryana Maintenance of Parents and Senior Citizens Rules, 2009, must also be included," clarified the HC, which scheduled the matter for further hearing on February 18.

Congress track record casts doubt on Telangana's promise-laden energy policy

Hyderabad: After failing to add even a single megawatt of renewable energy in the last one year, the Congress government has now come up with a new Clean and Green Energy Policy which claims to target investments of Rs 1.98 lakh crore and creation of 1.14 lakh jobs over the next decade

While the policy seems promising on paper, Telangana in recent times has not been visibly making use of the potential of solar energy for various reasons. Apart from this, the lack of awareness, high initial costs, absence of State government subsidy and lack of financing options are hindering rooftop solar installation programmes in the State. The new policy aims to add 20,000 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy capacity by 2030, making Telangana a major player in renewable energy in the country. However, at the field level, the situation is totally different with the solar power generators facing problems due to the non-cooperative attitude of the staff of DISCOMs. The new policy talks about encouraging rooftop solar power plants in government schools, Indiramma houses, government buildings and gram panchayat offices. However, going by the track record of this government, the move does not appear to work at the field level as in the last one year, the government did nothing to set up solar panels on government buildings.In fact, the Congress government could not even complete the programme to install rooftop solar panels on government schools across the State initiated by the previous BRS aovernment



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Realising semiconductor dream



Though India aspires to be a global leader in the semiconductor sector, there are several challenges ahead and many lessons to be learnt from international experiences. Most important among them is that India lacks a robust and integrated supply chain for the semiconductor industry, which involves the availability of raw materials, equipment, components, testing facilities and skilled manpower. The complexity and capital intensity of semiconductor manufacturing is a major barrier, with a new fab costing over \$1 billion to build. Setting up fabrication plants requires cuttingedge technologies, sophisticated materials and a meticulous production process. India has a shortage of skilled talent and lacks access to high-end technologies, which are licensed by patent holders at a high price. Apart from restrictive bureaucratic procedures, infrastructure limitations, such as power supply, water availability and logistics, can pose significant hurdles for semiconductor manufacturing. Also, India faces stiff competition from established semiconductor manufacturing hubs like China, Taiwan and South Korea. There is also an argument that the Centre's incentives are not sufficiently attractive compared to what other nations are offering. There are also apprehensions about policy stability. India imports all chips and only a few ele-

ments of the semiconductor supply value chain are indigenously available. There is a need to promote research collaborations between academic institutions and industry players to develop cutting-edge chip technologies to keep pace with the ever-changing consumer demands and market trends. While India boasts a large pool of engineering and technical talent, there is a need for specialised skills in semiconductor manufacturing.

Though India traditionally had a strong base for the semiconductor design industry, hardware manufacturing has remained elusive. Over the last 15 years, several consortiums made multiple attempts at chip-making but without success. The Covid-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions have exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains, underscoring the need for domestic chip production to ensure both economic growth and national security. However, India's current investment in low-level assembly and packaging repeats the mistakes of China and limits the country's ability to move up the value chain. India must aim higher to compete on a global scale. It must foster innovation, encourage private-sector leadership and pursue global collaborations to access cutting-edge technologies. It needs a more comprehensive and forward-thinking strategy. Unlike China's inward-looking approach, India must embrace international partnerships. It must create a favourable ecosystem for startups and entrepreneurs to enter the semiconductor space by offering incentives such as investment tax breaks and funding opportunities. Building state-of-theart fabrication facilities (fabs) is essential for India's semiconductor aspirations. The global semiconductor industry is poised for a decade of growth to become a trillion-dollar industry by 2030. The country aspires to be one of the major drivers of this growth by creating a conducive manufacturing environment and forging more international collaborations. The Indian semiconductor market, valued at about \$23.2 billion, is projected to reach \$80.3 billion by 2028.

Israel-Hamas draft ceasefire deal: A look at the terms and tensions

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

If the Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal goes according to the current draft, then fighting will stop in Gaza for 42 days, and dozens of Israeli hostages and hundreds of Palestinian prisoners will be freed. In this first phase Israeli troops will pull back to the edges of Gaza, and many Palestinians will be able to return to what remains of their homes as steppedup aid flows in. The question is if the ceasefire will survive beyond that first phase. That will depend on even more negotiations meant to begin within weeks. In those talks, Israel, Hamas, and the U.S, Egyptian and Qatari mediators will have to tackle the tough issue of how Gaza will be governed, with Israel demanding the elimination of Hamas.Without a deal within those 42 days to begin the second phase, Israel could resume its campaign in Gaza to destroy Hamas - even as dozens of hostages remain in the militants' hands. Hamas has agreed to a draft of the ceasefire deal, two officials confirmed, but Israeli officials say details are still being worked out, meaning some terms could change, or the whole deal could even fall through. Here is a look at the plan and potential pitfalls in the draft seen by the Associated Press.During the first phase, Hamas is to release 33 hostages in exchange for the freeing of hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. By the end of the phase, all living women, children and older people held by the militants should be freed.

Some 100 hostages remain captive inside Gaza, a mix of civilians and soldiers, and the military believes at least a third them are dead. On the first official day of the ceasefire, Hamas is to free three hostages, then another four on the seventh day. After that, it will make weekly releases. Which hostages and how many Palestinians will be released is complicated. The 33 will include women, children and those over 50 - almost all civilians, but the deal also commits Hamas to free all living female soldiers. Hamas will release living hostages first, but if the living don't complete the 33 number, bodies will be handed over. Not all hostages are held by Hamas, so getting other militant groups to hand them over could be an issue. In exchange, Israel will free 30 Palestinian women, children or elderly for each living civilian hostage freed. For each female soldier freed, Israel will release 50 Palestinian prisoners, including 30 serving life sentences. In exchange for bodies handed over by Hamas, Israel will free all women and children it has detained from Gaza since the war began on Oct. 7, 2023 Dozens of men, including soldiers, will remain captive in Gaza, pending the second phase.During the proposed deal's first phase, Israeli troops are to pull back into a buffer zone about a kilometer (0.6 miles) wide inside Gaza along its borders with Israel.Smoke rise over the northern Gaza Strip as seen from a position on the Israeli side of the border on January 13, 2025 in Southern Israel, Israel. That will allow displaced Palestinians to return to their homes, including in Gaza City and northern Gaza. With most of Gaza's population driven into massive, squalid tent camps, Palestinians are desperate to get back to their homes, even though many were destroyed or heavily damaged by Israel's campaign. But there are complications. During the past year of negotiations, Israel has insisted it must control the movement of Palestinians to the north to ensure Hamas does not take weapons back into those areas. Throughout the war, the Israeli military has severed the north from the rest of Gaza by holding the so-called Netzarim Corridor, a belt across the strip where troops cleared out the Palestinian population and set up bases. That allowed them to search people fleeing from the north into central Gaza and bar anyone trying to return. The draft seen by the AP specifies that Israel is to leave the corridor. In the first week, troops would withdraw from the main northsouth coastal road — Rasheed Street — which would open one route for Palestinians returning. By the 22nd day of the ceasefire, Israeli troops are to leave the entire corridor.Still, as talks continued Tuesday, an Israeli official insisted the military will keep control of Netzarim and that Palestinians returning north would have to pass inspections there, though he declined to provide details. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss closed negotiations.Working out those contradictions could bring frictions. Throughout the first phase, Israel will retain control of the Philadelphi Corridor, the strip of territory along Gaza's border with Egypt, including the Rafah Crossing. Hamas dropped demands that Israel pull out of this area. In the first phase, aid entry to Gaza is to be ramped up to hundreds of trucks a day of food, medicine, supplies and fuel to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. That is far more than Israel has allowed in throughout the war. For months, aid groups have struggled to distribute to Palestinians even the trickle of aid entering Gaza because of Israeli military restrictions and rampant robberies of aid trucks by gangs. An end to fighting should alleviate that. The need is great. Malnutrition and diseases are rampant among Palestinians, crammed into tents and short on food and clean water. Hospitals have been damaged



and short of supplies. The draft deal specifies that equipment will be allowed in to build shelters for tens of thousands whose homes were destroyed and to rebuild infrastructure like electricity, sewage, communications and road systems.But here, too, implementation could bring problems.Even before the war, Israel has restricted entry of some equipment, arguing it could be used for military purposes by Hamas. Another Israeli official said arrangements are still being worked out over aid distribution and cleanup, but the plan is to prevent Hamas from having any role.

