

# Across State

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## Maharashtra will be Naxal-free soon- Fadnavis

### 11 Naxals surrender before CM Devendra Fadnavis at Gadchiroli police station



#### Gadchiroli

In a major victory, on Wednesday, 1st January, a total of 11 naxals including Tarakka Sidam surrendered before Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis at Gadchiroli Police headquarters. This happened during Fadnavis' visit to the district. "This is a very important police station because Maoists dominated this area. Our police have established their outpost by demolishing the Maoist dominance. The area is being developed, a road is being developed which will connect us with Chhattisgarh. Mobile towers are also being installed," he said.

While addressing the issue of Maoism last month, the CM had taken cognizance of the 33 Naxals that had been killed in the last year and said that the North Part of Gadchiroli district had become completely 'Naxal-free'. Fadnavis also said that as many as 55 Naxals have been arrested and 33 have surrendered in the same period.

Speaking during the winter session in the state assembly earlier he said, "North Part of Gadchiroli district is

completely Naxal-free. 33 Maoists have been killed, 55 Maoists have been arrested, 33 Maoists have surrendered, in the last year". He further said that the government would continue its fight against Naxalism and fix a timeline



of three years to crush the left-wing extremism.

"1500 youths of Gadchiroli have joined the police force, out of which 33 youths are Naxal victims, the main leader of Maoists Giridhar, and his wife have surrendered, Giridhar had recruited the cadre of South Gadchiroli, the government's goal is to eliminate Naxalism in the coming 3 years," he was quoted as saying.

"The threat of Naxalism is not limited to remote areas only. Many front organizations have been formed. They are trying to shake the faith in the Constitution through an ecosystem. Many of these organizations try to rescue the arrested Naxalites. They create a safe haunt for them," he added.

In the given case, it is said that the 11 Naxals who have surrendered before Maharashtra CM will be offered monetary assistance from the state for rehabilitation. These were carrying a collective bounty of Rs 1.03 crore and were involved in attacking security personnel.

Notably, the most prominent among the surrendered Maoists was Dandkaranya Zonal Committee Member Vimla Chandra Sidam alias Tarakka. Tarakka had been involved in the Naxalism movement for the past 38 years. Maharashtra CM meanwhile also felicitated C-60 commandos and officers for bravery in anti-Naxal operations.

"Maharashtra will soon become free of Naxal menace given the rise in the number of Maoists laying down their arms and the movement failing to attract recruits," he noted.

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# BMC issues stop-work notice to 78 construction sites in Byculla and Borivali after invoking GRAP-4 regulations

## Mumbai

A day after the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) implemented aspects of Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP-4) regulations for Mumbai in order to mitigate worsening air pollution norms, the civic body has spruced up its vigilance with wards including Byculla and Borivali issuing notices to construction sites and officials confirming that all work will be suspended from Wednesday.

In areas like Navy Nagar, where the BMC had announced increased vigilance owing to prolonged higher AQI, officials said that notices have been issued to the Navy to increase vigilance of construction works.

Between December 30 and 31, the BMC has sent stop-work notices to 33 project sites in Byculla and 45 project sites in Borivali (East) for flouting the dust mitigation norms.

These spots have been recording poor AQI consistently for the past few weeks.

Between November 1 and

December 31, BMC has sent notices to 877 project sites for flouting dust mitigation norms.

Municipal Commissioner Bhushan Gagrani had Monday announced that construction works will be stopped in the areas of Mumbai that record "poor" AQI.

According to the Central Pollution Control Board's (CPCB) dashboard, Mumbai's AQI stood at 126 on December 31 (Tuesday), which is regarded as "moderate". Of the 25 AQI monitoring stations in Mumbai, 17 recorded "moderate" AQI levels, while eight remaining stations recorded AQI under 'satisfactory' quality.

On Tuesday, Ghatkopar recorded an AQI of 193 which was a few readings away from "poor", followed by 176 at Shivaji Nagar (Mankhurd) and 169 at Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC).

Gagrani had also said that areas like Worli, Byculla and Navy Nagar are under BMC's radar considering they have

been recording poor AQI for a prolonged period of time.

The CPCB dashboard also showed that south Mumbai's Navi Nagar and Colaba areas



recorded 21 days of poor AQI in December, while Mazgaon recorded 14 days of poor AQI, and Worli recorded 10 days of poor and very poor AQI.

Suresh Sagar, Assistant Commissioner from the E ward which encompasses Byculla, confirmed with The Indian Express that the civic body is in the process of issuing notices to all construction sites of Byculla,

where all construction work will be suspended starting Wednesday.

"Since the air quality index has been high in Byculla for a while, we have been informed

to cease all construction works in the ward. Therefore, the building proposal department along with the ward office is issuing notices to all construction sites of Byculla. With this, all construction work will stop from tomorrow (Wednesday)," said the official.

He added, "Construction work in these areas will be allowed to resume only after we

receive further instruction from the administration."

Amid concerns of high AQI levels in the Navy Nagar area, the BMC has written to the Chief Engineer at the Navy HQ as well as a contractor undertaking construction work in Navy Nagar to ramp up their vigilance.

"Since Navy Nagar is under the control of the Navy, the BMC has written to the Naval officials and a contractor carrying out works in the area. The civic body has appealed to implement strict vigilance and to adhere to the norms that have been enlisted to mitigate pollution levels at construction sites. While AQI in other pockets of the ward have been moderate, the levels in Navy Nagar have been high. The BMC has written to the Navy authorities to increase vigilance. The letter has been sent to the Chief Engineer at the HQ of Navy in Colaba as well as The Garrisons, a contractor undertaking project work in that area," said an official privy to the developments.

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## Walmik Karad, NCP man in eye of storm since the murder of Beed sarpanch, surrenders

### Beed

Former Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) corporator and aide of NCP minister Dhananjay Munde, Walmik Karad, who has been in the eye of a storm since the murder of a sarpanch in Maharashtra's Beed district, surrendered at the headquarters of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Pune on Tuesday. Karad is also a group leader in Parli Nagar Parishad, president of the Ladki Bahin Yojana in Beed, and NCP's member of the Beed district planning committee. Munde had earlier accepted that Karad is close to him and said that "there are hundreds of workers who are working in our team and Karad is one of them". Karad had been absconding since December 9. In a video clip he released before surrendering, he said, "I am Walmik Karad. A false complaint of extortion has been filed at Kaiz police station against me. Even as I am entitled for anticipatory bail, I am surrendering before the police at the CID office in Pune. Whoever is the killer of (sarpanch) Santosh Bhaiya Deshmukh should be arrested and given the death penalty. My name is being embroiled

into the cases due to political vendetta. During the police probe, if I am found guilty, I am willing to face the consequences according to law." After Karad surrendered at the CID headquarters on Pashan Road in Pune around Tuesday noon, he was detained for questioning. "Later in the afternoon, a team took him to the Beed unit of the CID, which is investigating the extortion case registered against him. He was placed under arrest after the team reached Beed," a senior CID officer in Pune said.

The officer added, "The Beed unit of the CID is investigating three related cases registered at the Kej police station in Beed district. These cases were registered on December 6, 9 and 11 respectively. Of these, Karad has been named in the case registered on December 11, which pertains to extortion demand of Rs 2 crore from the staffers of a wind energy firm. Other two offences are that of kidnapping and murder of Massajog sarpanch Desmukh registered on December 9 and case of assault on staffers of wind energy firm. Karad will be questioned for all three related offences."



## Minister Ashish Shelar tells Maharashtra IT dept to draft independent AI policy for state

### Mumbai

Maharashtra's Information and Technology Minister Ashish Shelar on Tuesday directed his department to draft the state's first independent Artificial Intelligence policy.

Shelar, while chairing a meeting with officials from the IT Department at the Sahyadri Guest House in Mumbai, emphasised the importance of AI in shaping the future of industries, businesses and governance and recognising its transformative potential.

"By leveraging AI, we can attract more industries and businesses, create employment opportunities for the youth and position Maharashtra as a formidable player," he said

Shelar noted that it is important to align Maharashtra's AI aspirations with national efforts such as IndiaAI Mission so that the state emerges as a leader in the AI revolution.



IndiaAI Mission, launched in March, focuses on advancing AI capabilities across the nation with special allocations for the IndiaAI Datasets Platform, Application Development Initiatives, Graphic Processing Units, IndiaAI Innovation Centre, Future Skills Programme and financing startups

in the AI space.

The Central Government is planning to start the collection and aggregation of non-personal datasets to build a comprehensive database that will power IndiaAI Datasets Platform from January 2025. This will enable seamless access to startups, companies, academics and researchers to develop applications, interface with language models and offer specialised services.

Therefore, it is important that Maharashtra works towards positioning itself at the forefront of India's technological advancement while contributing to the nation's vision of becoming a global AI leader, the minister said.

IT Principal Secretary Parrag Jaini Nainutia, MahaIT managing director Jayshree Bhoj and senior officials from allied departments were present for the meeting.

## 2024 sees 11% rise in home sales in Mumbai worth Rs 1.6 lakh crore



### Mumbai

The year 2024 saw residential sales worth Rs 1.6 lakh crore registered in Mumbai. According to data from the Inspector General of Registration (IGR), 1,41,302 homes were sold during the year, generating Rs 12,161 crore in stamp duty revenue for the Maharashtra government. Compared to 2023, home sales increased by 11 per cent, while the revenue saw a 12 per cent rise.

December alone saw the sale of 12,193 homes, contributing Rs 1,116 crore in stamp duty. Except for September – when sales dipped to 9,111 homes, generating Rs 876 crore – every other month saw sales crossing the 10,000 mark. March recorded the highest sales, with 14,149 homes sold, yielding Rs 1,122 crore in stamp duty.

Property prices per square foot also saw a significant increase in five years. In 2024, the average property price was Rs 14,200 per sq ft, marking a rise of around 49 per cent from Rs 9,500 per sq ft in 2019.

Larger homes gained popularity in 2024, with apartments sized between 1,000 and 2,000 sq ft seeing their share of sales rise from 8 per cent to 12 per cent, compared to 2023. Homes above 2,000 sq ft maintained a steady demand of 2 per cent.

Meanwhile, the demand for compact homes under 500 sq ft dropped significantly, with their share falling from 51 per cent to 35 per cent.

Suburban areas dominated the housing market, contributing to 86 per cent of total sales, while Mumbai city sales remained stagnant at 7 per cent due to unaffordable property prices in high-end localities.

The post-pandemic surge in home ownership aspirations has driven this growth, with the market registering consistent sales throughout the year. Tanuj Shori, founder and CEO of Square Yards, said, "The Indian residential real estate market has entered a promising upcycle post-pandemic, bolstered by pent-up demand and a stronger sentiment for homeownership. Over the past two to three years, the sector experienced exceptional growth, which has naturally moderated in 2024." Rising property values and strong demand for larger homes indicate a continued upward trajectory for Mumbai's housing sector, solidifying its position as a resilient real estate market. "In 2025, we foresee residential demand and supply growing in close ranges, setting the stage for steady, sustainable progress," added Shori.

## Over 1000 penalised for driving under the influence on New Year's Eve

### Mumbai

Over 1,000 individuals were penalised for driving under the influence of alcohol on New Year's Eve in Mumbai, Thane, Mira-Bhayander-Vasai-Virar, and Navi Mumbai. The police said that, in order to prevent untoward incidents in the city, strong security measures were in place, and traffic violators were penalised during checks.

According to Mumbai police officials, a special campaign was conducted between 8 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday morning, with over 15,000 policemen deployed on the ground. During this campaign, roadblocks were set up at 107 locations, and a total of 46,143 vehicles were inspected.

The police said that 5,670 drivers were charged under various sections of the Motor Vehicles Act by Mumbai police personnel, while their counterparts in the traffic department took action against 17,647 individuals for flouting various traffic norms.

"During the checks, we found 333 individuals driving under the influence of alcohol. Subsequently, FIRs were registered against them at local police stations and appropriate

action was taken," a senior police officer said.

Traffic police officials further added that 2,893 drivers were penalised for parking their vehicles on the road and causing obstruction to the free flow of traffic, while 1,923 were booked for riding without helmets and 1,731 people were fined for driving through red traffic lights. Additionally, Rs 89.19 lakh was collected in fines from violators.

In Navi Mumbai, police officials said that during the nakabandi, which started late on Tuesday and continued into the early hours of Wednesday, they took action against 2,357 motorists under the Motor Vehicles Act for violating various traffic norms.

"To ensure law and order, we had deployed adequate security at various locations, especially at areas where celebrations took place, during which we found 266 people driving under the influence of alcohol, and appropriate action was taken against them," an officer said.

In Thane, the police said that 369 people were found driving under the influence of alcohol. Meanwhile, in Mira-Bhayandar-Vasai-Virar, action was taken against 61 individuals for driving under the influence of alcohol.



## Does RSS support BJP's 'wrongdoings'? Kejriwal asks Bhagwat



### News Delhi

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday wrote to RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat and alleged deletion of votes and money distribution by the BJP in Delhi.

Kejriwal raised several questions in his letter to the RSS chief which comes ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls.

The former Delhi chief minister asked Bhagwat if the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) endorsed the "wrongdoings" committed by

the BJP.

He asked if the RSS supported money being openly distributed by the BJP leaders to buy votes and "large-scale" deletion of Purvanchali and Dalit votes by the saffron party.

The BJP has accused the AAP and Kejriwal of helping illegal Rohingya and Bangladeshis staying in Delhi with documents and money to use them as vote bank in the elections.

The elections to the 70-member Delhi Assembly are due to be held in February.

## Govt begins land identification process for Manmohan Singh memorial

### New Delhi

The government has started the process of identifying a site for setting up a memorial to former prime minister Manmohan Singh and is in touch with his family to finalise the location.