Further complicating matters, Israel's government is still committed to its plan to ban UNRWA from operating and to cut all ties between the agency and the Israeli government. The UN agency is the major distributor of aid in Gaza and provides education, health and other basic services to millions of Palestinian refugees across the region, including in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. If all of that works out, the sides must still tackle the second phase. Negotiations over it are to begin on Day 16 of the ceasefire. Phase two's broad outlines are laid out in the draft; All remaining hostages are to be released in return for a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a "sustainable calm."But that seemingly basic exchange opens up much bigger issues. Israel has said it will not agree to a complete withdrawal until Hamas' military and political capabilities are eliminated and it cannot rearm — ensuring Hamas no longer runs Gaza. Hamas says it will not hand over the last hostages until Israel removes all troops from everywhere in Gaza So the negotiations will have to get both sides to agree to an alternative for governing Gaza. Effectively, Hamas has to agree to its own removal from power - something it has said it is willing to do, but it may seek to keep a hand in any future government, which Israel has vehemently rejected. The draft agreement says a deal on the second phase must be worked out by the end of the first. Pressure will be on both sides to reach a deal, but what happens if they don't? It could go in many directions. Hamas had wanted written guarantees that a ceasefire would continue as long as needed to agree on phase two. It has settled for verbal guarantees from the United States, Egypt and Qatar.Israel, however, has given no assurances. So Israel could threaten new military action to pressure Hamas in the negotiations or could outright resume its military campaign, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has threatened. Hamas and the mediators are betting the momentum from the first phase will make it difficult for him to do that. Relaunching the assault would risk losing the remaining hostages — infuriating many against Netanyahu — though stopping short of destroying Hamas will also anger key political partners. The third phase is likely to be less contentious: The bodies of remaining hostages would be returned in exchange for a 3- to 5-year reconstruction plan to be carried out in Gaza under international supervision

South Korean impeached President Yoon arrested by law enforcement officers



GNS News Agency, fEB 1

South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol was detained in a massive law enforcement operation at the presidential compound Wednesday (January 15, 2025), defiantly insisting the anti-corruption agency didn't have the authority to investigate his actions but saving he complied to prevent violence. In a video message recorded before he was escorted to the headquarters of the anti-corruption agency, Yoon lamented the "rule of law has completely collapsed in this country."Mr. Yoon, the country's first sitting president to be apprehended, had been holed up in the Hannam-dong residence in the capital, Seoul, for weeks while vowing to "fight to the end" the efforts to oust him. He has justified his declaration of martial law Dec. 3 as a legitimate act of governance against an "anti-state" opposition employing its legislative majority to thwart his agenda. The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials said Yoon was brought into custody about five hours after investigators arrived at the presidential compound and about three hours after they successfully entered the residence, in their second attempt to detain him over his imposition of martial law.A series of black SUVs, some equipped with sirens, were seen leaving the presidential compound with police escorts. Yoon was later seen stepping out of a vehicle after arriving at the agency's office in the nearby city of Gwacheon. Following the questioning, Mr. Yoon was expected to be sent to a detention center in Uiwang, near Seoul.In this image released by South Korean President Office via Yonhap, impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol speaks in Seoul, South Korea, What's next?

The anti-corruption agency, which is leading a joint investigation with the police and the military over whether Yoon's martial law declaration amounted to an attempted rebellion, has 48 hours to request a court order for a formal arrest on a charge of attempting a rebellion, and if it fails to do so, Mr. Yoon will be released. If Mr. Yoon is formally arrested, investigators can extend his detention to 20 days before transferring the case to public prosecutors for indictment. The anti-corruption agency told reporters that Mr. Yoon, during his first two hours of questioning, exercised his right to remain silent. The detainment warrant for Mr. Yoon, issued by the Seoul Western District Court, said there were substantial reasons to suspect that he committed crimes as a "ringleader of a rebellion."Mr. Yoon's presidential powers were suspended when parliament impeached him on December 14. The impeachment case now rests with the Constitutional Court, which could formally remove Yoon from office or reject the case and reinstate him.In a separate message posted on his Facebook account after his detainment, Mr. Yoon claimed that "martial law is not a crime," saying his declaration was necessary to raise awareness about an opposition that was exercising "legislative dictatorship by blocking laws and budgets" and "paralyzing" state affairs. He denied the rebellion accusations, describing his impeachment as "fraud." The scene at the compoundAs they began the detention operation in the early morning, the anti-corruption investigators and police officers engaged in an hourslong standoff at the compound's gate with presidential security forces but otherwise encountered no meaningful resistance.Police officers were seen using wire cutters to remove the barbed wire placed by the presidential security service on the perimeter of the compound to block their entry. Some police officers used ladders to climb over rows of buses placed by the presidential security service near the compound's entrance, and then the investigators began moving up the hilly compound. The investigators and police later arrived in front of a metal gate with a gold presidential mark that's near Yoon's residential building. Some officers were seen entering a security door on the side of the metal gate, joined by one of Yoon's lawyers and his chief of staff. The presidential security service later removed a bus and other vehicles that had been parked tightly inside the gate as a barricade.

Despite a court warrant for Mr. Yoon's detention, the presidential security service had insisted it's obligated to protect the impeached president and fortified the compound with barbed wire and rows of buses blocking paths. The preparations and the concernsSouth Korea's acting leader, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, issued a statement early Wednesday urging law enforcement and the presidential security service to ensure there are no "physical clashes."Following Mr. Yoon's detainment, Choi met with diplomats from the Group of Seven nations, including the United States, Japan, Britain and Germany, as well as the representative of the European Union, to reassure them that the government was functioning stably. Why did the now-impeached President of South Korea declare martial law? | In Focus podcast

Park Chan-dae, floor leader of the liberal opposition Democratic Party, which drove the legislative campaign that led to Yoon's impeachment on Dec. 14, said Yoon's detention is the "first step toward restoring constitutional order, democracy, and realizing the rule of law."As investigators moved up the hillside compound, lawmakers from Mr. Yoon's People Power Party held a rally in nearby streets, decrying the efforts to detain him as unlawful. The National Police Agency met with field commanders in Seoul and nearby Gyeonggi province in recent days to plan their detainment efforts, and the size of those forces fueled speculation that more than a thousand officers could be deployed. The agency and police had openly warned that presidential bodyguards obstructing the execution of the warrant could be arrested.Mr. Yoon's lawyers have claimed that the detainment warrant issued by the Seoul Western District Court was invalid. They cited a law that protects locations potentially linked to military secrets from search without the consent of the person in charge - which would be Mr. Yoon. They also claimed that the anti-corruption agency had no legal authority to investigate rebellion allegations."I am truly appalled to see illegalities upon illegalities upon illegalities being carried out and procedures being forcefully conducted under an invalid warrant," Yoon said in the video released before his detention. "I do not acknowledge the investigation by the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials. As the president, who is responsible for upholding the constitution and legal system of the Republic of Korea, my decision to comply with such illegal and invalid procedures is not an acknowledgment of them, but rather a willingness to prevent unfortunate and bloody incidents."Supporters of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol stage a rally to oppose his impeachment near the presidential residence in Seoul, South Korea, on January 15, 2025

Supporters of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol stage a rally to oppose his impeachment near the presidential residence in Seoul, South Korea, Mr. Yoon's supporters and critics have held competing protests near the residence — one side vowing to protect him, the other calling for his imprisonment — while thousands of police officers in yellow jackets closely monitored the tense situation.

What led to thisMr. Yoon declared martial law and deployed troops around the National Assembly on Dec. 3. It lasted only hours before lawmakers managed to get through the blockade and vote to lift the measure. The oppositionled assembly voted to impeach him on rebellion charges Dec. 14. The Constitutional Court held its first formal hearing in the impeachment case on Tuesday, but the session lasted less than five minutes because Yoon refused to attend. The next hearing is set for Thursday, and the court will then proceed with the trial whether or not Yoon is there. The White House National Security Council issued a statement saying that the United States stands by its support for the Korean people and "our shared commitment to the rule of law." It said Washington remains committed to working with the government led by Seoul's acting leader, Choi, and reaffirms the strength of the countries' alliance.

Sri Lanka lifts ban on vehicle imports with effect from February 1

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

Colombo: Sri Lanka has finally lifted the import ban on cars, having last week allowed only trucks, buses and double cabs. Through a new special gazette notification on Friday, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake lifted the ban on vehicle imports with effect from February 1.

This has completely ended the ban on vehicle imports imposed in early 2020 with the Covid outbreak. The ban was continued when Sri Lanka suffered its economic crisis triggered by forex shortage. In April 2022, Sri Lanka declared its first ever debt default. However, the imports will be subject to a 50 per cent surcharge on the import duties which is expected to push prices of new imports higher.

Dissanayake had earlier announced that 1.2 billion US dollars would be reserved for vehicle imports. Sri Lanka is guided by IMF conditions that its forex reserves have to be maintained and built in order to avoid another 2022 type crash of the economy.

Know about Los Angeles area fires

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

LOS ANGELES: Wildfires, which have turned into infernos, have burnt homes and businesses in Los Angeles for a week, killing at least 25 people, displacing thousands of others, and destroying more than 12,000 buildings. Around 30 people are still missing. The blazes started on January 7, fueled by fierce Santa Ana winds. The Palisades, Eaton, Kenneth, and Hurst fires have consumed about 163 square kilometers. Investigators are still trying to determine what sparked the fires. AccuWeather puts the damage and economic losses at \$250 billion to \$275 billion. Here's what to know about the firesIn the mountains surrounding LA, dry winds are blowing at the speed of 80 kph, which are likely to increase with the potential for more powerful gusts across the mountains into coastal and valley areas.

A red-flag warning has been in effect, but the weather service has issued a rare warning about a "particularly dangerous situation" related to severe fire conditions. The Santa Ana winds have turned seasonal wildfires into infernos that have leveled neighbourhoods in and around Los Angeles where there has been no significant rainfall in over eight months.Southern California's winds typically flow onshore from the Pacific, carrying moist air onto land. The Santa Ana winds are warm currents that move in the opposite direction. They usually occur from September through May. Though Biden has announced to cover 100 per cent of firefighting recovery, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offers up to \$770 to help cover the evacuees' immediate needs, but its larger grants generally aren't available until after insurance companies pay out.Businesses can borrow up to \$2 million, while homeowners can borrow up to \$500,000 for rebuilding and another \$100,000 for personal property.LA County Recovers, a government-run program, posted interactive maps on its website that show the damage. Addresses may be entered into a search bar to find a specific location. Users can also see photos of the damaged buildings. Nine people have been charged with looting, including a group that stole an Emmy award from a house that had been evacuated. Another pair took more than \$200,000 worth of items.

Price gouging has become an issue with hotels, shortterm rentals and medical supplies. Scammers are also soliciting donations for bogus relief efforts. Three were arrested outside the fire zones for starting small fires. The fires were spotted by alert citizens and quickly extinguished. One person was using a barbecue lighter to start fires. Another lit a trash can on fire. The third was caught lighting brush on fire.Sewer, water and power infrastructure across the re-



The other cohosts are Miriam Adelson, the Dallas Mavericks owner and widow of casino magnate Sheldon Adelson; Tilman Fertitta, casino magnate, Houston Rockets owner and Trump's pick to serve as U.S. ambassador to Italy; Todd Ricketts, the co-owner of the Chicago Cubs; and Ricketts' wife, Sylvie Légère.

gion has been significantly damaged, and several utilities have declared their drinking water unsafe until extensive testing can prove otherwise, which may take weeks or months. As toxic chemicals can get into damaged drinking water systems, experts say filtering or boiling won't help.About 88,000 people from highly populated neighborhoods including Pacific Palisades, Altadena and others remained under evacuation orders. Another 84,800 might be ordered to evacuate.More than 80,000 households were without power across California.Thousands have fled and many have lost their homes, including Hollywood stars Billy Crystal and Mandy Moore, and Los Angeles Lakers head coach JJ Redick.

Fires have also burned through more affordable communities such as Altadena, which has served generations of Black families. The fires have also destroyed several places of worship, including a mosque, a synagogue, a Catholic parish and a half-dozen Protestant churches. A person whose home was destroyed in the Eaton blaze claims in a lawsuit that Southern California Edison's equipment sparked the fires. Lightning is the most common source of fires in the US, according to the National Fire Protection Association, but investigators quickly ruled that out. There were no reports of lightning in the Palisades area or the terrain around the Eaton Fire, which started in eastern Los Angeles County. The next two most common causes are fires that are intentionally set or caused by electricity lines.







India suffered economic losses of over Rs 1 lakh crore in natural catastrophes in 2023: Report



Floods in northern India and Sikkim, coupled with tropical cyclones (TC) Biparjoy and Michaung, pushed overall economic losses for the year to \$12 billion, well above the previous 10-year (2013-2022) average of \$8 billion, global insurance giant Swiss Re said in a report. Economic losses in 2024 are yet to be calculated.Swiss Re said the high losses were the result of disasters striking areas of large exposure and asset concentration.

For example, the Category 3 TC Biparjoy made landfall in Kutch, Gujarat on June 16, 2023, shutting down all ports in the Saurashtra and Kutch regions including Kandla and Mundra ports.Strong winds, heavy rainfall, and storm surge caused large-scale damage in the state. The cyclone also impacted the neighbouring states of Maharashtra and Rajasthan, it said. Likewise, TC Michaung, which made landfall on December 5, 2023, brought extreme rainfall that caused large losses in Chennai."Floods caused by heavy rains in northern India between July 10-15, 2023 impacted Himachal Pradesh, including the town of Shimla, and Delhi," Swiss Re said. According to the Swiss Re. analysis of natural catastrophe-related losses in India over the last two decades shows that floods have accounted for, on average, about 63 per cent of total annual economic losses. This is due to the climate and geography of the country."India is under the sway of summer monsoon from June to September, and northeast monsoon from October to December. Monsoon depressions generate extreme rainfall that in turn can cause severe flooding," it said. Mahesh H Puttaiah, head insurance market analysis, Swiss Re, said, "the rapid pace of India's economic growth has moved faster than actions taken to reduce the vulnerabilities posed by natural catastrophes.

Since the turn of the century, several large flood events

have caused economic losses above \$ 1 billion. For example, the floods in Mumbai in 2005, Uttarakhand in 2013, Jammu and Kashmir in 2014, Kerala in 2018, and northern India in 2023, all of which occurred during the summer monsoon. The Chennai flood in 2015 occurred during the northwest monsoon season, Swiss Re said.Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu are the top three states in terms of industrial production, contributing 13.3 per cent, 13 per cent, and 10.5 per cent, respectively, to India's total industrial output of \$605 billion in 2023."The major urban centres in the three states, respectively Ahmedabad, Mumbai and Chennai, and their adjoining areas are major natural catastrophe hotspots, given exposure to multiple natural perils. So too is Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR). Gujarat appears to be most exposed to natural catastrophes as it experiences floods, TCs and (occasionally) earthquakes. Tamil Nadu (Chennai) and Maharashtra are exposed to floods and TCs. Delhi is exposed to floods and earthquakes," Swiss Re said. The report also indicates the extent of exposure to flood hazard (river flooding) and storm surge of the four major cities with large industrial clusters, seaports, and airports.Industrial clusters, and the transport infrastructure of Ahmedabad or Chennai specifically, can be very much in the range of harm if a cyclone like Tauktae or Vardah occurs in near proximity. The report also mentions about the earthquake hazard: New Delhi and Ahmedabad are more exposed."The impact from an earthquake with its epicentre in the Himalayas, but from which the ripples extend as far as Delhi or, alternatively, a smaller event with its epicentre close to a main city like Mumbai or Delhi, could result in losses that far exceed those that the 2001 earthquake in Bhuj, Gujarat would generate today," the report warned.Many people, households and businesses in India are under- or uninsured, leaving them vulnerable to significant financial pressure when a natural catastrophe strikes, Swiss Re said. "Resilience building with insurance can be approached as a three-step process. The first step is granular hotspot identification," it said. The second step is accurate assessment of risk accumulation, using state-of-the-art models based on granular and recent exposure data. The final step is designing appropriate re-insurance programmes to reduce underinsurance and natural catastrophe protection gaps, which currently stand at above 90 per cent in India, it said. Mumbai floods in 2005 and Chennai floods in 2015 are the two costliest flood events in India's recent history, causing economic losses of \$5.3 billion and \$6.6 billion (in 2024 prices), respectively.

Domestic aviation industry likely to clock Rs 2,000-3,000 cr net loss in FY25: Report

domestic aviationIn the report on Tuesday, rating agency Icra also said that domestic air passenger traffic was estimated at 153 lakh in December, 7.3 per cent higher compared to 142.5 lakh recorded in November last year. The country's civil aviation industry is projected to report a net loss of Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000 crore in the current and next financial year as supply chain challenges and engine issues are expected to continue for some more time, according to a report. In the report on Tuesday, rating agency Icra also said that domestic air passenger traffic was estimated at 153 lakh in December, 7.3 per cent higher compared to 142.5 lakh recorded in November last year.

"Further, it grew by ~10.8 per cent on a YoY basis and was higher by ~17.5 per cent than the pre-Covid levels, i.e., December 2019. The airlines' capacity deployment in December 2024 was higher than December 2023 by ~7.5 per cent and by ~3.8 per cent over November 2024," it added.Giving a stable outlook for the Indian aviation industry, Icra said there are expectations of moderate growth in domestic air passenger traffic and a relatively stable cost



growth witnessed in FY2024 is likely to marginally taper to 7-10 per cent in FY2025 (compared to 13 per cent in FY2024), given the high base of FY2024 and lower passenger traffic in H1 FY2025, impacted by severe heat waves and other weather-related disruptions. "The yields are also likely to be under pressure, as airlines strive to maintain adequate passenger load factor (PLF). International passenger traffic for

China, India seek new supplies as U.S. sanctions tighten grip on Russian oil



Chinese and Indian refiners are seeking alternative fuel supplies as they adapt to severe new U.S. sanctions on Russian producers and tankers that are designed to curb the revenues of the world's second-largest oil exporter.U.S. President Joe Biden's administration imposed its broadest package of sanctions so far targeting Russia's oil and gas revenues on Friday (January 10, 2025) to give Kyiv and Donald Trump's incoming team leverage to reach a deal for peace in Ukraine.The incoming Mr. Trump administration has not yet responded to requests for comment.