Sources said Central Public Works Department (CPWD) officials visited sites around the Sanjay Gandhi memorial in the Rashtriya Smriti Sthal and identified some spots where a memorial could come up.

The government is in touch with the former prime minister's family and has discussed the three or four options for the memorial's location, they said.

Sources said no site had been finalised yet and everything would be done in consultation with Singh's family.

The Centre will set up a trust before allotting the selected land to it for the memorial.

The government has already conveyed its willingness to set up a memorial to the former prime minister's family.

Singh -- the architect of India's economic reforms -- died on December 26 at the age of 92 following age-related complications.



## Chaos At Puri Jagannath Temple On New Year's Day, Devotees Break Security Barricades



### Puri

A stampede-like situation reportedly took place when devotees attempted to break through the security barricades in front of Shree Jagannath Temple in Puri and some fell on the ground on the first day of the new year. No casualty was reported, police said. The incident took place while devotees were waiting in queues in front of the temple gate to seek blessings of sibling deities, Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra. Some of the devotees, who had been standing for hours,

became restless and tried to enter the temple by breaking the barricades.

Amid the pushing and shoving, some women fell but were helped by fellow devotees and security personnel. The police personnel deployed at the premises were inadequate compared to the huge rush of devotees. Lakhs of devotees had visited the temple today with several people queuing up since last night. The queues had stretched from the temple to the Market Square, which is nearly half a kilometre away.

According to the Puri Police, nearly three lakh devotees have visited the temple till the end of the day and it is estimated that the turnout may cross five lakhs as the arrangements for darshan will continue till night.

In order to strengthen security, barricades have been erected from the Market Square on the main road to the temple. However, questions are being raised as to how a stampede-like situation was caused despite the elaborate arrangements. Earlier on Monday, some devotees fell ill due to the heavy rush inside the temple.

## Five Drown After Falling Into Well In Hazaribagh

### Hazaribagh

Five people drowned after falling into a well in Sarabaha village of Churchu block here. Their bodies have been sent to Sheikh Bhikhari Medical College Hospital for post-mortem. A pall of gloom has descended on the entire village after the tragedy.

A scuffle broke out between a couple and in the hit of the moment, the husband jumped into the well with his motorcycle. To rescue him, some neighbours plunged into the well but none could come out alive.

The victim's family said two people entered the well and after seeing them drowning, two others also went inside and all five had a water burial. On getting information, police reached the spot and fished out the bodies from the well. It is learned that the bodies could be taken out after two hours

of strenuous effort and emptying the water from the well.

A dispute broke out between Sundar Karmali and his wife Rupa. Sundar jumped into the well with his motorcycle. Seeing him drowning, Suraj and Rahul Karmali got down into the well to retrieve him. When the duo was also drowning, two siblings -- Vinay Karmali and Pankaj Karmali -- entered the well. In the process, all of them died. The age of the deceased is said to be between 22 and 23 years.

"Two persons were brought to the hospital and doctors declared them dead upon arrival. The bodies of all five have been brought to the Medical College Hospital for post-mortem. The relatives of all the deceased have also reached the hospital," ASI Mahavir Kumar Mehta of Charhi Police Station said.





# Bengaluru Police File FIR Against BJP MLC C T Ravi, 12 Others In Connection With Poster Campaign Against Minister Priyank Kharge

## Bengaluru

Opposition Leader in the Karnataka Legislative Council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy, BJP MLCs C T Ravi, N Ravikumar and 10 others have been booked for carrying out a poster campaign in Bengaluru city against Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge in connection with the suicide of Bidar-based contractor Sachin Panchal allegedly due to harassment by the minister's followers.

The High Grounds police have registered an FIR against these people based on a complaint by PSI Shashidhar Vannur. Narayanaswamy and others have

been accused of creating inconvenience to the general public by illegally assembling on public roads.

In a bid to step up pressure on the Karnataka government to secure the resignation of Priyank Kharge, the BJP launched a poster campaign on Tuesday pasting posters of Kharge in public places in many parts of the city.

The posters carried slogans that read 'Minister Priyank Kharge Responsible for Death of Contractor' and 'Supari Sponsor Kharge.' Following this, Narayanaswamy and other leaders were arrested and let up.

Meanwhile, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah turned down BJP's demand

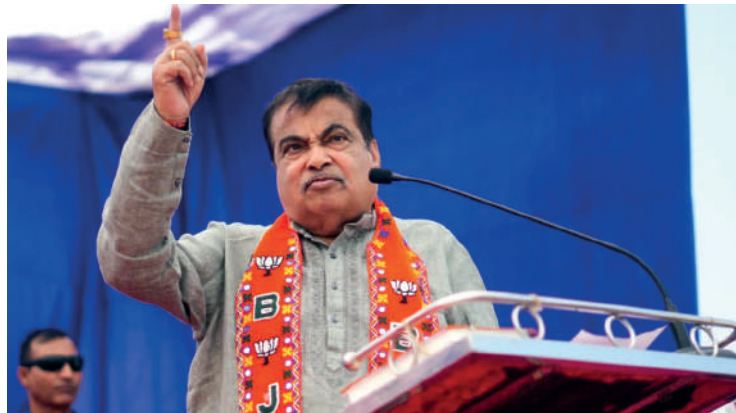


for the resignation of Priyank Kharge, son of Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, saying the demand was laced with malicious intention.

"The demand by BJP is politically motivated and is being made out of hatredness. The death note by contractor Sachin does not even mention Priyank's name. So, there is no question of seeking Kharge's resignation," Siddaramaiah told reporters here.

He also took a dig at the BJP for demanding a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into Sachin's suicide. "When BJP was in power, not even a single case was handed over to the CBI. They don't have the moral right to talk about it," he said.

## Gadkari Seeks Mamata's Intervention To Facilitate Land Acquisition For 20 NH Projects In Bengal



## Kolkata

Union minister Nitin Gadkari has sought West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's intervention to facilitate land acquisition for 20 major national highway projects in the state, a senior official said on Wednesday. In a letter to the CM, the Union minister of road transport and highways said these projects were facing "substantial delays" due to land acquisition issues.

He mentioned that nine projects are in the detailed project report (DPR) stage, while 11 projects, costing Rs 8,003.14 crore, are at various stages of implementation. However, the projects are delayed due to pending approvals from district authorities for critical activities such as land acquisition, forest clearance, and utility shifting, he wrote. "I would be grateful if

you could instruct the concerned Land Revenue, Forest and other authorities to provide all necessary clearances in a timely manner, enabling smooth project implementation without any unnecessary delays," Gadkari said in the letter. He also emphasised that the projects could get momentum if the chief secretary convened regular review meetings involving all the stakeholders every month.

"I also request you to advise the chief secretary to convene a monthly review meeting with all stakeholders including representatives from my ministry and NHAI. This regular meeting will facilitate prompt resolution of pending issues with (a) focus on land acquisition, forest clearances and other critical matters," Gadkari mentioned in his letter.

## Indian Scientists Discover Underwater Mineral Treasure



## Chennai

In a significant stride for Indian deep-sea exploration, scientists from the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) have made a groundbreaking discovery: active hydrothermal vents located 4,500 meters beneath the surface of the southern Indian Ocean.

This discovery, achieved through the deployment of an unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV), marks a pivotal moment for India's ambitions in deep-sea mining and scientific research.

### Hydrothermal Vents: Underwater Hot Springs

Hydrothermal vents are underwater hot springs formed in areas of intense volcanic activity, typically along mid-ocean ridges where tectonic plates are diverging. Seawater seeps into cracks in the ocean floor, where it is heated by the underlying magma. This superheated water, laden with dissolved minerals, then erupts from the seafloor, creating towering chimneys that

spew plumes of dark, mineral-rich fluids.

### A Treasure Trove of Minerals

These vents are not only geological wonders but also host unique ecosystems. Despite the extreme conditions of high temperature and pressure, a diverse array of life thrives around these vents, including giant tube worms, clams, and other chemosynthetic organisms that derive energy from the chemical reactions occurring at the vents. The mineral-rich deposits surrounding these vents are of significant economic interest. They contain high concentrations of valuable metals such as copper, zinc, gold, silver, and rare earth elements, making them potential targets for future deep-sea mining operations.

This discovery aligns with India's ambitious Deep Ocean Mission, a multi-disciplinary program aimed at exploring and harnessing the resources of the deep sea. The government has

allocated significant funding to this initiative, recognising the potential of deep-sea resources to contribute to India's economic growth and technological advancement.

The discovery of these hydrothermal vents provides a valuable opportunity for Indian scientists to study these unique ecosystems, understand their ecological significance, and develop technologies for sustainable deep-sea resource exploration.

### Future Directions

Deep-sea exploration and mining present significant technological and environmental challenges. Operating at such depths requires specialised equipment and robust infrastructure. Furthermore, it is crucial to ensure that any future mining activities are conducted responsibly to minimise environmental impact and protect the fragile deep-sea ecosystems.



# No loans, electricity, water and sewerage connections for buildings without completion/occupation certificate, orders SC

## New Delhi

Banks and financial institutions can't sanction loans against any building as a security without verifying the completion/occupation certificate issued to the building and electricity, water and sewerage connections shall be given by service providers to buildings only after production of such a certificate, the Supreme Court has ordered.

Issuing pan-India guidelines "in the larger public interest" to check illegal constructions, a Bench of Justice JB Pardiwala and Justice R Madhvan said, "No permission/licence to conduct any business/trade must be given by any authorities including local bodies of states/ Union Territories in any unauthorised building irrespective of it being residential or commercial building."

It said the builder/applicant has to give an undertaking to the effect that possession of the building will be handed over to the owners/beneficiaries only after obtaining completion/occupation certificate from the authorities concerned.

"Unauthorised constructions, apart from posing a threat to the life of the occupants and the citizens living nearby, also have an effect on resources like electricity, ground water and access to roads, which are primarily designed to be made available in orderly development and authorised activities," it said, upholding an Allahabad High Court's December 2014

order for demolition of certain illegal constructions in Meerut.

Noting that unauthorised constructions have to be curtailed with an iron hand and any lenience would amount to showing misplaced sympathy to them, the Bench said violation of any of these directions would lead to initiation of contempt proceedings in addition to the prosecution under respective laws.

"We are of the opinion that construction(s) put up in violation of or deviation from the building plan approved by the local authority and the constructions which are audaciously put up without any building planning approval, cannot be encouraged. Each and every construction must be made scrupulously following and strictly adhering to the Rules," the Bench said.

Officers responsible for issuance of wrongful completion/occupation certificate shall be proceeded departmentally forthwith, it said.

Writing the judgment for the Bench, Justice Madhavan made it clear that "delay in directing rectification of illegalities, administrative failure, regulatory inefficiency, cost of construction and investment, negligence and laxity on the part of the authorities concerned in performing their obligation(s) under the Act, cannot be used as a shield to defend action taken against the illegal/unauthorised constructions".



The verdict came more than a month after the top court declared 'Bulldozer Justice' unconstitutional and said the executive cannot demolish the residential and commercial properties of persons only on the grounds that they were accused or convicted of a crime.

Noting that state governments often seek to enrich themselves through the process of regularisation by condoning/ratifying the violations and illegalities, it lamented that "the state is unmindful that this gain is insignificant compared to the long-term damage it causes to the orderly urban development and irreversible adverse impact on the environment".

"Hence, regularisation schemes

must be brought out only in exceptional circumstances and as a one-time measure for residential houses after a detailed survey and considering the nature of land, fertility, usage, impact on the environment, availability and distribution of resources, proximity to water bodies/rivers and larger public interest," it said in its December 17 verdict.

The top court ordered its Registrar (Judicial) to send copies of the verdict to chief secretaries of all states/union territories for issuance of circulars to all local authorities/corporations for strict compliance.

It also ordered that copies of the judgment also be circulated to the Registrar General of each high court to enable high courts to use it while considering disputes relating to unauthorised construction, deviation/violation of building permission/plan.

"Even after issuance of completion certificate, deviation/violation, if any, contrary to the planning permission brought to the notice of the authority immediate steps be taken by the said authority concerned, in accordance with law, against the builder/owner/occupant; and the official, who is responsible for issuance of wrongful completion/occupation certificate shall be proceeded departmentally forthwith," the top court ordered.

# Air Marshal Mishra Takes Charge As Chief of IAF's Western Command

## New Delhi

Air Marshal Jeetendra Mishra on Wednesday took charge as the chief of Indian Air Force's Western Air Command that looks after the security of the air space in the sensitive Ladakh sector as well as some other parts of north India. Air Marshal Mishra, a fighter combat leader and an experimental test pilot, has more than 3000 hours of flying experience, according to the IAF.

He succeeds Air Marshal Pankaj Mohan Sinha, who superannuated after putting in more than 39 years of distinguished service. Air Marshal Mishra was commissioned into the Indian Air Force (IAF) as a fighter pilot on December 6, 1986. He is an alumnus of the National Defence



Academy, Air Force Test Pilots School, Bangalore, Air Command

and Staff College, the US, and Royal College of Defence

Studies in the UK.

In his service career spanning over 38 years, the Air Marshal has tenanted important command and staff appointments. These include Commanding Officer of a fighter squadron, chief test pilot at Aircraft and Systems Testing Establishment (ASTE), Air Officer Commanding of two frontline air bases, Director (Operational Planning and Assessment Group), Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Projects) at the air headquarters.

He was Deputy Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (Operations) prior to taking over his new appointment. The Air Officer is a recipient of 'Ati Vishisht Seva Medal' and 'Vishisht Seva Medal'.