The U.S. Treasury imposed sanctions on Russian oil producers Gazprom Neft and Surgutneftegaz, as well as on 183 vessels that form part of a shadow fleet that has so far allowed Russia to skirt sanctions to get its oil to global markets. According to Morgan Stanley, which cited data from tanker tracker Vortexa, the tankers subject to the latest sanctions carried around 1.5 million barrels of crude oil per day in 2024. That equates to around 1.4% of global oil demand.Many of them have been used to ship oil to India and China as Western sanctions and a price cap imposed by the Group of Seven countries in 2022 shifted trade in Russian oil from Europe to Asia. In addition, some tankers have shipped oil from Iran, which is also under sanctions.Oil prices have jumped. Global benchmark Brent crude rose on Monday (January 14, 2025) above \$81 a barrel to its highest since August and the premium of prompt crude to that for delivery six months later has risen to its highest since April, implying traders expect supplies to remain tight. The Kremlin said the sanctions risked destabilising global markets, and Moscow would seek to counter them."It is clear that the United States will continue to try to undermine the positions of our companies in non-competitive ways, but we expect that we will be able to counteract this," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday (January 14, 2025). Washington also imposed sanctions on top Russian ship insurer Ingosstrakh and another insurance provider Alphastrakhovanie. It was unclear what would happen to the vessels whose insurance was unknown in the event of any environmental disaster and what mechanisms would be in place for clean-up costs or for insurance claims.Adaptation?China has reiterated its opposition to unilateral U.S. sanctions. Analysts said the new sanctions were likely to reduce Russian oil exports in the short term, but Russia could adapt by using the vessels in its shadow fleet that are still not under sanctions. Analysts also said the true size of Russia's shadow fleet was unknown, but it was estimated to comprise close to 600 tankers. Since the new sanctions, at least 65 oil tankers have dropped anchor at multiple locations, including off the coasts of China and Russia, ship tracking data showed. Five of those were stationary off Chinese ports and a further seven dropped anchor off Singapore, with others halting near Russia in the Baltic Sea and the Far East.Shandong Port Group banned tankers under U.S. sanctions from calling at its ports before Washington's announcement on Friday (JanuThe severity of the new measures has for now driven Chinese refiners back to sellers of oil that is not restricted, pushing up the spot markets for some regional crudes, as well as adding upward momentum on the global oil market."Chinese refiner Yulong Petrochemical has previously bought Russian ESPO Blend crude, but over the weekend bought 4 million barrels of Abu Dhabi's Upper Zakum crude loading in February and March from Totsa," the trading arm of French energy major TotalEnergies, traders said. In recent weeks, it has also purchased Angolan and Brazilian crude, traders said, and is in talks to buy more oil from West Africa as well as Canada. China's Unipec on Friday (January 10, 2025) also booked four very large crude carriers, which can carry up to 2 million barrels of crude, from the Middle East, figures from data intelligence firm Kpler showed. The numerous sources Reuters spoke to declined to be named as they were not authorised to speak to media. Yulong and Totsa typically do not comment on commercial deals.

Two-month transition periodCurrently, over 60% of Russia's seaborne oil exports go to India, the world's thirdlargest oil importer and consumer. Although Indian refiners have stopped dealing with oil tankers and entities under U.S. sanctions, the country does not expect disruption to Russian crude supplies during a two-month transition period, a government source said on Monday India will allow Russian oil cargoes booked before to discharge at ports, the source said, adding that Russia could also offer deeper discounts to India to meet a \$60 a barrel price cap imposed by Group of Seven countries in 2022. Shipments below that level can use western tankers and insurance.Moscowbased Sinara Bank also said temporary discounts were possible for Russia's flagship Urals oil blend to dated Brent.

Traders said Indian refiners, which bought spot Middle East crude last week before the sanctions were announced, were seeking more cargoes.India's Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd bought 2 million barrels of February-loading Oman crude from Totsa via a tender last week, two people familiar with the matter said

It might be time for a dress code overhaul in sports

What do Serena Williams' catsuit, Magnus Carlsen's jeans, and the Norwegian beach handball team's shorts rebellion have in common? No, it's not a new Netflix drama, though it could be. They all exemplify athletes confronting outdated, often bizarre, and occasionally discriminatory dress codes in sports. From pristine tennis whites to buttoned-up chess suits, the rules governing athletic attire often seem like relics from an era when corsets were considered workout gear. Imagine enduring the heat of competition under glaring lights or braving the elements, only to have your outfit spark more controversy than your performance. The world of sports isn't solely about physical feats and strategy; it also involves navigating a tightrope of social

the guarterfinals of the FIDE Women's World Blitz hampionship. Photo: Michal Walusza/FIDE) Carlsen's disqualification wasn't the only controversy at the recent Blitz. Zhu Jiner, a Chinese Grandmaster, was fined 0 for wearing boots during the same tournament (Photo: Michal Walusza/ FIDE)Origins of dress codes in sportsAccording to Mehendi Sharma, Assistant Professor of Fashion Design at Pearl Academy, sports dress codes often arise from practicality, tradition, and, at times, prejudice. She says, "Tennis whites symbolised purity in Victorian England, while gymnastics leotards prioritised movement. Chess adopted semi-formal attire to project its image as a refined and intellectual pursuit." However, these codes frequently uphold exclusivity and rigid traditions. "Like museum exhibits, dress codes preserve the past while questioning the present. Are they about discipline, or do they silently referee culture?" Sharma asks.Carlsen's jeans scandal drew global attention not because dress code violations are rare, but because Carlsen is the "Messi of chess," as Grandmaster Subbaraman Vijayalakshmi observed. Woman International Master Bommini Mounika Akshaya concurred, saying, "There are always many incidents related to dress code at the World Rapid and Blitz championships.

environment in FY25.

Moreover, the industry witnessed improved pricing power during FY24, reflected in the higher yields (over pre-Covid levels) and the revenue per available seat kilometre– cost per available seat kilometre (RASK–CASK) spread of the airlines."The momentum in the air passenger traffic Indian carriers is expected to grow by 15-20 per cent in FY2025," the report said.For FY 2025 and FY 2026, Icra has projected the industry to register a net loss of Rs 20-30 billion.Supply chain challenges and engine failure issues impacted the industry capacity over the last 18 months and are expected to continue affecting it this year, it added.

Data localisation, parental verification in data protection rules weigh most on tech industry's minds



data protectionThe government-appointed committee will act as a central body, which will collate requests from all other sectoral regulators and ministries, which see the need for certain data to be localised. During a IT Ministry organised consultation with the tech industry Tuesday on the recently released draft data protection rules, a few concerns stood out: apprehensions over data localisation, consent verification and behavioural tracking of children, and worries over cross-border data flows to foreign jurisdictions.

The consultation that went on for over two hours saw representation from tech companies such as Meta, Google, Microsoft, Snap and a myriad of industry lobby groups and consultancies which represent them. It was chaired by IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, and IT Secretary S Krishnan. At the meeting, the government assured the industry of holding extensive consultations with the industry, and giving ample time to submit comments. Some industry bodies are learnt to have expressed reservations around potential data localisation requirements that could be imposed on significant data fiduciaries under the draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025.

Data localisation has been a bugbear for the tech industry for several years now, and the data protection rules envision the creation of a government appointed committee which would recommend the classes of data and traffic patterns pertaining to them which would not be able to be exported from India. This requirement has only been proposed for significant data fiduciaries, which will be determined on the basis of the volume and sensitivity of personal data they process, and the risks they might have on sovereignty and integrity of India, electoral democracy, se-

curity, and public order. All major tech companies including Meta, Google, Apple, Microsoft, and Amazon are expected to be classified as significant data fiduciaries. However, the government has clarified that the committee has been proposed to create a central body which works with other ministries and sectoral regulators to effectively implement local storage of data without causing any disruptions to the industry."The government-appointed committee will act as a central body, which will collate requests from all other sectoral regulators and ministries, which see the need for certain data to be localised. Based on that, the committee will first hold industry consultations and then come up with its recommendations," Vaishnaw had earlier told this paper.Some participants also raised concerns around obtaining verifiable parental consent for allowing children those below the age of 18 - from accessing online services, and how the digital architecture around it could be reliably operationalised. A few participants highlighted that bigger companies, with access to information on more people, might have a competitive advantage in implementing this provision, with smaller firms facing a bigger challenge. Concerns were also raised around children potentially falsifying their age while signing up for platforms, and limiting content for children who may not have tech literate parents.

Network18 Media incurs Rs 1,425 crore net loss in Q3

New Delhi: Network18 Media & Investments Ltd has reported a loss of Rs 1,400 crore in the December quarter while its revenue from operations was Rs 1,360.50 crore, which is not comparable with the year-ago period due to the merger of its subsidiary Viacom18 with Star India.It reported a Rs 25.68 crore profit before exceptional items. However, on a consolidated basis, it faced a loss of Rs 1,425.73 crore, due to the derecognition of its subsidiaries, which has been accounted on a provisional basis during the quarter."Accordingly, the figures for the corresponding previous periods are not comparable," it said.On a standalone basis, Network18 Media & Investment's revenue from operations was at Rs 476.41 crore during the quarter and its profit was at Rs 3,431.94 crore, helped by exceptional gains.

norms, cultural politics, and power dynamics. Some of these rules are as rigid as the starched collars they enforce.