# Air India Express Announces 'New Year Sale,' Air India Rolls Out In-Flight Wi-Fi



## New Delhi

Air India Express has launched a 'New Year Sale,' offering domestic fares starting at Rs 1,599. The sale is open for bookings until 5 January 2025, with travel dates between 8 January and 20 September 2025, requiring advanced reservations.

Passengers booking through the airline's website or mobile app can access additional discounts, including Xpress Lite fares starting at Rs 1,448. These fares come with zero convenience fees and include options to pre-book 3 kg of cabin baggage at no extra cost. Check-in baggage rates have also been reduced, with 15 kg priced at Rs 1,000 for domestic travel and 20 kg at Rs 1,300 for international routes.

Loyalty program members can avail 25% discounts on business-class equivalent Xpress Biz fares, priority boarding, seat selection, and pre-ordered meals. The airline has also announced 50% discounts on Biz seat upgrades, available on its newly inducted Boeing 737-8 aircraft. In addition to these offers, Air India Express continues to provide discounted fares for students, senior citizens, healthcare professionals, armed forces personnel, and their families.

Air India Introduces In-Flight Wi-Fi

Meanwhile, Air India has introduced in-flight Wi-Fi services, becoming the first Indian airline to offer internet

connectivity on domestic routes. The service is currently available on select Airbus A350, Boeing 787-9, and Airbus A321neo aircraft.

Rajesh Dogra, Chief Customer Experience Officer, Air India, said, "Connectivity is now an integral part of modern travel. For some, it is about the convenience and comfort of real-time sharing, while for others, it is about greater productivity and efficiency. Whatever one's purpose, we are confident that our guests will appreciate having the option of connecting to the web and enjoy the new Air India experience on board these aircraft."

The new feature allows passengers to browse the internet, use social media, send messages, and complete work tasks during flights. It supports multiple devices and is being offered free of charge for an introductory period.

The service, already available on certain international flights to cities like New York, London, and Singapore, is now being extended to domestic routes. Passengers can access the Wi-Fi by selecting the "Air India Wi-Fi" network, entering their PNR and last name, and connecting once the aircraft reaches 10,000 feet.

Air India plans to expand this feature across its fleet in the coming months, though connectivity will depend on satellite coverage and other factors. Both announcements

underline the airlines' efforts to attract passengers in an increasingly competitive aviation market. The introduction of Wi-Fi services and discounted fares comes as Indian carriers face rising demand for air travel, with a focus on affordability and enhanced onboard services.

# Seven Cyber Fraudsters Nabbed By Telangana CSB During Inter-State Op In Rajasthan

## Hyderabad

Busting a major cyber crime racket, the Telangana Cyber Security Bureau (TGCSB) on Wednesday apprehended seven cybercriminals in Rajasthan who were allegedly operating a nationwide syndicate to dupe people. The arrests were made following investigation launched on the basis of intelligence gathered during the capture of 27 cybercriminals in the state in September last year.



As per police sources, the arrested individuals have been identified as Saurabh Singh (22), a delivery boy; Devendra Kumar Saran (25), a grocery store manager; Rahul Vaishnav (19), a

student from Pali district; Nitin Sisodia (25), Naveen Kumar (22), and Kuldeep Meena (21), students; and Sahil Khan (24), a textile trader, all hailing from Jaipur.

The cyber security bureau found involvement of these criminals in 2,223 cybercrime cases across the country, including 189 cases in Telangana alone, with an estimated Rs 9 crore gained illicitly. During investigation, it was found that some of the fraudsters had withdrawn the proceeds of these crimes from ATMs and handed the money over to other members of the gang.

The latest arrests were part of a follow-up operation targeting those who had escaped earlier. Under the supervision of TGCSB Director Shikha Goel and SP Devendra Singh, two teams led by DSPs Suryaprakash and Venugopal Reddy, were deployed to Jaipur and Jodhpur, leading to capture of these cyber criminals.

# Justice Served: 67-Year-Old Sentenced To 20 Years RI for Raping Three Minor Girls In Telangana's Jagityala

## Jagityala

In a landmark verdict, the Jagityala Fast Track Special Court sentenced 67-year-old Shivaratri Muthaiah to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment for raping three minor girls.

As per the prosecution, Muthaiah, a resident of a village under Gollapalli police station limits, lured the girls with chocolates before committing the heinous crime. The incident came to light in October, 2023, when the victims' family filed a complaint with Gollapalli police. Sub-Inspector Naresh registered three cases under POCSO Act and arrested Muthaiah.

Police expedited the investigation and the case was presented in the Fast

Track Special Court. After examining the evidence, District Chief Judge and Fast Track Court Special Judge G Neelima found Muthaiah guilty and sentenced him to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs 1,000 in each case. The court also ordered that the sentences be served concurrently and directed that a compensation of Rs 2 lakh be paid to each of the three victims. Telangana SP Ashok Kumar congratulated the officers and staff who worked tirelessly to ensure that the accused was punished swiftly.

In December last year, a POCSO court in Baruipur of West Bengal's South 24 Parganas had awarded

death sentence to Mustaqin, convicted of rape and murder of a minor girl from Jaynagar. The verdict, which came just 61 days after the crime was reported, is a stark reminder to the trial in the rape and murder case of the RG Kar Hospital doctor that is continuing for more than four months.

Mustaqin's conviction was ordered by the Baruipur Sub-district Court Judge Subrata Chatterjee on Thursday. The case was investigated by the West Bengal Police. The investigation began after a case was registered against Mustaqin under the POCSO Act. The police formed an SIT on October 7 and chargesheet was submitted to the Baruipur court on October 30, which is 25 days after the incident.



## Cabinet Approves Modification, Provisions In Ongoing Central Sector Scheme Of PMFBY

New Delhi

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday approved the continuation of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme till 2025-26 with an overall outlay of Rs 69,515.71 crore from 2021-22 to 2025-26.

Briefing the reporters here, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said, "The decision will help in risk coverage of crops from non-preventable natural calamities for farmers across the country till 2025-26. In addition to the same, for large-scale technology infusion in the implementation of the scheme leading to increasing transparency and claim calculation and settlement, the Union Cabinet has also approved the creation of the Fund for Innovation and Technology (FIAT) with a corpus of Rs 824.77 crore."

The fund will be utilised towards funding technological initiatives under the scheme, YES-TECH, and WINDS as well as Research and Development studies, Vaishnaw added.

Yield Estimation System using Technology (YES-TECH) uses Remote Sensing Technology for yield estimation with a minimum 30 per cent weightage to technology-based yield estimates. 9 major states are currently implementing



it - Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu & Karnataka.

Other states are also being on-boarded expeditiously. With the wider implementation of YES-TECH, Crop Cutting Experiments and related issues will be gradually phased out. Under YES-TECH Claim calculation and settlement have been done for 2023-24. Madhya Pradesh has adopted 100 per cent technology-based yield estimation, the Union Minister said.

Vaishnaw further said weather Information and Network Data Systems (WINDS) envisages setting up Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) at the block level and Automatic Rain Gauges (ARGs) at the panchayat level.

Under WINDS, a 5 times increase in current network density is envisaged to develop

hyper-local weather data. Under the initiative, only data rental costs are payable by Central and State governments. Nine major states are in the process of implementing WINDS (Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Puducherry, Assam, Odisha, Karnataka, Uttarakhand and Rajasthan), while other states have also expressed willingness to implement.

All efforts are made and will continue to be made to saturate all farmers of North Eastern States on priority. To this extent, the centre shares 90 per cent of premium subsidy with the North Eastern States. However, due to the scheme being voluntary and low gross cropped area in the North Eastern states, flexibility has been given to avoid surrender of funds and for reallocation in other development projects and schemes with fund requirements, he added.

## 26/11 Mumbai attacks accused, Tahawwur Rana, likely to be brought to India soon



New Delhi

Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman Tahawwur Rana, who was involved in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, is likely to be brought to India soon. The US Court of Appeals ruled that Tahawwur Rana could be extradited to India under the extradition treaty between the two countries. A few months back, in a huge setback to Tahawwur Hussain Rana, a US court had ruled that the Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman could be extradited to India where is wanted for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack carried out by Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists. Rana had appealed against the ruling which was rejected today. In its ruling, the panel also held that India provided sufficient competent evidence to support the magistrate judge's finding of probable cause that Rana committed the charged crimes. Rana, a Pakistani national, was tried in a US district court on charges related to his support for a terrorist organisation that carried out large-scale terrorist attacks in Mumbai. A jury convicted Rana of providing material support to a foreign terrorist organisation and conspiring to provide material support to a foiled plot to carry out terrorist attacks in Denmark. However, the jury acquitted Rana of conspiring to provide material support to terrorism-related to the attacks in India. After Rana served seven years in prison for those convictions and upon his compassionate release, India issued a request for his extradition to try him for his alleged participation in the Mumbai attacks. A total of 166 people, including six Americans, were killed in the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks in which 10 Pakistani terrorists laid a more than 60-hour siege, attacking and killing people at iconic and vital locations in Mumbai.

## Maharashtra: Four dead, two injured as car hits stationary truck in Jalna district

Mumbai

As many as four people died on the spot, including three members of a family, and two others sustained injuries as their car hit a stationary truck in Jalna district of Maharashtra on Wednesday afternoon, police said. The accident that took place on Solapur-Dhule road around 1 pm.

As per the officials, the victims were returning to Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar after a visit to the holy town of Akkalkot. He said that the truck had broken down and stopped on the road at Mahakal village in Ambad tehsil when the car collided with it from behind.

People who died on the spot were identified as Anita Parshuram Kunte (48), Bhagwat Chore (47), Srushti Bhagwat Chore (13) and Vedant Bhagwat Chore (11). While, Parshuram Kunte, who was driving the car, and Chhaya Chore sustained serious injuries. They were rushed to a private hospital in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar.

Traffic on the busy highway was disrupted for nearly two hours until police cleared the road. Gondi Police are investigating the incident.

## BJP targets Priyank in contractor suicide case, asks if Constitution applies to Mallikarjun Kharge's family

New Delhi

A contractor's alleged suicide has stirred political altercation in Karnataka as the opposition BJP on Sunday hit out at Priyank Kharge asking if the Constitution does not apply to the family of the Congress president. In a statement, Leader of Opposition, R Ashoka, alleged that Priyank Kharge, the Congress president's son and state minister, was responsible for the suicide of Bidar-based civil contractor Sachin Panchal.

Demanding Priyank's resignation, the statement read,

"Does Ambedkar's Constitution not apply to the Kharge family? Priyank Kharge, who preaches to everyone, should resign and demonstrate morality." Ashoka further claimed Priyank's close associates were involved in the death of contractor Sachin Panchal. On Thursday, contractor Sachin Panchal allegedly ended his life by lying down in front of an approaching train. In his alleged suicide note, Panchal held Raju Kapanur, Priyank's close aide, responsible for his death, accusing him of issuing death threats over money.

The note also reveals alarming information that Raju had given 'Supari' (contract killing) to kill BJP MLA Basavaraj Mattimadu and leaders Chandu Patil, Manikantha Rathod and Andola Swami, as claimed by BJP state president B Y Vijayendra. After the suicide note came to light, the BJP hit out at Priyank demanding CBI probe into the case. However, the Congress minister has dismissed the allegation, stating that his name was not mentioned in the suicide note and called for a police investigation into the matter.



## Driver 'hell-bent on carnage' kills 10, injures 30 on New Year's Day in US

### New Orleans

A driver in a pickup truck who, officials said, was "hell-bent on carnage" sped through a crowd of pedestrians in New Orleans' bustling French Quarter district, killing 10 and injuring 30 in an act being investigated as a New Year's Day terrorist attack.

The attack occurred around 3.15 am on Wednesday along Bourbon Street, known worldwide as one of the largest destinations for New Year's Eve parties, and with crowds in the city ballooning in anticipation for the Sugar Bowl college football playoff game at the nearby Superdome later in the day.

"He was hell-bent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did," said Police Commissioner Anne Kirkpatrick. She said police officers would work to ensure safety at the Sugar Bowl, indicating that the game would go on as

scheduled.

"It was very intentional behaviour. This man was trying to run over as many people as he could," Kirkpatrick said.

Officials did not immediately provide an update on the status of the driver, whether there was an ongoing threat to the public or offer a suspected motive in the fatal incident at the city's famed Canal and Bourbon Street early on Wednesday.

Alethea Duncan, an assistant special agent in charge of the FBI's New Orleans field office, said officials were investigating the discovery of at least one suspected improvised explosive device at the scene.

Officials did not immediately provide an update on the status of the driver, whether there was an ongoing threat to the public or offer a suspected motive.

## Pope reiterates stance on abortion, calls for respect for life in New Year message

approve legislation legalising the

### Rome

Pope Francis has ushered in the New Year with a renewed appeal for the faithful to reject abortion, calling for a "firm commitment" to protect and respect life from conception to natural death.

Francis, 88, celebrated a New Year's Day Mass in St Peter's Basilica on Wednesday that was dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

In his homily, he prayed that everyone learns to care for "every child born of a woman" and to protect "the precious gift of life: life in the womb, the lives of children, the lives of the suffering, the poor, the elderly, the lonely and the dying." "I ask for a firm commitment to respect the dignity of human life from conception to natural death, so that each person may cherish his or her own life and all may look with hope to the future," he said, using the terminology of the church's opposition to abortion and assisted suicide.

In recent years, the Argentine Jesuit has been speaking out more emphatically about abortion



than he did at the start of his pontificate. After two doctrinaire popes, Francis complained in the first months of his papacy in 2013 that the church had become obsessed by "small-minded rules" about hot-button issues like abortion.