Recently, the spotlight fell on world chess champion Magnus Carlsen, who was disqualified from the World Rapid and Blitz Championships for wearing jeans—a garment deemed unfit for the "gentleman's game". This incident has reignited debates about the relevance of dress codes and their impact on sportsmanship and inclusivity. Chinese grandmaster Zhu Jiner (right) lost to India's R Vaishali in

FDI in insurance to be hiked to 100%, paving way for investments, entry of foreign giants

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Saturday announced a significant hike in foreign direct investment (FDI) in the insurance sector — from 74% to 100% — paving the way for the entry of global insurance giants, substantial foreign investments and tough competition in the Indian market. The government will hopes this major reform boosts insurance penetration in the country, which, as per an IRDAI report, was at 3.7% in 2023-24. The global insurance penetration at the same time was 7%.

With the 100% FDI, foreign insurers will have full autonomy to operate in India, bringing in sophisticated risk management practices, advanced technology and innovative products, say experts. Foreign investments will also provide much-needed capital to the Indian insurance sector, enabling insurers to offer better products and services. Of the world's top 25 insurance firms, as many as 20 are not present in India now. This move is expected to attract them to the country.

There is also a chance that foreign companies in existing Indian joint ventures may exit or buy out their Indian partners and form their own fully-owned ventures in India. "We could see India moving towards a future with 1,000 insurers in the next decade," said Tapan Singhel, MD & CEO, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance.

To enhance the FDI limit, the government will have to bring amendments to the Insurance Act 1938, the Life Insurance Corporation Act 1956, and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act 1999. Sitharaman told reporters that the draft Bill will be tabled in Parliament soon.Insurance shares remained subdued on the exchanges with ICICI Prudential down by 1.26% and SBI Life by 1.80% during the day.

The inflow of foreign capital is expected to create new job opportunities and potentially lower premiums for consumers in the insurance sector. As of March 2024, the total number of registered insurers and reinsurers was 73. There were 26 life insurers, 25 general insurers, and seven standalone health insurers operating in India.According to Balachander Sekhar, founder and CEO of RenewBuy, the move to allow 100% FDI can trigger a paradigm shift to the sector. Many international insurers can now enter the Indian market which will drive Indian insurers to adopt global



The decision to allow 100 per cent FDI in insurance is a major reform aimed at achieving the goal of "Insurance for All" by 2047. It's anticipated to bring in substantial foreign investments, enhance competition and improve accessibility to insurance across the country.

best practices in product and processes, innovation as well as cutting-edge technologies. This will ultimately help consumers access the best products and services, he said.

The insurance sector received the highest FDI in the services sector during the April–September period of FY25, according to the 2024-25 Economic Survey. The segment accounted for more than 62% of the \$5.7-billion equity inflows into the services sector.

Alok Rungta, MD & CEO of Future Generali India Life Insurance, said the insurance sector has long advocated for higher capital infusion and policyholder-centric reforms. This will attract global investors, drive innovation and foster greater financial inclusion by making insurance solutions more accessible and affordable, he said.Insurance is a capital-intensive industry, and any move to enhance capital access is undoubtedly beneficial. "This could attract global insurers seeking greater control on the Indian operations. There are numerous other benefits from greater international participation, particularly the access to latest tech and new products," said Shanai Ghosh, MD & CEO, Zuno General Insurance.



Indian cricketer since Virat Kohli in 2018 to do so. Before

Kohli, legendary off-spinner R Ashwin had been named the

Test Cricketer and Cricketer of the Year in 2016."I am deeply

honoured to receive the ICC men's Test Cricketer of the

Year award. Test cricket has always been a format I hold

close to my heart, and to be recognized on this platform is

truly special," Bumrah said in a media release."This award

is not just a reflection of my individual efforts but also of the

unwavering support of my teammates, coaches, and fans

who continue to believe and inspire me every

day."Representing India is a privilege I deeply cherish, and

knowing my efforts bring smiles to people around the world

makes this journey even more special," he added.Bumrah

is also in contention for the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy for

men's Cricketer of the Year, which will be announced on

Tuesday. He was earlier named in the ICC men's Test Team

of the year for 2024. The right-arm quick was instrumental

in India's series wins against England and Bangladesh at

home, and he also rose to the occasion in away conditions

mat, but maintained a phenomenal average of 2.96, break-

ing the mold in the quick-scoring era of the Test game. He

ended 2024 with an annual strike rate of just 30.1.He be-

came the fourth bowler from India to take more than 70

Test wickets in a calendar year, following in the footsteps

of Ravichandran Ashwin, Anil Kumble and Kapil

Dev.However, across Test history, none of the 17 bowlers

to have taken 70-plus wickets in a calendar year did so at

an average as low as Bumrah's. Thirty two of his 71 wick-

ets came during the Border-Gavaskar series against Aus-

tralia that India lost 1-3 despite his individual brilliance.

He sent down an eye-watering 357 overs in the for-

in South Africa and Australia.

Gukesh draws with Wei Yi, Praggnanandhaa outwits Caruana in Tata Masters



GNS News Agency, fEB 1

World champion D Gukesh maintained his half-point lead with an easy draw against Wei Yi of China, while R Praggnanandhaa outwitted top seed Fabiano Caruana of the United States to come within striking distance of the leader after the 11th round of Tata Steel Masters. Playing the white side of an Italian game, Gukesh went for a relatively new plan by pushing his central pawn in the opening that just helped Wei Yi maintain parity after the trade of

The Indian was up a pawn when the endgame surfaced but the position was level and the peace was signed in 30 moves. The draw helped Gukesh jump to eight points out of a possible 11 in the first major tournament of the year, while Praggnanandhaa stunned Caruana with black pieces to move to 7.5 points. Sharing the second spot is Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan, who played out a draw with German Vincent Keymer. It was a Queen's gambit declined by Praggnanandhaa and Caruana went for one of the complex variations to show his intent after getting some mediocre results in the tournament thus far. Praggnanandhaa has seldom had trouble fighting complicated positions with loads of tactical possibilities, and Friday was no different as he went for an attack quickly against the white queen after the players had castled on opposite wings.

As it happened, Caruana's 32nd move was a huge blunder giving Praggnanandhaa another victory five moves later.On a good day for other Indians too, P Harikrishna accounted for Alexey Sarana of Serbia while Leon Luke Mendonca put it across Vladimir Fedoseev of Slovenia. Arjun Erigaisi, meanwhile, played out another draw with Jorden van Foreest of Holland. In the penultimate round now, Gukesh is set to meet Foreest with black pieces and chess buffs expect some fireworks as the world champion will be keen to push ahead of the field.Praggnanandhaa will play his last white game in the tournament against Sarana while Nodirbek has to play another black against Erigaisi, who is vet to win a game having lost four and drawn seven. In the Challengers' section, Divya Deshmukh got a much-needed victory over Irina Bulmaga of Romania but R Vaishali found the going tough and lost to Aydin Suleymanli of Azerbaijan. Divya, on three points, still has a lot of catching up to do while Vaishali remained on five points.

Meanwhile, Dutchman Erwin L'Ami regained the sole lead in this section after a finely-crafted victory over Chinese teenager Mioyi Lu. L'Ami, on eight points, benefitted as the overnight sole leader Nguyen Thai Dai Van was outdone by Svane Frederik of Germany.Results Round 11: Masters: Jorden van Foreest (Ned, 4.5) drew with Arjun Erigaisi (Ind, 3.5); D Gukesh (Ind, 8) drew with Wei Yi (Chn, 6); Fabiano Caruana (USA, 5.5) lost to R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 7.5); Vincent Keymer (Ger, 4.5) drew with Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb, 7.5); Anish Giri (Ned, 6) beat Max Warmerdam (Ned, 3.5); Alexey Sarana (Srb, 5) lost to P Harikrishna (Ind, 5.5); Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo, 6) lost to Leon Luke Mendonca (Ind, 4). Challengers: Oro Faustino (Arg, 2.5) lost to Nodirbek Yakubboev (Uzb, 6); Lu Miaoyi (Chn, 5.5) lost to Erwin L'Ami (Ned, 8); Nogerbek Kazybek (Kaz, 6) drew with Ediz Gurel (Tur, 6); R Vaishali (Ind, 5) lost to Aydin Suleymanli (Aze, 7.5); Svane Fredrik (Ger, 7) beat Nguyen Thai Dai Vam (Cze, 7.5); Irina Bulmaga (Rom, 1) lost to Divya Deshmukh (Ind, 3); Benjamin Bok (Ned, 7) drew with Arthur Pijpers (Ned, 5).

Sachin Tendulkar to get BCCI **Lifetime Achievement Award**

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

Legendary former batter Sachin Tendulkar, whose records and impact on international cricket have stood the test of time, will be conferred with the BCCI's Lifetime Achievement Award at the Board's annual gala in Mumbai on Saturday (February 1, 2025). Overall, Tendulkar will be the 31st recipient of the award, which was instituted in 1994 in the honour of India's first captain Col. C K Nayudu. The 51-year-old Tendulkar, who played 664 international games for India, holds the record for the highest number of Test and ODI runs in the history of the game."Yes, he will be the recipient of the C K Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award for the year 2024," a Board source told PTI.Tendulkar's 200 Test and 463 ODI appearances are also the highest by any player in the history of the game. He amassed 15,921 Test runs besides a whopping 18,426 in ODIs.However, he played only one T20 International in his stellar career.

In 2023, the lifetime honour was bestowed on former India head coach Ravi Shastri and wicket-keeping great Farokh Engineer. Considered the greatest batter of his era, Tendulkar was not just a prolific run-scorer but also an icon of the game, who played for more than two decades after debuting as a 16-year-old in a 1989 Test against Pakistan. The well-documented and numerous batting records apart, Tendulkar was also a key member of India's 2011 World Cup-winning team, which was his record sixth and last appearance in the showpiece. At his peak, the diminutive right-hander could bring the nation to a standstill by simply walking out to bat.



where wished that he was his son. When he withstood pain and nearly took India to a victory against Pakistan in Chennai in 1999 and broke down, a billion hearts broke into pieces. When he shed tears of joy while hugging Mahendra Singh Dhoni on April 2, 2011, a nation shared his happiness. And in November 2013, when he left the field in front of his adoring fans in Mumbai, thousands lost cried hoping for him to continue. If Sunil Gavaskar brought respect for Indian cricket with his astute mind and artistic defence, Tendulkar, with his dazzling array of strokes, stood for style and aura. They were the social symbols of their time. BCCI didn't become a rich cricket board just overnight. It's first blue chip share certainly was Tendulkar, which paid them handsome dividends throughout. Tendulkar was that middleclass success story, which led to a "successful marriage" of India Inc. and Indian cricket It wouldn't be an overstate ment to say that for cricket historians, there will be distinct eras which need to be chronicled namely -BT' which is Before Tendulkar, 'DT' which will be 'During Tendulkar' and 'PT' that is Post Tendulkar.Tendulkar always united India with his craftsmanship creating organic love in the pre-social media days free of toxicity. His humility made him ever more endearing. Tendulkar will be bestowed with the honour but it is the establishment that should feel privileged that they perhaps had the greatest servant of Indian cricket for 24 years. There could easily be more followed cricketers in India but when it comes to unadulterated love, no one will ever surpass the 'Master'. He owns that love

Jasprit Bumrah reigns supreme, named ICC men's Test Cricketer of 2024



GNS News Agency, fEB 1

Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was on Monday (January 27, 2025) named ICC men's Test Cricketer of the Year for amassing 71 wickets in just 13 matches at a jaw-dropping sub-15 average, statistics that placed him heads and shoulders above his contemporaries during a phenomenal 2024. Returning to the longest format in late 2023 after recovering from a back injury, world number one Bumrah averaged a "ridiculous" 14.92 through the year while also setting multiple records. He played a pivotal role in keeping India in contention for the ICC World Test Championship before the team fell short."Bumrah was the standout bowler in the world in 2024, excelling in both home and away conditions and proving a key contributor in keeping India in contention in the ICC World Test Championship standings,' the ICC stated in a press release.

Bumrah pipped fellow nominees England's Harry Brook and Joe Root, and ICC's Emerging Cricketer of the Year Kamindu Mendis to win the award, becoming the first

Virat Kohli's Ranji Trophy Return : Got removed by Himanshu Sangwan after scoring 6in the 1st Innings

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

Virat Kohli's first Ranji Trophy innings in 13 years lasted all of 15 balls, extending his lean run and fuelling the raging debate over his form. For the 5000-odd crowd that assembled here to watch Kohli, it was fun while it lasted but when he had his off-stump rooted by Railways pacer Himanshu Sangwan in the 28th over of Delhi's first innings, a majority of them took no time to exit the Arun Jaitley Stadium. The frequent chants of 'RCB, RCB' and 'Kohli, Kohli' dried up as the superstar took the long walk back to the dressing room, giving the railway employee Sangwan the most prized scalp of his career. Ahead of first domestic red-ball appearance since November 2012, Kohli had trained with former India coach Sanjay Bangar to iron out flaws in his batting that crept up on the tour of Australia.More specifically, it was the ball outside the off-stump that haunted the former India captain on the two-month long tour Down Under.Kohli came out to bat to a loud reception following the leg before dismissal of Yash Dhull at about 10:30 a.m. local time, which was an hour into day's play. It was left-arm pacer Rahul Sharma that first got to bowl at the cricketing icon and with a spring in his stride, he bowled a yorker down the leg-side only to realise that he overstepped. Considering the batter in front, Rahul went for that little extra in his following ball and it turned out to be another no ball. In the next over bowled by medium pacer Kunal Yadav, Kohli tried to assert himself and played and missed twice to a ball pitched on his vulnerable zone- wide outside the off-stump.



After collecting two singles, Kohli decided to dominate the opposition-right-arm pacer Sangwan in this particular over.Standing way outside the crease, Kohli disdainfully dispatched Sangwan towards the straight boundary. It was still the first session and the ball was doing a bit but in his attempt to dominate Sangwan, the very next ball, Kohli went for an expansive drive off a good length delivery but missed it completely to see his off-stump shattered. The ball seamed back in contributing to Kohli's downfall. He had a quick look at the surface before trudging back to the pavilion and with him his sea of fans headed towards the exit door. The fans will return for Kohli's second essay which could be on day three.Sangwan's wild celebration was on expected lines. He had just taken the wicket of his life.

Badoni helps Delhi claim firstinnings lead after Kohli's flop show

His dismissal was the most sought after among opposition teams, who did not hesitate to say that Tendulkar was the only Indian batter who could intimidate them. Tendulkar's emergence in the Indian cricketing scene happened at the same time when India witnessed economic liberalisation and the curly-haired genius became a favourite of corporate India, thanks to a never-seen-before emotional connect with people from Kashmir to Kanyakumari.When a 17-year-old Tendulkar scored a hundred at Perth on a treacherously bouncy WACA track, lot of teenagers found a hero.When he scored the 'Desert Storm hundred' at Sharjah against Australia in 1998, a middle-aged man some-

Litmus test for Shami as Men in Blue hope to end on a high

GNS News Agency, fEB 1

A series without real context sealed with a game to spare. Despite most of the boxes being ticked, India's last T20I game of the season at the Wankhede Stadium will be far from being a meaningless affair. After all, the game will be Mohammed Shami's litmus test to prove his fitness in time for the Champions Trophy, that starts in less than three weeks.For most of the last 14 months, there has been a cloud over Shami's return to top-flight cricket after the pacer aggravated his ankle injury during his dream run in the 2023 ODI World Cup. As a result, when he joined the squad for the first time since November, 2023, ahead of the seriesopener against England, it was a given that he will not feature in all five T20Is. In fact, the team management wanted to monitor his workload on a daily basis keeping in mind the Champions Trophy. Having bowled in virtually each of the team's training session in four venues, Shami donned the match jersey only in Rajkot. He looked good -although not at his best - during the three overs he bowled in the third T20I.Having made way for Arshdeep Singh in Pune on Friday night, Shami will be eager to come out on the redsoil strip at the Wankhede Stadium. It was at the same venue during the World Cup semifinal that Shami had claimed his best figures in ODIs. More importantly, his 7/57 ensured a tense New Zealand chase didn't end up in a heartbreak for a billion home fans.

No wonder then that Morne Morkel, India's bowling coach, was thrilled with having Shami around a relatively young group of pacers in the T20I squad. "Shami has been been bowling really well. Catching to him at the warm-ups, he is hitting the glove hard. So, very happy how he is coming along. He is probably going to get an opportunity for the next game and we will see see how things go," Morkel said after Friday night's match." Excited to have him back in the group, just for him to share his experience and his knowledge of training as a massive boost for this young bowling unit, so yeah, great to have show me back in the mix."

It will be interesting to see whether Shivam Dube ----



The pacer has fond memories of playing at the Wankhede; Buttler & Co. will be desperate to sign off with a victory

who was substituted as a precautionary measure - will be retained at his home ground. The Hindu understands that Dube had been cleared by doctors at the Pune stadium after checking him for a suspected concussion. While India will be hoping to end on a high, England will be desperate to finish the series on a positive note. Will captain Jos Buttler sign off with a trademark innings? Over to Wankhede. The teams (from): India: Suryakumar Yadav (Capt.), Axar Patel (vice-capt.), Sanju Samson (wk), Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, Hardik Pandya, Rinku Singh, Harshit Rana, Arshdeep Singh, Mohammed Shami, Varun Chakaravarthy, Ravi Bishnoi, Washington Sundar, Dhruv Jurel (wk), Shivam Dube and Ramandeep Singh.England XI: Jos Buttler (Capt.), Harry Brook (vice-capt.), Phil Salt, Ben Duckett, Liam Livingstone, Jamie Smith, Jamie Overton, Brydon Carse, Jofra Archer, Adil Rashid and Mark Wood.