Francis now regularly refers to procuring an abortion as "hiring a hitman to solve a problem." He recently sparked outrage in Belgium when he criticised its abortion law as "homicidal" and announced he wanted to beatify Belgium's late king who abdicated for a day rather than

procedure. The Vatican recently announced that the beatification process is under way for King Baudouin, who died in 1993.

The morning Mass marked the final big event of Francis' busy Christmas schedule. For the pope, who suffers from recurrent respiratory problems, this year's season was even more challenging with the start of the Vatican's big Holy Year, a once-every-quarter-century celebration of the faith that is expected to bring 32 million pilgrims to Rome during 2025.

## Bhagat Singh Gallery in Pakistan Punjab opened for tourists



### Lahore

The government in Pakistan's Punjab has opened the Bhagat Singh Gallery at the historical Poonch House here, where the freedom fighter's trial was conducted around 93 years ago.

The gallery houses historical documents, including pictures, letters, newspapers, details of

the trial and other memorial articles related to his life and contributions to the freedom struggle.

Punjab Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman inaugurated the gallery on Monday. "Tourists will have access to the gallery under an agreement between the departments of industry,

commerce and tourism of the Punjab government," Zaman said. He further said that the historical building of Poonch House had been restored to its original form.

Singh, 23, was hanged by British rulers on March 23, 1931, in Lahore, after being tried under charges for hatching a conspiracy against the colonial government. Pakistan's Punjab Archives Department displayed records of the legendary freedom fighter's case file, including his execution certificate, letters, photographs and newspaper clippings and other material, for the first time in 2018.

The record, which was put on display, included Singh's request for providing the court order dated August 27, 1930, and his petition dated May 31, 1929, for the interview of his father.

## Unsung Indian-origin 'heroes' feature in King Charles' New Year honours list

### London

Community leaders, campaigners, academics and medics are among over 30 Indian-origin professionals to be recognised in King Charles' 2025 New Year Honours List released in London in time for New Year's Eve.

Ranil Malcolm Jayawardena, a Conservative member of Parliament of Sri Lanka and Indian heritage, has been conferred a knighthood for political and public service along with recently resigned England men's football team manager Gareth Southgate, for services to the game.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan and former West Midlands Mayor Andy Street are also among those receiving knighthoods among more than 1,200 recipients on the 2025 honours list released on Monday night across all sectors, with particular commendation to role models in sport, healthcare, academia and voluntary service.

Every day, ordinary people go out and do extraordinary things for their communities," UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said. "They represent the very best of the UK and that core value of service which I put at the centre of everything this government does," he added.

The list includes CBEs for Satwant Kaur Deol for services to further education, Charles Pritam Singh Dhanowa OBE for services to Competition Law, and surgeon Professor Sneha Khemka for services to healthcare, science and innovation and technology. Leena Nair, Global CEO of Chanel, will also be receiving a CBE for services to the retail and consumer sector.



# Disgraceful row

THEY just won't let Dr Manmohan Singh's noble soul rest in peace. It is deplorable as well as disgraceful that the BJP and the Congress have brought the knives out so soon, not even waiting for the seven-day period of national mourning to get over. Indeed, a week is a long time in politics, and politicians seldom have the patience to exercise restraint, even if the occasion demands solemnity of the highest order. The war of words over the former PM's cremation is a new low for Indian politics. It comes days after citizens of India thought they had seen the worst — a free-for-all involving lawmakers during the winter session of Parliament. Now, they are seeing the memory of the good Doctor being brutalised.

An unsavoury controversy has erupted over the site designated by the government for the cremation — Nigambodh Ghat — instead of Rashtriya

Smriti Sthal, where former PMs IK Gujral and Atal Bihari Vajpayee were cremated



in 2012 and 2018, respectively. The ruling party has cited 'logistic challenges' to justify its decision to break with precedent. However, this is a brazen attempt to defend the indefensible. Denying Manmohan Singh the honour that was duly accorded to Gujral and Vajpayee is simply unpardonable.

The government has fielded a Sikh minister, Hardeep Singh Puri, to counter the Congress' charges, but he has made things worse by raking up Operation Blue Star and the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. He has also accused the grand old party of ill-treating its own leaders like Narasimha Rao and Pranab Mukherjee, probably taking a cue from Home Minister Amit Shah's recent potshots at the Congress over BR Ambedkar's legacy. The deafening blame game has left no room for a profound silence, which would have been an ideal tribute to the man of few words and many accomplishments. The government and the Opposition would be well advised to rise above petty politics for once so that Manmohan Singh can have the memorial he richly deserves.

// satyasya paramam nidhanam //

We would like to hear from you. Please share your comments on editor.acrossstate@gmail.com

"Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood."  
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

A three-storey building came down like a house of cards in Mohali on Saturday, claiming two young lives. Far from being quake-resistant, the structure could not even withstand digging — apparently unauthorised, for that matter — in the adjacent plot belonging to one of the owners of the building. The tragedy has turned the spotlight on the pitfalls of unregulated construction and urbanisation in Mohali. Long regarded as Chandigarh's poor cousin, this satellite city is witnessing a realty boom, with all kinds of property developers looking to grab a share of the pie. Residential complexes are coming up overnight, even as strict enforcement of the bylaws remains elusive. The use of substandard

## H-1B visa issue



construction material and unskilled labour or contractors are among the other factors that are making buildings unsafe. There is a worrying tendency among builders to cut corners so as to expedite work and maximise profits.

This problem, however, is not confined to Mohali. It is also afflicting cities across Punjab and neighbouring Haryana. 'Millennium

City' Gurugram's Chintels Paradiso Group Housing Society is a prime example of unscrupulous developers putting lives of residents at risk. In February 2022, two women were killed after the ceiling of a flat in a high-rise tower caved in; such was the cascade effect that portions of flats on lower floors also crumbled. One tower after another of this

premises has been declared unsafe for habitation by technical experts, necessitating the evacuation of its occupants. At the receiving end are the hapless homebuyers who put their life savings into dubious projects, while the offenders simply wait for the dust to settle before resuming their operations.

Regular inspections and audits are a must to ensure that builders do not circumvent bylaws at any stage. Officials who allow violations right under their nose should also be taken to task. Brazen negligence and greed that reduce unsuspecting people to sitting ducks at home, in offices or in the marketplace should not go unpunished.

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# Assault on Aravallis

## Scrap kilns add to the devastation

THE majestic Aravalli hills, a crucial ecological barrier against desertification, continue to bear the brunt of relentless exploitation. Even as the mountains are enduring the ravages of illegal mining, it has come to the fore that the fragile ecosystem is also under attack from scrap mafia. Illegal portable waste kilns along the Rajasthan-Haryana border burn vehicle scrap, especially rubber tyres, emitting



toxic fumes. The noxious gas is not only polluting the air, water and soil but also displacing wildlife and threatening the health of local communities.

The crisis is exacerbated by a lack of accountability. Jurisdictional confusion between Haryana and Rajasthan allows the waste mafia to operate with impunity, much like their mining counterparts. Villagers' complaints about pollution and health hazards are met with bureaucratic inertia. Efforts by law enforcement

authorities to tackle the illegal portable kilns are hobbled due to staff shortages and unclear boundaries. Unsurprisingly, such administrative lapses have emboldened the culprits. They brazenly evade action by crossing state borders.

This environmental catastrophe demands coordinated intervention. Haryana's Forest Minister has promised raids and penalties for both offenders and

negligent officials, but piecemeal measures will not suffice. Multi-state collaboration is imperative to eliminate this toxic menace. Advanced surveillance technologies, such as geospatial mapping and drone patrols, should be deployed to monitor activities in the Aravallis. In addition, stringent penalties and swift legal

action are essential to deter culprits. Empowering local communities with resources and platforms to report violations could bolster enforcement efforts. The Aravallis are a lifeline for millions of local residents. They are crucial to regulating groundwater recharge and mitigating urban heat. Allowing their destruction for short-term gains is an environmental injustice that future generations will not forgive. Resolute action is needed to save this irreplaceable treasure.

THE Indian contingent returned from the Paris Olympics with just six medals. Two of them were won by pistol shooter Manu Bhaker. For someone who accounted for one-third of the nation's medal tally, a recommendation for the Major Dhyani Chand Khel Ratna — India's biggest sports award — should have been a foregone conclusion. However, things are never that simple when bureaucrats and politicians call the shots in the sporting arena. Manu's name is missing from the preliminary nominee list, which includes hockey captain Harmanpreet Singh, who led the Indian team to a second consecutive Olympic bronze, and para athlete Praveen Kumar, who won the gold in the men's high jump at the Paralympics. Harmanpreet and Praveen are worthy contenders, but Manu is undoubtedly worthier.

There are reports that the Sports Ministry will soon come up with the final list, which is likely to include

Manu, but the unsavoury speculation has laid bare the opacity of the award selection process. It shouldn't matter whether leading athletes have completed the formality of filing their nomination for the top honour. A standout performance ought to be enough to put them in contention. Their prospects must not be impacted by technicalities.

Laudably, Manu has admitted her 'lapse' and stated that awards and recognition are not her goal. However, her father has bitterly remarked that there is no point winning medals for the country and then begging for recognition. Back in 2008, ace boxer MC Mary Kom had wondered why she was not being considered for the Khel Ratna despite having won the World

# Migration slowing

## States should fine-tune policies accordingly

DOMESTIC migration is slowing in India, according to a working paper released recently by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister. The total number of migrants in the country has dropped by 11.78 per cent as compared to the 2011 Census figure. This indicates that fewer people are travelling to other states in search of jobs as they are preferring to work in their own district or state. This trend is being attributed to improved economic



avenues and infrastructure in areas from where high migration has traditionally been taking place.

West Bengal and Rajasthan have emerged as the new migrant destination hotspots, while Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh also figure among the top five. It is apparent that states

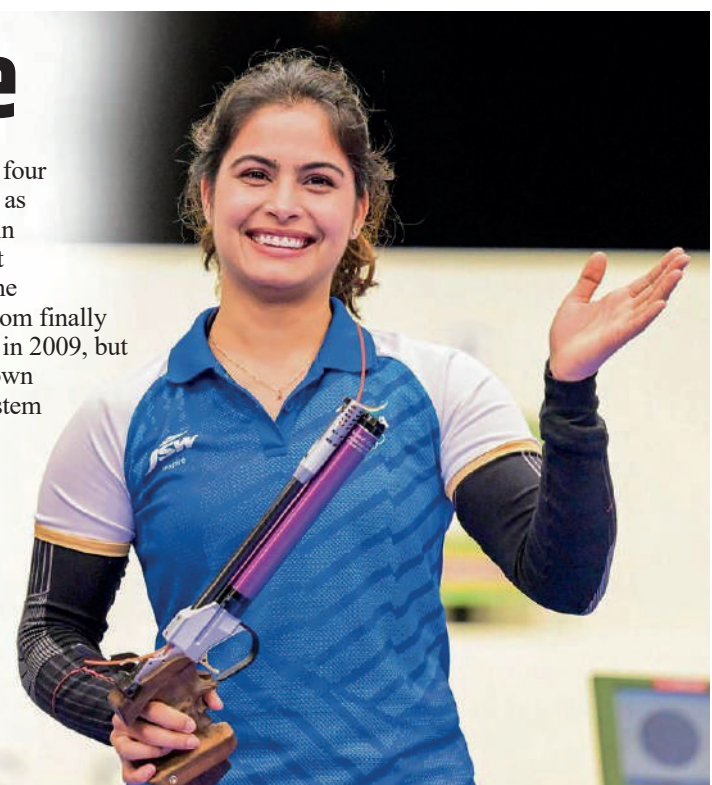
such as Punjab and Haryana — which have high stakes in the agricultural and industrial sectors — are not so attractive to migrants. This is partly due to tensions between locals and 'outsiders'. Migrants would rather not live and work in states where they might face hostility and discrimination. Policymakers need to understand the ground reality, which has serious implications such as labour shortage and higher production costs.

Every state needs horses for courses to spur economic growth, and migrants come in handy when locals are reluctant to do unskilled work in particular. However, initiatives such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana have changed the demographic dynamics. It was MGNREGS that helped millions of workers stay afloat after they trudged

back to their villages during the Covid-induced lockdown in 2020. And this reverse migration has not turned out to be a mere aberration. Various states must take this shift into consideration while framing or reviewing policies. The priority should be to maximise economic gains while ensuring social harmony.

# Give Manu her due

Championship title four times in a row, even as Indian cricket captain MS Dhoni had got it after winning just one World Cup. Mary Kom finally received the honour in 2009, but her outburst had shown the Indian sports system in a poor light. A country aspiring to host the Olympics must ensure that its brightest sports stars are not bogged down or distracted by avoidable controversies.





# A statesman for the ages

IT'S a sad moment for the entire nation and the world at large that Dr Manmohan Singh is no more. What's even sadder is that they just don't make them like him anymore. He was truly a class apart, a statesman who managed to keep his gentleness and humility intact in the rough and tumble of politics. In his final address to the nation as Prime Minister on May 17, 2014, the day after the Congress-led UPA was routed in the Lok Sabha elections, he humbly reiterated that his life and tenure in public office were an open book. There was no reason to disbelieve him when he said that he had always tried to do his best in serving the nation. He gave it his all, first as Finance Minister — when he masterfully spearheaded liberalisation of the Indian economy — and then as PM. Things didn't always go his way, but that didn't stop him from working hard “with diligence as my tool, truth as my beacon”.

His stress on truth and transparency was not a sham. Among the greatest

achievements of the government he headed was the enactment of the Right to Information (RTI) Act in 2005. This landmark legislation was aimed at empowering citizens and ensuring much-needed accountability in the working of government departments. The veil of secrecy around governance was lifted at last, and the people realised that there was much more to democracy than casting their vote. The year 2005 also witnessed the rollout of another pathbreaking reform, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. This social welfare measure transformed the lives of people in the hinterland by bolstering the livelihood security of rural households. However, Manmohan Singh was not one to shout from the rooftops about his government's initiatives. Nor did he stoop to patting himself on the back or giving the impression that he was God's gift to the country. It was always service before self for him. His failing was that he did not do enough to stem the

rot that triggered the decline and fall of the UPA government. It was this lapse that enabled the BJP to ride high on the anti-corruption plank and wrest power from the Congress.

At the international level, his visionary leadership propelled the India-US civil nuclear deal, which acted as a game-changer for strategic cooperation between the two nations. Their presently strong bilateral ties owe a lot to the efforts made by the Manmohan Singh government. And he wisely chose to avoid retaliation against Pakistan after India was rocked by the Mumbai terror attacks of 2008. This was not a sign of weakness; it was a pragmatic decision that prevented the two neighbours from plunging headlong into yet another war.

Though he was generally soft-spoken and self-effacing, he didn't flinch from speaking his mind when things became intolerable. In a letter released ahead of the final phase of polling in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, he lambasted his successor,

Narendra Modi, for indulging in the “most vicious form of hate speeches, which are purely divisive”. He went on to say that Modi was the first PM to lower the dignity of public discourse.

Leading the nation in paying tributes to Manmohan Singh, PM Modi has said that his predecessor's commitment to the people and the country's development would always be respected and remembered. It remains to be seen if the BJP-led NDA, which misses no opportunity to blame Jawaharlal Nehru for the ills afflicting the nation today, will desist from defiling the legacy of Manmohan Singh. With his government no longer all-powerful, there is a lot that Modi can learn from India's first Sikh PM. The most important lesson is that no leader or government is bigger than the nation. And it's no less significant to let actions speak louder than words, like Manmohan Singh amply demonstrated.

## Pak ups the ante

### Airstrikes on Afghan soil bode ill for the region

THE irony is too obvious to be missed — Pakistan, notorious for sponsoring cross-border terrorism, is itself feeling the terror heat and making desperate moves. Pakistan's airstrikes have killed around 50 people, mostly women and children, in eastern Afghanistan, a couple of days after its security forces gunned down 11 suspected terrorists in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Relations between Islamabad and Kabul have worsened this year as the banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has stepped up operations against Pakistani military and police forces. Pakistan has repeatedly accused the Taliban of sheltering members of this terror group, but the Afghan government continues to be in the denial mode.

The airstrikes have exposed Pakistan's duplicity. They were carried out hours after its special representative for Afghanistan visited Kabul to discuss ways to improve ties. It is

apparent that Islamabad is paying lip service to resolving the dispute through diplomatic means. This strategy can have dangerous consequences for the region, with the Afghan government warning that it would not leave this “cowardly act unanswered”.

The Shehbaz Sharif-led government is in no mood to appear vulnerable at a time when it is holding talks with jailed ex-PM Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. Last month's crackdown on protesting PTI supporters has not endeared the ruling coalition to the masses. The Balakot-style airstrikes might be a ploy of the establishment to rebuild its public image. Another trigger could be the growing closeness between the Taliban and the Indian government that has clearly annoyed Pakistan. In any case, Islamabad needs to brace itself for a fierce retaliation not only from the Taliban but also from the TTP. India, a victim of terrorism for decades, must keep a close eye on the developments.

## Simplify GST

THE core belief behind the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) was simplification of the tax structure and ensuring better compliance. It defies logic why complexities continue to be the standard practice. The popcorn tax exemplifies the surfeit of irrational and unwarranted slabs across sectors. Salted popcorn attracts 5 per cent GST, pre-packaged and labelled varieties 12 per cent and the caramel option is a luxury at 18 per cent. Ahead of the 55th GST Council meeting, the attention was focused on the much-anticipated rate cut on health and life insurance premiums. The deferment came as a disappointment. A bigger one was the effort put in to clarify how much a consumer ought to pay on this and that popcorn bucket. On show was not only the sanction for misplaced priorities, but the lack of empathy for end-users and businesses.

When a former chief economic adviser terms the

popcorn episode a national tragedy and a violation of the spirit of the ‘Good and Simple Tax’ that GST was meant to be, he voices concerns that need to be addressed urgently. The harsh criticism, cutting across ideological lines, indicates the frustration over the slow movement on rationalising GST slabs. It reflects both bureaucratic obduracy and political endorsement of a strategy that apparently hinges on over-taxation and intricacies. Nothing less than a systemic re-arrangement with regard to the imposition of GST would suffice. The citizen's wellbeing has to come first, not the wishlist of the government machinery to fill coffers any which way.

The data cited by the Opposition that reveals GST evasion of Rs 2.01 lakh crore in the 2023-24 financial year warrants scrutiny and course correction. Structural complexities only derail enforcement. Holding on to the status quo is a problem and not a solution.



# In \$2-bn deal, Adani to exit partnership with Wilmar



Rs 305 apiece to net Rs 12,314 crore.

Adding the share sale through OFS, whose price will be determined on the day of sales, the total proceeds will exceed \$2 billion (about Rs 17,100 crore).

"With this, AEL (Adani Enterprises Limited) will fully exit Adani Wilmar Ltd," it said. "Adani's nominee directors will step down from the board of Adani Wilmar Ltd." Pranav V Adani, director of AEL and nephew of group founder and chairman Gautam Adani, and Malay Mahadevia will resign from the board upon execution of the agreement. The transaction is expected to conclude before March 31, 2025.

Proceeds from the stake sale will be used to turbocharge the growth of AEL in core infrastructure businesses.

With this transaction, Adani is back with a bang, removing the liquidity perception overhang.

**Mumbai**  
Billionaire Gautam Adani's group on Monday announced its exit from FMCG joint venture Adani Wilmar by selling its entire stake to the Singaporean partner and in the open market for over \$2 billion in a first major deal since the US bribery indictment.

In a statement, Adani Enterprises Ltd — which held 43.94 per cent stake in Fortune

brand cooking oil, wheat flour and other food product maker Adani Wilmar Ltd — said it will sell 31.06 per cent stake to Wilmar International. The remaining about 13 per cent holding will be sold in the open market to meet minimum public shareholding requirements.

Adani will sell up to 40.37 crore shares (31.06 per cent stake) to Wilmar at no more than

## IT companies may have subdued revenue growth in Q3 FY25 because of cautious spending by clients: Report

### New Delhi

The revenue growth for India's leading IT services companies is expected to remain subdued in the third quarter of FY25 due to the impact of furloughs and cautious client spending, according to a report by JM Financial.

The report highlighted that the constant currency (cc) revenue growth for large-cap IT firms is projected to range between -0.5 per cent and 5.5 per cent quarter-on-quarter (QoQ), while dollar-denominated revenue growth is likely to lag by 30-130 basis points due to currency fluctuations. It said, "3QFY25 will be indented by furloughs. Its impact will likely be similar to last years'. That is hardly encouraging given furloughs were deeper (more clients) and longer last time around. Discretionary spend is restricted to few pockets still."

In the large-cap companies, the report stated that HCL Technologies (HCLT) is expected

to outperform its peers with 5.5 per cent cc QoQ growth, primarily driven by a 25 per cent seasonal uptick in software sales.

Additionally, its corporate training group (CTG) segment is likely to contribute 60 basis points to its growth. In contrast, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) may post flat cc growth as its Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) project becomes a headwind. Infosys is anticipated to perform towards the higher end of its guidance range, with an expected growth rate of -0.5 per cent to +0.5 per cent QoQ.

Among mid-cap IT firms, Persistent Systems (PSYS) and Coforge are poised to achieve strong growth exceeding 4 per cent in cc terms, supported by ramp-ups in large deals. However, Mphasis is likely to experience a sharper impact from furloughs, which could weigh heavily on its performance. The report warned that the impact of furloughs this quarter is expected to mirror the previous year, when they were deeper and longer, involving more clients. This outlook raises concerns as discretionary spending continues to be restricted to select areas. However, the report emphasized that third-quarter performance is not a definitive reflection of underlying demand in the IT sector. Metrics such as client budgets, deal wins, and short-duration deal activity provide better indicators of future growth prospects. The Federal Reserve's hawkish monetary policy stance is also likely to influence client budgets, potentially impacting spending decisions in the near term.

It added, "3Q performance is seldom a reflection of underlying demand. Client budgets, deal wins and uptick in short duration deals would be better gauge. Fed's recent hawkish tone might influence client budgets".

While the near-term challenges persist, the report advises focusing on long-term trends, including deal pipelines and client spending patterns.

## Lower realisation and weaker pricing power will hurt profitability of cement manufacturers in FY25: CRISIL

### New Delhi

Cement manufacturers are facing a challenging fiscal year as operating margins are expected to shrink by 170-220 basis points, settling at 15-16 per cent for FY2025, according to a CRISIL report.

The decline is attributed to weaker pricing power and subdued demand, even though input costs are expected to remain under control.

Demand for cement, which had recorded a robust compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11 per cent between FY2022 and FY2024, is projected to slow to 4.5-5.5 per cent this fiscal.

This deceleration is due to multiple factors, including a base effect, extended heatwaves, labour shortages during the general elections, and a reduction in construction activity in the first half of the year.

However, the latter half is expected to witness some recovery, driven by improved rural demand and higher government spending on infrastructure.

Cement prices, which hit an all-time high of Rs391 per 50 kg bag in FY2023, declined by 2 per cent to Rs384 last fiscal. This year, prices are anticipated to fall further by 5-6 per cent due to moderating demand growth and increasing competition. The resulting decline in realisations is expected to impact profitability significantly.

The pricing trends will not be uniform across regions. The eastern region is likely to experience the steepest price drop of 11-12 per cent, owing to sluggish demand and substantial capacity additions.

In the southern region, prices are projected to decline by 5-6 per cent following a 4 per cent

dip last fiscal, primarily due to subdued demand and increased capacity growth.

Northern prices may fall 4-5 per cent as effective capacity rises despite no new additions. The western region is forecast to see a 3.5-4.5 per cent decline, while the central region is expected to experience a more modest drop of 2-3 per cent, given limited capacity additions.

The cement industry has witnessed significant capacity expansions over the past two years, with 101 million tonnes (MT) added. Another 210-220 MT is expected to come online by FY2029, reflecting a 5.5-6.5 per cent CAGR. This aggressive expansion across geographies is intensifying competition and further pressuring prices.

While input costs such as power, fuel, raw materials, and freight surged during FY2022 and FY2023 due to geopolitical tensions, a correction in energy

prices brought some relief in FY2024. Input costs declined by 500-600 basis points last fiscal, and further reductions are anticipated this year, providing a cushion against lower realisations.

Despite the cost relief, the combination of weaker pricing power and subdued demand growth is expected to dent profitability. Operating margins are projected to drop to 15-16 per cent this fiscal, highlighting the need for manufacturers to navigate these challenging conditions carefully.

The second half of FY2025 will be critical for recovery, as government spending on infrastructure is expected to pick up, and rural construction demand shows signs of revival. The cement industry will rely on these factors to offset the challenging market conditions in the first half of the year

# India's CAD projected at 1 pc of GDP for FY2025: CRISIL Report

## New Delhi

India's current account deficit (CAD) is to remain in a safe zone at approximately 1 per cent of GDP for fiscal 2025, up from 0.7 per cent in the previous year, according to a report by CRISIL.

While geopolitical risks will require close monitoring, the strong financial inflows and a steady services trade surplus are expected to provide stability.

India's current account deficit (CAD) remained largely stable at USD 11.2 billion, or 1.2 per cent of GDP, in the second quarter (Q2) of fiscal 2025, compared with USD 11.3 billion (1.3 per cent of GDP) in the same period last year.

However, sequentially, the CAD widened slightly from USD 10.2 billion (1.1 per cent of GDP) in the first quarter, as reported by the Reserve Bank of India.

Despite pressures from a rising merchandise trade deficit, strong services exports and healthy remittances helped keep the CAD manageable.

The overall trade deficit rose to 3.4 per cent of GDP in Q2 FY2025 from 2.9 per cent in the year-ago period, with the merchandise trade deficit increasing to 8.2 per cent of GDP from 7.5 per cent. Meanwhile, the services trade surplus rose to 4.9 per cent from 4.7 per cent.

Additionally, the primary income account deficit reduced to 1 per cent of GDP from 1.4 per



cent, while the secondary income account surplus grew to 3.2 per cent from 2.9 per cent.

Financial inflows saw significant growth during the quarter, led by robust foreign portfolio investments (FPI). Net FPI inflows surged to USD 19.9 billion, up from USD 4.9 billion in the same period last year. This included equity inflows of USD 10.7 billion and debt inflows of USD 9.1 billion.

Other investments, including non-resident Indian (NRI) deposits and external commercial borrowings (ECBs), also increased sharply. NRI deposits rose to USD 6.2 billion, compared to USD 3.2 billion a year ago, while net ECBs improved to USD 5 billion from an outflow of USD 1.9 billion in Q2 FY2024.

Net foreign direct investment (FDI), however, recorded outflows of USD 2.2 billion, nearly tripling from USD 0.8 billion in Q2 FY2024, due to higher FDI outflows of USD 23.5 billion.

India's forex reserves saw an accretion of USD 18.6 billion during the quarter, a significant increase from USD 2.5 billion in Q2 FY2024. However, the rupee depreciated to 83.8 per dollar in Q2 FY2025, compared to 82.7 per dollar in the same period last year.

Since then, forex reserves have declined, falling to USD 644.4 billion by December 20, 2024, from USD 692.3 billion at the end of Q2, as the Reserve Bank of India intervened to manage rupee volatility.