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An estimate of the exact time that Virat Kohli spent at the batting crease on Friday was between 20 and 24 minutes. Whatever it was, it was nowhere near enough for Kohli to rediscover his form heading into the ICC Champions Trophy beginning on February 19. Even in this short span, he could have easily been out twice. When he was eventually cleaned up after making six runs off 15 balls, the sizeable crowd at the Arun Jaitley Stadium was stunned into silence. A few metres away from Kohli was Railways medium-pacer Himanshu Sangwan, pumping his fists and screaming in joy at bagging the prized scalp as the star batter stared at the turf before walking off with his head down. EntertainingAs soon as Kohli got into the dressing room, the fans that had gathered with fervour on Friday morning began to head for the exit gates. But Ayush Badoni entertained the few who stayed put with a dazzling 99 off 78 balls to help Delhi end day two of a Group D Ranji Trophy duel against Railways with a 93-run first-innings lead. At stumps, the home team was 334 for seven, with Sumit Mathur unbeaten on 78.

The moment of despair for Kohli arrived at 10:54 a.m. Off the previous ball in the 28th over, the No. 4 took a couple of steps down the crease and used his strong bottom hand to clatter a full ball down the ground for four, his right foot up in the air as he played the expansive shot. He followed it up by walking towards Sangwan again and playing an airy



drive, but was done in by a ball that jagged back through the yawning gap between bat and pad and sent the off-pole for a stroll. When the day's play drew to a close, he was felicitated by the Delhi & District Cricket Association (DDCA).But for Kohli to make this a truly happy homecoming to the Arun Jaitley Stadium in the Ranji Trophy, a much bigger score in the second innings is imperative. Delhi -1st innings: Arpit Rana c Upendra b Kunal 10, Sanat Sangwan b Himanshu 30, Yash Dhull Ibw b Rahul 32, Virat Kohli b Himanshu 6, Ayush Badoni c Kunal b Karn 99, Sumit Mathur (batting) 78, Pranav Rajvanshi b Chaudhari 39, Shivam Sharma c Upendra b Kunal 14, Siddhant Sharma (batting) 15; Extras (nb-5, lb-6): 11; Total (for seven wkts. in 96 overs): 334.

Mukund, Ramkumar register easy wins as India lead 2-0 against Togo

New Delhi: Sasikumar Mukund returned to Davis Cup action with a fluent straight-set victory while Ramkumar Ramanathan hardly broke a sweat in his match as an untroubled India took a 2-0 lead in the World Group I play-off tie against Togo, here Saturday. Togo had promised a tough fight in the build-up, even warning the Indian skipper to not take them for granted but their performance belied the exceptional results they had enjoyed coming into this match.

There was not even a semblance of resistance from the players of the African nation, making it a pretty dull contest, watched by about 1500 fans. The opening match of the tie went on expected lines with Liova Ayite Ajavon, languishing outside the top-1000, lacking ammunition to test the 365th ranked Mukund in his home conditions. The 28year-old Indian needed just one hour and 15 minutes to walk away with a 6-2 6-1 win in the opening singles at the DLTA Complex. Ramkumar then overpowered Togo number one Thomas Setodji 6-0 6-2 in the second singles which got over in just 50 minutes. A good fight was expected from Setodji but it turned out to be another lop-sided affair.

It seemed that Setodji ranked 1256, was not at his best as he struggled to put the ball across the net. His right arm taped above and below the elbow, Setodji's returns lacked sting as he made high number of unforced errors. His returns mostly fell on net or flew over the lines.Ramkumar lost just one point on his serve in the opening set, making high-quality serves while Setodji struggled to contain his unforced errors. He netted most of his returns that kept the points short. Captain Rohit Rajpal did not need to get up from his chair even once as his players went about their business without fuss. With 2-0 lead in the pocket, N Sriram Balaji and Rithvik Choudary Bollipalli will look to seal India's place in the World Group I by winning the third rubber on Sunday. Mukund, who missed Davis Cup action in the 2024 season by not making himself available for matches against Pakistan and Sweden, consistently returned on the backhand side of his opponent and charged to the net to make space for winners after moving Ajavon on both flanks effortlessly.Mukund had an easy day in office but still Ajavon defended and returned well in long rallies that were expected on a slow surface. The Togolese player was largely left to defend. The Indian often came to the net, looking for winners, and on one such attempt made a volley error that put him down by a breakpoint in the third game. He saved the chance and continued to charge to the net.With Mukund feeding a lot balls on the backhand side of Ajavon.







Shahid Kapoor film is dragged down by loose threads, long slack stretches



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Deva movie review: Shahid Kapoor plays Dev Ambre, a hot-headed cop who is constantly on the boil.Deva movie review: Shahid Kapoor plays Dev Ambre, a hot-headed cop who is constantly on the boil.Deva Movie Review & Rating: A bunch of cops in Mumbai track down the killer of a fellow officer, opening up several cans of worms. That, more or less, was the thrust of the Roshhan Andrrews-directed Mumbai Police (2013), headlined by Prithviraj Sukumaran.

Another bunch of cops in Mumbai do the same, broadly, in the 2025 'Deva', also by the same director. From what I remember of the original, there seem to be several scenes which are exact replicas, but for some strange reason, the filmmakers have taken great pains to prevent

themselves, as well as anyone else, dubbing the Shahid Kapoor starrer a remake.Kapoor plays Dev Ambre, a hotheaded cop who is constantly on the boil. A drunk-onpower neta (Girish Kulkarni) who doesn't abide by the rules? Wade into said neta's goons, and shout him down. A colleague (Pavail Gulatie) who is being too soft on the politician? Give him a lecture on good cops who need to do their duty. Female colleague (Kubbra Sait) daring to tell him that she may know more about a locality? Scoff at her.

Basically, Dev aka Deva comes off as a cross between Zanjeer's Vijay - several scenes have been helpfully shot against a Mumbai wall with Amitabh Bachchan's visage plastered across it - and Dirty Harry, with a vigorous dance sequence involving a number of crotch thrusts thrown in, as a differentiator.Kapoor's close-shaved head in this one may remind you of his appearance in 'Haider', which was his last striking performance. He adds in a cocked-to-a-side head, collar open enough to show off chain against buffed, gleaming chest, dangling cigarettes, and a slo-mo stride to match. The look is a good fit for a badass movie cop. But Shahid Kapoor cannot get past that, getting stuck in a flat, stylised delivery, for the most part. Naming a film after a titular character skews the script: everything flows from hero Shahid Kapoor's actions and reactions, whereas a 'Mumbai Police' keeps our attention on everyone in it, even if Sukumaran is clearly in the lead.Leading lady Pooja Hegde, who returns to the screen after a gap, leaves an impact in her brief role. Less can, more often than not, be more. There are at least a couple of instances when Shahid Kapoor does come alive, reminding us of the actor that he can be. Both are scenes in which he allows his character to be vulnerable, and you wish there were more of these, rather than the loose threads and the long slack-blah stretches which make you feel every minute of

Tanuja was scared that Kajol would end up killing sister during their fights, recalls Tanishaa: 'She had a very bad temper'

Like many other siblings, Tanishaa Mukerji too shares a special bond with her sister Kajol. And while the sisters cherish each other today, things weren't always so smooth between them. In a recent interview, Tanishaa shared that her mother Tanuja banned the two sisters from fighting physically as she was scared that Kajol would kill Tanishaa.

In an interaction with Hauterrfly, Tanishaa was asked about her childhood memories and shared how she was raised by a bunch of strong women. "My great-grandmother raised me. My mom would go for work. Her brother and his 2 daughters were also used to stay with us. So, I grew up with three sisters," shared Tanishaa. When asked about her fights with sister Kajol during their childhood, Tanishaa recalled that mom Tanuja was "scared" for her younger daughter's life. "Kajol and I used to fight a lot. She is older than me in age as well as in size. She is physically bigger than me," she said and added, "My mother used to get scared that Kajol would kill me one day. She had a very bad temper when she was a kid. My mom used to be very scared."Tanishaa went on to add, "My mom made a rule that we can fight without touching each other. I think it was a very good thing that Mummy did for us. Because of that, Kajol and I developed a strong bond of sisterhood for each other."Tanishaa made her debut in the movies in the early 2000s but got people's attention when she appeared with



Uday Chopra in the 2005 YRF's film Neal n Nikki. Tanishaa also participated in Bigg Boss 7 as a contestant and emerged as the first runner-up. She also participated on the dance reality show Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa.