# RBI directs banks to implement beneficiary name look-up for RTGS, NEFT transfers by April 2025

## Mumbai

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has directed banks giving Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) and National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) services to introduce beneficiary account name look-up facility to customers for fund transfers by April 1, 2025.

Banks participating in the RTGS and NEFT systems must offer this facility through internet banking, mobile banking, and even at physical branches for customers conducting transactions in person.

This move aims to enhance the security and reliability of digital fund transfers.

RBI said "All banks who are direct members or sub members of RTGS and NEFT are advised to offer this facility no later than April 1, 2025".

In an official notification late on Monday the central bank stated that currently, payment systems like Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and Immediate Payments Service (IMPS) allow remitters to verify the name of the beneficiary before initiating a transfer. Recognizing the benefits of this feature, the RBI decided to implement a similar mechanism for RTGS and NEFT.

This facility will allow

individuals initiating transactions through RTGS or NEFT to confirm the beneficiary's account name before transferring funds.

The RBI had first proposed this initiative on October 9, 2024, emphasizing its importance in reducing errors and ensuring accurate fund transfers.

To enable this system, the RBI has instructed the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to develop the necessary infrastructure and ensure that all banks are onboarded.

RBI said "National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has been advised to develop the facility and onboard all banks".

The RBI has mandated that all banks, whether direct or sub-members of the RTGS and NEFT systems, must make this service available to their customers by the April 2025 deadline.

This initiative is expected to significantly enhance customer convenience and trust in digital banking. By enabling users to verify the recipient's account name beforehand, the RBI aims to minimize transaction errors and improve the overall efficiency of electronic payment systems in India.

# Gross NPAs of banks decline to 12-yr low: RBI

The Reserve Bank on Monday said the asset quality of banks improved further, and their gross non-performing assets (GNPA) or bad loans ratio declined to a 12-year low of 2.6 per cent in September 2024 on the back of falling slippages and steady credit demand.

The RBI also flagged concern over a sharp rise in write-offs, especially among private sector banks (PVBs), which could be partly masking worsening asset quality in unsecured lending segment and dilution in underwriting standards.

The net NPA ratio or the proportion of net non-performing assets in net loans and advances was at around 0.6 per cent,



according to the RBI's December 2024 issue of the Financial Stability Report (FSR).

The Financial Stability Report reflects the

collective assessment of the Sub-Committee of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) on the resilience of the Indian financial system and risks to financial stability.

"Buoyed by falling slippages, higher write-offs and steady credit demand, the gross nonperforming assets ratio of 37 scheduled commercial banks fell to a multi-year low of 2.6 per cent," the report said.

Fresh accretion of NPAs in retail loan portfolios was also dominated by slippages in the unsecured loan book, with 51.9 per cent from unsecured loans as of September 2024.



# NRI Investment Season: A Booming Opportunity in Indian Real Estate

## New Delhi

The Indian real estate market is witnessing a surge in interest from Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), driven by favorable economic conditions, regulatory reforms, and evolving buyer preferences. With the festive season adding to the momentum, NRIs are increasingly viewing Indian real estate as a secure and high-yield investment opportunity.

### NRI Investments on the Rise

A mix of emotional and financial motivations is behind the growing NRI interest in Indian real estate. Favorable currency exchange rates have amplified their purchasing power, while government initiatives like RERA and GST have added transparency and credibility to the sector.

"India's real estate market has matured significantly over the last few years, with reforms like RERA fostering greater trust among NRI buyers. Today, NRIs are not just looking for homes; they are seeking high-value investment opportunities that align with global standards of living. Our projects at Motiaz Group cater to this demand with offerings that combine luxury, sustainability, and long-term growth potential. Chandigarh Tricity, with its exceptional infrastructure and growth trajectory, has emerged as a top choice for these buyers," shares Mukul Bansal, MD of Motiaz Group.

### Tricity's Unique Appeal to NRIs

Chandigarh Tricity, encompassing Chandigarh, Mohali, Zirakpur, and Panchkula, has become a favored destination for NRI investors. The region offers a unique mix of world-class amenities, high-quality healthcare, educational institutions, and proximity to key commercial hubs, making it an attractive option for residential and commercial investments alike.

### Regulatory and Technological Advancements

Regulatory changes have significantly enhanced



the real estate investment climate in India. Tools like blockchain-based property registration, AI-driven analytics, and virtual property tours are making it easier for NRIs to invest remotely.

"NRIs today are looking for more than just a home; they want assurance of quality, timely delivery, and compliance with legal norms. As a developer deeply rooted in transparency and innovation, we at Royale Estate Group focus on delivering value through meticulously planned projects. The Tricity region, with its clean environment and smart city initiatives, perfectly aligns with the aspirations of NRI buyers seeking long-term value and emotional connection," says Piyush Kansal, ED of Royale Estate Group.

### Catering to Diverse Needs

From luxury homes to smart offices, developers are tailoring their offerings to cater to the diverse needs of NRI buyers. The preference for gated communities with advanced security, green spaces, and smart home technology is particularly pronounced.

Tejpreet Singh Gill, MD of Gillco Group, explains, "Over the years, we've seen a remarkable shift in the expectations of NRI buyers. They seek a perfect blend of luxury, convenience, and connectivity. At Gillco Group, we've embraced technology to offer virtual site visits and digital transaction processes, making it easier for NRIs to invest from anywhere in the world. Chandigarh Tricity's serene yet modern environment resonates strongly with them, offering the perfect balance of urban sophistication and cultural familiarity. We're committed to delivering homes that not only meet but exceed their expectations."

The NRI investment season is shaping up to be a transformative phase for the Indian real estate market. With developers innovating to meet global standards and buyers exploring India as a reliable investment destination, the future looks promising.

"Indian real estate today is synonymous with growth, trust, and innovation. As NRIs explore opportunities back home, they're not just investing in property but in a vision of India's future. Chandigarh Tricity is at the forefront of this revolution, offering unparalleled opportunities for residential and commercial growth. We're proud to be a part of this journey, creating spaces that NRIs can proudly call their own," concludes Umesh Bhati, Director of Operations at Bayside Corporations.

This season, as NRIs reconnect with their roots through real estate investments, the focus remains on creating value and building trust, hallmarks of India's evolving property market.

# Telangana CM meets Microsoft chief Satya Nadella, discusses state's immense potential

## Hyderabad

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, accompanied by his Cabinet Ministers D Sridhar Babu, Uttam Kumar Reddy, among others, met Microsoft President Satya Nadella in Hyderabad.

Microsoft is one of the earliest technology companies in Hyderabad and has grown to a strength of 10,000 over the years.

It has also invested in a data centre capacity of 600 MW in the state.

Chief Minister Reddy



thanked Nadella for regular investments and the growth of Microsoft's business in the city and state.

The Chief Minister and his

IT Minister discussed various technology imperatives that the state is focusing on including AI, Gen AI, cloud, and sought Microsoft's support to develop

a strong ecosystem so that Hyderabad is seen as the leading city in the world in technology domain, the Chief Minister's Office said in a statement Monday.

The Chief Minister also explained his plans for infrastructure development in the state including Regional Ring Road, radial roads, Future City, development of new manufacturing clusters, and how the government is proposing to create a vast pool of industry-ready talent through

institutions like Young India Skills University.

As per a CMO post on X, Satya Nadella reiterated the commitment of Microsoft to partner with the state government in all its initiatives. He appreciated the Chief Minister's vision of enhancing skills and improving infrastructure to the next level and opined that only these two can position Hyderabad in the Top 50 cities in the world for creating economic growth.



# Bring the Defence Ministry into the Space Commission

Why does India pursue a 'space program' at all? Is it only to satisfy the scientific curiosity of its intelligentsia? Is it only to fulfil the harmless aspirations of its entrepreneurs to bring an economic windfall to the nation? If these are the only motives for the Indian government to pursue the space program, the high table known as India's Space Commission—the tallest decision-making body on all matters space—with its current organogram, is perfectly fine. However, if you ask two more simple questions—Who takes care of defending India's space assets? Who secures our sovereign realms from the strategic and tactical dangers emanating from orbital and outer space threats?—the current structure of India's Space Commission warrants a re-assessment.

In 2019, India established the Defence Space Agency (DSA) under the aegis of the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), with two other agencies, the Armed Forces Special Operations Division and the Defence Cyber Agency. It is, indeed, a fact that these are the initial formative years for the DSA, but does that mean it does not have a place in the Space Commission? This question is beginning to impact security thinkers and planners in the country tasked to monitor India's comprehensive security needs. From their perspective, these are dangerous gaps that must be filled fast.

In 2019, India established the Defence Space Agency (DSA) under the aegis of the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), with two other agencies, the Armed Forces Special Operations Division and the Defence Cyber Agency.

The Indian government took some bold and long-pending decisions when it initiated the space reforms in 2020. The Space Commission, during these reforms, expanded its members and got new representatives: it invited the Chairman of the newly-created Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe), the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Chairman-Standing Committee of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) Council, and the National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister. Since its formation, the Space Commission has been overly civilian, with a majority of its representation being from the civilian space agency Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO). Even after bringing in new members, the inordinately civilian influence on the Commission remains to this day, as its chairman is also the Secretary of the Department of Space and Chairman of the ISRO. What's more of a concern is



that ISRO is genuinely not in a position to execute 'space defence' measures, as such activities may fall under the purview of militarisation, an attribute it does not want to be associated with as an institution.

The DSA is not structurally part of the Department of Space, which is understood. Still, it is difficult to comprehend why there are no attempts to make it a part of the Space Commission. The conspicuous absence of representation from the IDS or the DSA in the Space Commission begs the question of whether the Commission is a civilian-economic body by design. If yes, we must live with the fact that there is no other equally empowered Commission where these many secretaries, academics, and the National Security Advisor (NSA) would come together to assist the DSA and IDS in building assets necessary for the 'space defence' of India.

If the current 'civilian' Space Commission has no room for the DSA or IDS, then a separate defence 'Space Commission' be created. If two 'space commissions' are not viable, there is only one eventuality: the reform of the Space Commission with equal representation that takes into account the civilian, commercial and military aspects of India's space activities. Such a reform would first warrant the participation of the Chief of the Defence Staff to plug in the tactical feed of the DSA, the next-to-come Indian Space Command and the Indian Space Force into the Space

Commission. There are three reasons why this topic has come about now.

In October 2024, the Cabinet Committee on Security approved the third phase of the Space-Based Surveillance Project.

First, in October 2024, the Cabinet Committee on Security approved the third phase of the Space-Based Surveillance Project. The earlier two phases involved the launches of sets of four and six 'spy' satellites, respectively. The third phase features the launch of 52 'spy' satellites, all managed by the IDS (read DSA) via the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS). The civilian space agency will never build intelligence-gathering satellites. Even in the recent past, the electronic intelligence satellite, under Project Kautilya, was built by the Defence Research Development Organization. The 52 satellites, too, are likely coming from the domestic commercial space market.

Second, the Ministry of Defence is fast emerging as a leading end-user, customer, and operator of space assets in India. It has begun to cultivate an ecosystem of commercial players and leading national R&D laboratories, which demands a separate infrastructure outside the civilian confines of ISRO. In the past couple of years, the Ministry of Defence's Innovation in Defence Excellence, better known as the IDEX scheme, has financed several early-stage space companies under its 'Mission

DefSpace Challenge' since 2022. This is only the beginning, and a large section of India's commercial space enterprises will soon get business orders from the DSA and the forces.

In the past couple of years, the Ministry of Defence's Innovation in Defence Excellence, better known as the IDEX scheme, has financed several early-stage space companies under its 'Mission DefSpace Challenge' since 2022.

Third, the civilian and military space domains are not competitors but complement each other. The best example, which will be seen in the coming days, is the comprehensive operational role of the Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force in the Indian Human Spaceflight Programme. This relationship will only strengthen in the future as Gaganyaan and Bharatiya Antariksha Station begin to take shape.

Just like space technology is always dual-use, the country's commission overseeing the development, deployment, and domestic and external trade of space technology and its sciences must include one of its fast-growing end users. The Space Commission was established when ISRO and its parent body, the Department of Space, were solo space technology designers, builders, operators, and commercialisers. Now that this solo authority is a thing of the past, a 'defence' representation in the Space Commission is warranted.



# Competitive regionalism in the Indian Ocean



In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, the Indian Ocean region was characterised by a sense of strategic inertia. However, that has significantly changed since the turn of the 21st century. Several reasons can be attributed to this new development. The rise of Asian economies—especially India, Southeast Asian nations, and China—have resulted in the Indian Ocean becoming a critical arena of global trade. This has resulted in critical trade routes passing through the region. Following this, securing critical chokepoints in the region has emerged as a major security imperative for stakeholders in the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, with the onset of the Indo-Pacific as a unified strategic theatre, the Indian Ocean region has received growing strategic attention.

Securing critical chokepoints in the region has emerged as a major security imperative for stakeholders in the Indian Ocean.

With the growth of the Indian Ocean's strategic relevance, several stakeholders have increasingly assumed greater salience in shaping the geopolitical order of the region. While littoral countries in the region have continued to exercise their strategic agency to pursue their security and economic interests, the initiation of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) marked the beginning of an era of institutional regionalism in the Indian Ocean. Mooted in 1997 as the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORA-RC), the forum has increasingly come to symbolise the Indian Ocean's institutional identity. Importantly, India has been a key architect of IORA.