Sudesh Lehri says he's illiterate, made shoes and sold vegetables for a living: 'When Archana Puran Singh laughed at me, I made many houses'

Madhavan defends stalking in Rehnaa Hai Terre Dil Mein, says no other way to approach a girl but 'follow her': 'Can't judge on Western yardstick'



R Madhavan and Dia Mirza-starrer Rehnaa Hai Terre Dil Mein did not work at the box office when it released but in the years since, the film has developed quite a following. In the first few years, fans expressed their love for the characters but later, as they evolved, they started to see the problematic aspects of the film. The film's lead character lies and stalks the woman he likes, and is rewarded for his misdeeds. Now, Madhavan has spoken about these aspects and said that back in the day, there was no other way to approach a woman other than stalking.Disagreeing with the criticism, Madhavan shared on Mashable India that he doesn't agree with the criticism. He said that the film was being judged on a "Western yardstick" which wasn't fair. "Main inn sab baaton se bilkul sehmati nahi rakhta. Ye green flag, blue flag ye sab cheezein nikkamme logon ka nikkamma kaam hai. Mera maanna hai ki ek gentleman hona zaroori hai. Bachpan se hume sikhaya gaya hai ki ladies se kaise baat ki jaaye, kaise unhe approach kiya jaaye, aur ye hamesha hamari sanskriti ka ek hissa raha hai. Badmaash toh hote hi hain. Par aap hume Western yardstick se judge nahi kar sakte (I completely disagree with all this. These concepts like green flag, blue flag—these are just meaningless things said by idle people. I believe it's important to be a gentleman. Since childhood, we were taught how to talk to women, how to approach them, and this has always been a part of our culture. Of course, there are troublemakers everywhere, but you can't judge us using a Western yardstick)."

He then went on to say that there was no other way to approach a woman back in the day so following her around was the only way. "Main aapse puchta hoon, jo log problematic bolte hain. Uss zamane mein agar Mumbai mein kisi ladki se hume mulaqat karni hoti, hum dil se mohabbat karte hai aur izzat se milna chahte hai. Toh kaise mile? (I ask those who call it problematic – back in the day, if we wanted to meet a girl in Mumbai, we did it with love and respect. If we were in an unfamiliar city and wanted to meet a girl, how would we do it?)"

Madhavan then questioned that in Western countries, people meet at bars and it is considered totally acceptable. He added that if someone fell in love with a woman in those days, one had to track the woman, follow her to her house and then contact her as otherwise, there was no other way. "Aap usko track kiye bagair, uske peeche jaakar voh kahan rehti hai, voh jaane bagair, use contact kar hi nahi sakte. Kaise karta koi insan? (Without tracking her, without following her home, you couldn't contact her. How could anyone do it?)" He also added that his character Madhav Shastri in the film did not have any other option but to stalk her. The 2001 Gautham Vasudev Menon film Rehnaa Hai Terre Dil Mein was the Hindi remake of his own Tamil film Minnale. Produced by Vashu Bhagnani's Pooja Entertainment, the film marked the Bollywood debuts of both Madhavan and actor Dia Mirza. The film also featured Saif Ali Khan

Salman Khan calls himself 'the dumbest' for participating in nephew Arhaan's podcast, says he speaks to himself 'rather harshly'

In 2024, Salman Khan's nephew Arhaan Khan started his own podcast and after releasing a few episodes and teasing an episode with Salman Khan, the podcast channel went silent. Now, Arhaan has shared a new teaser featuring his uncle and some of the life lessons he has shared with the young guns of the Khan family. The teaser video included some throwback moments from his old interviews and some footage from their family time. During their conversation on the podcast, Salman Khan can be seen making some revelations about himself as well as advising his nephew to always be present for family and friends. The teaser starts with an old interview of Salman Khan where the interviewer can be heard saying, "What you do on the screen is everybody's business." To this, Salman Khan agrees and replies, "Exactly. It's the image, you know? You are selling the image basically. I mean like me as an individual





Speaking with Archana Puran Singh and her family, Sudesh shared, "I have said this several times that I have worked really hard to be where I am today. When I started my career, I struggled so much that I became bankrupt, my house was sold. Everybody laughed at me. But, when Archana Puran Singh laughed at me, I made many houses."

Sudesh Lehri is among the famous Indian comedians. While he has been in the industry for over two decades, he gained widespread recognition after his participation in the The Great Indian Laughter Challenge Season 8. Over the years, he appeared on various comedy shows including Kapil Sharma's television shows. He recently appeared on Archana Puran Singh's YouTube channel, where he shared his journey to success and all the struggles he went through as a child. "A drunkard slapped me mid performance", shared the comedian.

Speaking with Archana Puran Singh and her family, Sudesh shared, "I have said this several times that I have worked really hard to be where I am today. When I started

my career, I struggled so much that I became bankrupt, my house was sold. Everybody laughed at me. But, when Archana Puran Singh laughed at me, I made many houses."He also spoke about Archana's bungalow in Madh Island. He said, "I always doubted whether or not you are rich, but today, it has been confirmed that you are indeed rich. I have seen such homes only in films."Listening to Sudesh praise her house, Archana interrupted and said, "I have seen your house on your YouTube channel, you have made such a beautiful house. You even have a home theatre." Sudesh replies, "I have made home theatre only for Krushna (Abhishek)." When a curious Archana asked, "Why?' He said, "Because his films don't release in theatres. He always claims they are in theatres, but I can never find."During their conversation, Sudesh shared, "I have done a lot of hard work when I was young. I have seen poverty. I have worked in small shops, used to make tea, I have worked in several factories, I used to make footwear. I sold vegetables. The rich don't have to lie, but being poor we often have to lie when money lenders would ask for money. All this worked like an acting course for me.'

Sudesh used to do private shows before attaining fame. He shared the one incident that changed his life. He said, "Once I was doing a show. There was a drunkard there, he randomly came on stage, held me by my collar and slapped me. My mic fell. All my teammates were ready to beat him up, but I stopped them. Later, I was very disappointed. I was like 'What am I even doing, who are these people, they don't value talent and art.' I returned home and told my wife, 'I am never going to perform at weddings."

Sudesh then decided to sell his house and return people's money. "I wanted to do something of my own. I wanted to create a brand of my own and gain fame. I knew I will only be respected if my build my name. Then I got a show. It became a massive hit. I toured so many places."He then lightened the mood by showing off his singing skills. Seeing his talent, Archana shared with her family, "I never believed he was illiterate. I thought he was just joking."

Later, Sudesh shared, "I have never even been inside a school. Recently, I had to shoot an ad, we had to play school kids. It was the first time that I entered a school."Sudesh even shared his wedding story. He said, "My marriage was fixed and people were behind my life to get married. I got frustrated and said 'Get me married right now, or I won't do it.' We had this conversation at 10 am on a Sunday morning, by 12 pm I was married. We tied the knot at a temple." I am just like all you people. Like just a normal human being."

The teaser cuts to present day where the superstar can be seen having a conversation with his nephew and saying, "You just need to be there for friends, family. The effort that you have to keep on putting in." He then goes on to share some secrets and revealed, "If I give you advice, the advice I give to myself, way I speak to myself... you will hate me. Because I speak to myself rather harshly." Salman Khan can also be heard speaking about forgiveness. He says, "You can forgive a person once, twice, third time... chalo khalaas." He then pulls his nephew's leg and calls him dumb. Pointing towards his nephew and his friends, the actor says, "Dumb and dumbers and we are the dumbest for doing this."The video ends with Salman's another advise, where he says, "When your body says no,

your mind should say yes. When the body and mind both say no, you should say, come on guys, one last round."Salman also shared the promo and shared that this podcast was shot almost a year ago. He wrote, "I spoke to the boys a year ago, I m not sure if they even remember all the advice. My first ever podcast appearance." Tagging Arhaan's podcast handle Dumb Biryani, Salman khan shared the podcast will stream soon.

'Embarrassed' Zahan Kapoor had no idea about cousin Ranbir Kapoor until his debut Saawariya: 'We were slightly more distant'

Zahan Kapoor, the second cousin of actors Kareena Kapoor and Ranbir Kapoor, recently gained recognition for his work in Vikramaditya Motwane's Black Warrant. In a recent interview, Zahan shared that he did not grow up with them and did not know much about Ranbir until his debut film Saawariya. Zahan is the grandson of late actor Shashi Kapoor, and Ranbir and Kareena are grandchildren of Raj Kapoor. Raj and Shashi were sons of Prithviraj Kapoor.

Speaking about his distant relationship with his cousins, Zahan told Bollywood Hungama, "I have developed a relationship with them now more as a young adult because they are my second cousins. So, there is a separation. They are first cousins to each other so their relationship with each other is still closer. But, I have childhood memories with them. The structure of the family is also just so big." Shashi Kapoor would host the annual Kapoor family Christmas lunch for many years. After his passing, his son Kunal Kapoor took over that role.Zahan said that they were "distant" during his childhood as they were already grown up and working, while he was much younger. He said, "While growing up, we were slightly more distant. They were already working members, I was a young kid. We grew up differently. My dadaji also made a conscious decision to separate himself; he valued his privacy. As a nuclear family, we value our privacy. The family would gather on special occasions and once in a while, maybe randomly also."

He revealed that he was in school when Ranbir made his debut in the movies and while he knew of Rishi Kapoor,



he did not know much about his family. "I am so embarrassed about it. I did not really have an idea about Ranbir Kapoor before he was launched. Of course, I knew Chintu uncle. But, we were so separate. I was living in my world as a young kid. It was around the time when he made his splash with Saawariya as a young adult in 2007. I was still in school."In the same conversation, Zahan also talked about he is envious of Ranbir as he can stay away from social media. "A little separation from social media is necessary. We live in a different age.

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