Over the years, the Indian Ocean has witnessed competition for primacy between India and China. While India's role in the geopolitical landscape of the Indian Ocean is a natural one, given its vital geographical location, China has sought to expand its presence in the region towards its continued pursuits of emerging as a leading power. Importantly, China is not an Indian Ocean power. However, the region serves as a crucial theatre for its strategic and economic interests. With its growing demand for resources, the Indian Ocean is increasingly becoming critical for Beijing. Moreover, bolstering its presence in the region is also likely to complement China's strategic objective of enhancing its role in shaping the evolving geopolitics of the Indian Ocean. To enhance its presence in the Indian Ocean, Beijing has sought to focus on bilateral partnerships with littoral countries in the region. These partnerships are anchored on developmental engagement, whereby Beijing seeks to fund infrastructure projects and enhance the capabilities of Indian Ocean littoral countries. While this has cautioned India, given the security implications of Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean—its primary area of security interest, it has also spurred competition between New Delhi and Beijing to emerge as principal security and economic actors in the region.

With its growing demand for resources, the Indian Ocean is increasingly becoming critical for Beijing.

A new frontier of competition seems to have emerged in the Indian Ocean. Since 2021, China has been convening the China-Indian Ocean Forum through the China International

Development Cooperation Agency, focused on key aspects of the Blue Economy. While it is designed to foster collective thinking among the Indian Ocean littoral states, it appears that through this initiative, Beijing seeks to construct its own regional forum for the region. This serves as a launchpad for China to emerge as a leader in the Indian Ocean. India's omission from this forum is unsurprising. It appears that, through the China-Indian Ocean Forum, Beijing seeks to construct a regional approach in the Indian Ocean that presents China as a credible leader in the region. This is vital, given that China is not a natural stakeholder in the Indian Ocean but continues to have its interests anchored in the region.

Interestingly, the IORA and the China-Indian Ocean Forum present two varying kinds of regionalism in the Indian Ocean. While the IORA is an intergovernmental forum that seeks to operate through diplomatic dialogue on issues of maritime security, China remains the pivot for the China-Indian Ocean Forum. This has long-term implications for the nature of engagement in both forums. The China-Indian Ocean Forum reinforces a client-patron dynamic between China and the Indian Ocean littoral states, whereas IORA is a democratic forum fostering dialogue on issues of common interest. This is notably also reflective of the Chinese view of the Indian Ocean and extends Beijing's existing engagement with littoral states of the region. For smaller littoral states, preserving their agency in norm-making and policy formulation at regional multilateral forums is key.

While the IORA is an intergovernmental forum that seeks to

operate through diplomatic dialogue on issues of maritime security, China remains the pivot for the China-Indian Ocean Forum.

Therefore, two notions of regionalism appear to be competing in the Indian Ocean region. While IORA emphasises regional identity and geographical embeddedness, the China-Indian Ocean Forum seeks to advance Chinese interests by assuming a greater role rather than fostering shared opportunities. This further prompts a vital question. What is the role of geography in imagining a region? Regionalism divorced from geographical embeddedness can pose vital challenges. Regional thinking must be driven by the interests and priorities of all who share the geographical space. Through this logic, China is not a natural actor in the Indian Ocean. China's role in the region is only driven by its interests and not its location. This will continue to perpetuate a difference in the outlook of China and other regional countries in the Indian Ocean. In this context, IORA is critical since it focuses on regional identity.

The competitive regionalism in the Indian Ocean is a result of China's continued efforts to advance its presence in the region. This should prompt a vital reflection on how regionalism, especially in complex spaces such as the oceans, should be imagined. Prioritising geographical imperatives will continue to remain key in constructing an effective regional outlook. Thus, IORA will continue to have leverage over the China-Indian Ocean Forum, given its emphasis on geography and regional identity.



# The Indian fintech ecosystem: An evaluation

Financial technology (Fintech) refers to technology-driven financial innovations that lead to new business models, applications, processes, products, or services with a significant impact on financial markets, institutions, and service delivery. Fintech encompasses financial solutions that utilise information and communication technology (ICT) to provide efficient and accessible financial services.

Fintech hubs are a core element of India's emerging financial ecosystem and provide an ideal environment for fintech companies, startups and their innovative solutions to be incubated, scaled, and allowed to thrive. This ecosystem thrives on a network of interconnected relationships between banks, fintech startups, scale-ups, third-party technology providers (TPPs), financial institutions, and regulators. By working collaboratively and aligning their objectives, a supportive framework is created that enhances the accessibility of financial services for consumers. Such ecosystems drive technological innovation, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of financial markets, and elevate the overall customer experience.

Fintech hubs are a core element of India's emerging financial ecosystem and provide an ideal environment for fintech companies, startups and their innovative solutions to be incubated, scaled, and allowed to thrive.

India's fintech sector is experiencing remarkable growth, cementing the country's position as a global leader. India currently ranks fourth worldwide in total funding within the fintech industry, following the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), and China. Notably, in the third quarter of 2024, India climbed to second place globally for funding, attracting US\$778 million—an impressive 66 percent increase compared to US\$471 million in Q3 2023. This surge highlights the sector's rapid expansion. Among the top-performing sub-sectors in Q3 2024, alternative lending secured the highest funding at US\$517 million, followed by investment technology at US\$109 million, and the payments segment at US\$93 million. These figures underscore the growing investor confidence and the dynamic nature of India's fintech landscape.

Indian fintech companies have secured 21 percent of the



total funding raised by Indian startups across all sectors, highlighting their significance within the entrepreneurial landscape. As of 2020, the top five cities hosting the largest number of fintech startups are Bengaluru with 447, Mumbai with 437, New Delhi with 208, Hyderabad with 133, and Gurugram with 128.

A significant enabler of India's fintech success story has been its strides in digital payments infrastructure. UPI (Unified Payments Interface) transactions for September 2024 alone accounted for 15.04 billion transactions valued at INR 20.64 trillion.

Currently, India is home to 12,894 fintech companies, including 1,612 funded firms. These companies have collectively raised US\$33.8 billion in funding to date. Among them, one is classified as a decacorn, 25 as unicorn and 87 as soonicorns. The combined valuation of these fintech companies stands at an impressive US\$125 billion, underscoring the sector's robust growth and economic contribution.

Fintech hubs have emerged as an important element of the financial ecosystem and have the potential to boost the market towards the adoption of financial innovations and solutions. The following table provides a snapshot of a few major Indian fintech hubs in operation today.

## Guarat

Gujarat International Finance-Tec City (GIFT city) Some of the principal elements of GIFT city are its GIFT International Fintech Institute (IFI), the GIFT International Fintech Innovation Hub (IFIH) and the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC). The IFI imparts industry aligned fintech

education, carries out applied research and innovation, and collaborates with academic institutions, fintech companies and government bodies. The IFIH is the city's fintech incubator and accelerator where Fintech startups can secure funding, obtain legal guidance and scale their businesses. It will have a networking of industry experts, investors, mentors, and corporate bodies that will drive innovation and support emerging companies during their growth. Equipped with the consolidated regulatory powers of four key Indian regulators: the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA), and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), the IFSC facilitates a cross border flow of finance, financial products, and services. It aims to repatriate financial transactions linked to India that are currently carried out abroad. GIFT City is India's first IFSC. The city is equipped with a 'Domestic Tariff Area', a 'Multi Services Special Economic Zone', and efficient physical infrastructure, building upon an ample supply of skilled talent in ICT, fintech and financial services to meet business needs.

## Maharashtra

Maharashtra's Fintech Hub and Policy The government of Maharashtra, through its setting up of the Global Fintech Hub and implementation of Fintech policy, 2018, aims to boost the fintech sector in the state through 'Smart Fintech Centers'. It offers infrastructure facilities and benefits, benefits and physical amenities near

banks, and financial service providers and regulators. These centers would also provide fiscal incentives and subsidies on electricity tariffs and entry taxes, aligned with the IT/ITeS Policy 2015, implemented to support fintech units. To boost innovation, a fintech corpus fund of INR 250 crore will be created to incentivise startups and support operational costs for an industry sandbox and the global fintech hub. Additionally, an investment fund of INR 20 crore, formed in partnership with banks, industry players, and stakeholders, will finance Fintech accelerators and incubators, fostering growth opportunities for promising start-ups through resources, programmes, and mentorship. An incentive fund of INR 10 crore will be allocated to encourage top performing fintech start-ups in their initial years. Annually, 20 top startups will receive grants of INR 10 lakh each.

## Karnataka

The Centre of Excellence at IIM Bangalore The Karnataka Department for Electronics, IT, BT (Biotechnology) and Science and Technology aims to establish a "Centre of Excellence" in fintech at NSRCEL (Nadathur S. Raghavan Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning), Indian Institute of Management Bangalore. With a total sanctioned strength of INR 13.24 crores by the Government of Karnataka, over the next five years, the Center of Excellence which will spearhead initiatives like startup incubation, acceleration programs, and skill development, while also providing sandbox environments for real world testing, including regulatory sandboxes. INR 8.19 crores has been allocated for this. Furthermore, skilling and training efforts along with certification programmes will also be delivered, enabling fintech startups to refine their solutions and drive technological advancement. INR 5.04 crores has been allocated for this.

## Potential constituents of high-performing fintech hubs

An examination of existing and upcoming fintech hubs shows that certain key elements are crucial for these hubs to

have optimal impact. Presently, there are certain disparities in how hubs and their regulatory bodies are structured. The 'Gujarat model', structured around the IFSC, is a praiseworthy standard that may be replicated in other parts of the nation.

Skilling and training efforts along with certification programmes will also be delivered, enabling fintech startups to refine their solutions and drive technological advancement.

In terms of formulating an ideal and successful fintech ecosystem, the presence and performance of the following elements may be necessary:

**A conducive regulatory and policy environment:** Government policies may encourage balanced regulation that supports innovation while ensuring strong security and compliance. This is crucial for building consumer trust. Such regulations also play a key role in reducing systemic risks, contributing to the overall stability of the financial system, and boosting investor confidence, leading to substantial business growth. It also facilitates companies' access to public markets through IPOs (Initial Public Offerings) to raise capital effectively.

**Enabling infrastructure:** The required digital and physical infrastructure must be put in place, particularly to facilitate financial services innovation and locate all the stakeholders of an ecosystem within an accessible structure.

**Availability of skilled human resources:** There needs to be easy access to a cost-effective and high-quality technical, entrepreneurial and financial services talent pool.

**Growth capital/access to funding:** There ought to be an availability of risk capital to facilitate an innovation culture among start-ups and other established industries, as well as funds for scaling.

**Ready access to other parts of the fintech ecosystem:** Efforts also need to be made to build robust linkages with other parts of the fintech ecosystem, including accelerators, markets, regulators, and banking and non-banking financial institutions.



# Health for humans: Behavioural prescriptions

The 21st century is governed by economic theories built on assumptions that do not always reflect reality. One such assumption is that of the Homo economicus—a perfectly rational individual who always maximises utility. While Rational Choice Theory presumes all individuals to be homo economicus, humans are only partly rational. Behavioural economics, a subset of behavioural science, is an interdisciplinary field that draws from psychology, neuroscience, anthropology, sociology and political science, among others, focusing primarily on decision-making and the impact of psychological factors on economic behaviour.

In a complicated, fast-paced world, instinctive decisions using heuristics (rules of thumb) and mental models (shaped by socioeconomic and cultural influences) that have evolved over centuries aid faster decision-making, reducing cognitive load. Simultaneously, however, the lack of deliberate thinking often leads to systematically sub-optimal decisions. By incorporating psychological models in economic frameworks, development challenges can be better addressed.

Behavioural economics, a subset of behavioural science, is an interdisciplinary field that draws from psychology, neuroscience, anthropology, sociology and political science, among others, focusing primarily on decision-making and the impact of psychological factors on economic behaviour.

Application of behavioural insights

Recognising human limitations, behavioural scientists use “nudges,” which Nobel laureate Richard Thaler, defines as subtle changes in choice architecture (the context in which individuals make decisions) that alter behaviour predictably without restricting choice or significantly changing economic incentives. In Chicago, painting white stripes progressively closer together on roads approaching sharp turns created an illusion of speeding, reducing accidents by 36 percent. Brazil leveraged soap operas with strong female leads to boost women’s education leading to an 11 percent decline in fertility, demonstrating the potential of small, cost-effective changes to address complex challenges where traditional interventions fail.

We are all surrounded by nudges—intentional or unintentional. By leveraging them, policies can be improved for societal benefit. Globally, over 600 behavioural insights or “nudge” units have been established in governments, businesses, nonprofits, research centres and multilateral organisations, showcasing their growing relevance in policy development.

Public health interventions in India

In healthcare, the most challenging issues are often behavioural rather than medical, such as inadequate uptake of preventative care and indulging in high-risk behaviours like tobacco consumption—explained by “Hyperbolic Discounting,” a heuristic, according to which, when choices and results are separated by time, the change in present utility is given more weight compared to the change in future utility. Tailored behaviour-centric policies can serve as a new prescription to current

challenges, improving health outcomes.

State BIUs were set up in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to conduct on-ground research and test behaviourally-designed interventions.

In 2019, NITI Aayog established the Behavioural Insights Unit (BIU) which aims to combat unproductive behaviour through the use of evidence-based solutions, particularly in low-resource settings. Additionally, state BIUs were set up in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to conduct on-ground research and test behaviourally-designed interventions. Currently, in collaboration with development partners, behavioural insights are being applied to boost the Aspirational Districts Programme in India.

While India has made significant progress on the supply side (i.e., health infrastructure), behavioural constraints



from the demand side (i.e., consumers) cause hindrances. For example, despite the provision of free iron-folic acid tablets by the government, their uptake remains low because of mental models of misconceptions and mistrust. In Madhya Pradesh, scratchable calendars were used to encourage pregnant women to take tablets daily, revealing a healthy baby upon adherence. Expectant mothers were also provided with a kit comprising the necessities for new mothers to reduce the cognitive load on them.

In Maharashtra, glitter was used to illustrate the spread of germs when children shook hands, making the concept more salient for them, resulting in observed positive changes in children’s attitudes towards handwashing. During COVID-19, the gaming application Ludo King was used to promote COVID-appropriate behaviour using elements such as “mask mode” and digital advertisements, helping change beliefs relating to mask effectiveness for 27.5 percent of the people and increase in intention to engage in safe COVID behaviours. These interventions represent the wide applicability of behavioural insights across age groups and differing socio-economic contexts, showcasing its immense scope in the Indian context.

**Way forward for India**

With the establishment of the BIUs in India, which is also the first BIU in South Asia, a dual responsibility falls upon it in introducing evidence-based insights not only within mainstream Indian policies but also contributing to the behavioural science community globally. Despite the implementation of some innovative interventions, gaps persist. In this regard, some recommendations are discussed below.

Interventions should align with societal norms and values to enhance acceptability

and avoid marginalising vulnerable groups.

Behavioural interventions, while cost-effective, raise ethical questions about autonomy and consent. Policymakers must ensure transparency to uphold individual autonomy and safeguard choice. Furthermore, interventions should align with societal norms and values to enhance acceptability and avoid marginalising vulnerable groups. Poorly designed choice architectures may have unintended consequences and risk reinforcing stereotypes or exacerbating inequalities, making inclusivity and cultural sensitivity critical. Sustainability is another challenge. Nudges often lose efficacy over time as their novelty wears off. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation are essential to assess long-term impacts and refine interventions. Ethical frameworks and ongoing research can help strike a balance between effectiveness and ethical responsibility.

In India, the inclusion of behavioural components in Centrally Sponsored Schemes remains limited according to a 2022 evaluation by the BIU. Additionally, a study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), involving 60 nudge units from 23 countries, found that behavioural insights are often applied later in the regulatory process to address gaps. Moving forward, by adopting a proactive approach and incorporating behavioural insights during the initial stages of policy development, biases that undermine policy effectiveness can be better targeted.

Within the domain of Indian public health, the centrally funded schemes primarily resort to Information, Education, and Communication strategies with limited fund allocation for behavioural channels. An experiment demonstrated that just providing information for widow pension schemes does not translate to increased applications, and accompanying behaviour change components are key to translating information into action.

Many interventions are restricted to the regional level, indicating a potential for tailored expansion to state and national-level policies.

Moreover, many interventions are restricted to the regional level, indicating a potential for tailored expansion to state and national-level policies. Further, along with Bihar and UP, BIUs should be established in other states as well, considering the cultural diversity in India. Additionally, limited monitoring and evaluation are being conducted. Empirically tested interventions help identify gaps, assess impact in the short and long run, and accordingly scale successful interventions. Furthermore, nudges may not always be ideal, and analyses must be conducted to evaluate their net welfare effect.

While the sectors of Health, Women and Child Development and Rural Development have been increasingly utilising behavioural insights, their application in domains such as social inclusion and labour markets is limited, both of which are social determinants of health. Further, nudges alone cannot resolve all issues. An intervention called “Community-Led Total Sanitation”,

which aimed to create a defecation-free community in India and Indonesia in 2007 held public group discussions at sites of open defecation as a “walk of shame” reducing open defecation by 7 percent in Indonesia and 11 percent in India. In India, it was combined with a subsidy for toilet construction, leading to 20 percent more toilets being built compared to Indonesia. This suggests that adequate resources and infrastructure are also essential and behavioural tools must be used as complements rather than substitutes for broader policy measures.

The scope on the supply side also extends to physician behaviour as demonstrated by a study indicating improvement in patient safety and quality of care. A significant issue in India is that the community health workers often feel undervalued. Research suggests that recognition through social cues can boost morale and performance, strengthening social connections and triggering a sense of social approval.

A 2010 Institut Public de Sondage d’Opinion Secteur survey found that the public acceptability of nudges is higher in less wealthy nations, including India; however, support for outright prohibitions on certain behaviours, such as smoking, is high as well. By fully understanding the level of acceptability and consequent experiences for people, policymakers can better assess the value of such interventions.

By learning from countries such as Spain and the US, which have been successfully using behavioural tools to increase organ donations, India can combat such challenges.

To ensure that nudges do not adversely impact welfare by misuse through institutions, outlining laws and guidelines may be beneficial, such as the one by the Reserve Bank of India, requiring authentication for recurring transactions, targeting the default setting of automatic payment renewal, based on the status-quo bias, according to which, individuals tend to go for default options.

Furthermore, by learning from global best practices, India can consider implementing similar policies. In terms of organ donation, for example, India faces a wide gap between demand and donors. By learning from countries such as Spain and the US, which have been successfully using behavioural tools to increase organ donations, India can combat such challenges. Additionally, the promotion of organ donation by Apple, in collaboration with Donate Life America, increasing registrations by over 6 million in the US, displayed the potential of public-private partnerships. Through global collaborations, the sharing of knowledge products and best practices can be facilitated, further advancing research.

In conclusion, while cognitive biases are deeply ingrained, they can be addressed through context-specific behaviour-centric policies. Moving forward, as India continues to integrate behavioural tools to complement traditional policy approaches, it can create a resilient, equitable and effective public health system that addresses challenges for humans, not just homo economicus.

# Doordarshan to screen restored version of 'Manthan' as tribute to Shyam Benegal



National broadcaster Doordarshan on Tuesday announced that it will ring in the new year by screening the 4K restored version of Shyam Benegal's film "Manthan" as homage to the veteran filmmaker.

Benegal, the pioneer of the parallel cinema movement in Indian cinema in the 1970s and 1980s, died on December 23 at a hospital here due to chronic kidney disease. He was 90.

Film Heritage Foundation (FHF), which restored the 1976 classic film for its premiere in the Cannes Classic section at the Cannes Film Festival earlier this year, shared the update on its official X page.

According to FHF, "Manthan" will be broadcast on Doordarshan on Wednesday at 8 pm.

"To pay tribute to the late Shyam Benegal, Doordarshan will begin the new year with a screening of 'Manthan' (1976) restored by FHF with support from the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd. (Amul) on Jan 1, 2025 at 8 p.m. on Doordarshan," the foundation said.

"Manthan" was inspired by the groundbreaking milk cooperative movement by Dr Verghese Kurien that transformed India into one of the largest milk producers in the world.

The Hindi film, titled "Churning" in English, was financed by 5 lakh farmers of Gujarat 48 years ago who contributed Rs 2 each. The opening credits of the movie read: "500,000 Farmers of Gujarat present." "Manthan" narrates the story of how a young veterinary doctor (Girish Karnad) fights against oppressive forces to establish a milk cooperative that empowers rural farmers. It also starred Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah, and Amrish Puri.

## Rashmika Mandanna marks 8 years in cinema, thanks fans for endless love

"Pushpa 2: The Rule" star Rashmika Mandanna on Tuesday celebrated completing eight years in the film industry and thanked fans for their constant love and support.

Taking to her Instagram Stories, the 28-year-old actor shared a message of gratitude for her fans.

"8 years in the film industry and the only way I could do what I have done so far is only because of your love and support. Thank you," she wrote in the caption.

Born and raised in Kodagu district of Karnataka, Mandanna made her acting debut in 2016 with the Kannada movie "Kirik Party", opposite Rakshit Shetty, and then starred in Telugu hits like "Geetha Govindam", "Dear Comrade", "Bheeshma" and "Sita Ramam".

Mandanna found countrywide success with 2021 hit "Pushpa: The Rise", co-starring Allu Arjun. She made her Bollywood debut with "Goodbye" and then starred in smash hit film "Animal" with Ranbir Kapoor.



After more than eight years of their legal fight, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie have finally settled their highly publicised divorce.

As per People magazine, Jolie's lawyers confirmed on Monday, December 30, 2024, that both parties have agreed to terms, marking a significant chapter in the protracted legal saga that began when Jolie filed for divorce in September 2016.

Jolie and Pitt had been married for two years and together for 12 before their relationship came to an end.

Jolie filed for divorce on September 19, 2016, citing "irreconcilable differences," shortly after an incident involving a private plane flight that she claimed escalated into an abusive altercation between Pitt and their six children.

Authorities investigated the matter, but Pitt was not charged, and Jolie later chose not to press charges.

In a statement to People magazine, Jolie's attorney, James Simon, reflected on the journey, stating, "More than eight years ago, Angelina filed for divorce from Mr Pitt. She and the children left all of the properties they had shared with Mr Pitt, and since that time she has focused on finding peace and healing for their family. This is just one part of a long



ongoing process that started eight years ago. Frankly, Angelina is exhausted, but she is relieved this one part is over."

A source close to Jolie told People magazine that the actress has remained focused on moving forward, saying, "She doesn't speak ill of Pitt publicly or privately. She's been trying hard to be light after a dark time." The settlement concludes a highly complex and contentious divorce that involved significant disagreements, particularly over custody arrangements and their shared assets.

In the years following Jolie's divorce filing, the couple had been embroiled in lengthy and sometimes bitter legal disputes.

Early on, the former couple reached an agreement to handle their divorce proceedings privately, utilizing a private judge to resolve the legal details.

They also sought to seal all records related to their children to protect their privacy, as per People magazine.

Despite these attempts to keep matters out of the public eye, the divorce proceedings were far from smooth.

Custody battles over their six children Maddox (23), Pax (21), Zahara (19), Shiloh (18), and twins Vivienne and Knox (16), were particularly contentious, with harsh accusations filed in Los Angeles Superior Court, as per People magazine.

In 2017, Pitt and Jolie agreed to seal sensitive court records regarding their children, and they officially bifurcated their divorce,

with their legal status as single being declared in 2019.

Since then, both parties have continued to navigate a difficult path, with Pitt beginning a relationship with LA jewellery executive Ines de Ramon in 2022.

Though the divorce settlement represents a resolution to one part of their legal battle, disagreements over their shared assets, specifically their French estate and winery Chateau Miraval, have continued.

In 2022, Pitt filed a lawsuit against Jolie after she sold her stake in the estate to a third party. Jolie countersued, alleging that Pitt had been orchestrating a campaign to take full control of the winery following their split.

As per People magazine, in the lawsuit, Jolie's business entity, Nouvel, argued that Pitt had been working behind the scenes to seize control of the property, which had been a symbol of their shared life and investments.

A source close to Pitt countered the accusations, telling People magazine, "This is just the latest in a series of deliberate efforts to misdirect, recycle and reposition the truth of what has happened over the last six years." Pitt also sought to prove that there was a written agreement between the couple regarding the sale of their shares in the estate, a claim that was substantiated in a recent court ruling. In a significant legal victory for Jolie, a judge ruled in November 2024 that Pitt must disclose documents, including emails and texts, that might support Jolie's allegations of abuse, which she claims have been covered up for years.



## Sonu Sood is back in action with Fateh



From commencing the shoot of his film Fateh from Amritsar last year to now gearing up for its release, life's come full circle for actor Sonu Sood. He also makes his debut as a director and writer with the film. Describing the film as 'high action thriller', Sonu confidently says that the film will be 'high on action, never experienced before on-screen'. In Amritsar, once again as Fateh is set to hit theatres soon, Sonu shares how he feels a special connection with city.

"Coming to Punjab is always like coming back home. The energy one feels here is different and it automatically transfers on-screen as well," he says as he pays obeisance at the Golden Temple. Dedicating three years of life to the film, Sonu says that personal experiences through his philanthropic foundation was the trigger to come up with the concept of the film. "All these years, we have had so many incidents of fraud being reported in the name of our organisation that eventually it pushed me to take up the subject of cybercrime. We have had over 40-50 FIRs registered for cybercrime and fraud in the name of helping people and there are so many, who get duped and robbed by such criminals."

Calling 2025 a year of high quality action cinema, Sonu says it's about time that Indian action films not just compete but make Hollywood take note of its brilliance. "I wanted to make a film that has high quality action sequences, something that the audience have never seen. We got Lee Whittaker, the man behind intense action blockbusters, including Fast and Furious 5, Jurassic Park 3, Captain Marvel, X-Men. We got action crew from Mexico, we have got Grammy

winning vocalist Loire Cotler to pen down a song for Fateh."

In the same breath, he says that it will not be a 'stylized, blood spatter-cars flying, action movie. "It will be like that classic intense action, stunt sequences. We have single shot action sequence that will blow up the screen," he says.

As far as his off-screen endeavours are concerned, Sonu has been busy with his charity organisation while steering away from politics. As someone, who openly confessed that he was offered political positions but refused, Sonu says, "Politics can wait. I feel one can do a lot, bring the change we desire without going into politics. I have so many things left to do, much to create." Well, for now

## Worker dies, another injured after being hit by actor's speeding car in Mumbai

One worker was killed and another seriously injured after they were hit by Marathi actor Urmila Kothare's car in Kandivali area of Mumbai in the wee hours of Saturday, police said.

The actor and her driver were also injured in the accident, an official said.

The incident took place when Kothare was returning home after finishing her shoot, he said.

"Kothare's car hit two labourers who were engaged in Metro rail work under the Poisar Metro station in Kandivali east shortly after midnight. While labourer died, another was seriously injured. The actor and her driver were also injured in the accident. But they were saved as the airbags opened at the right time," the official of the Samta Nagar police station said.

As per the preliminary information, the driver lost control over the speeding vehicle, due to which it hit the victims working on roadside, he said.

A case has been registered against the car driver and investigation is under way, he added.

Kothare has acted in a few films, including "Duniyadari" in Marathi and "Thank God" in Hindi

## Salman Khan unveils action-packed teaser of 'Sikandar'

Brimming with charisma, power and his trademark swag, a teaser of Salman Khan's much-anticipated movie "Sikandar" was unveiled on Saturday.

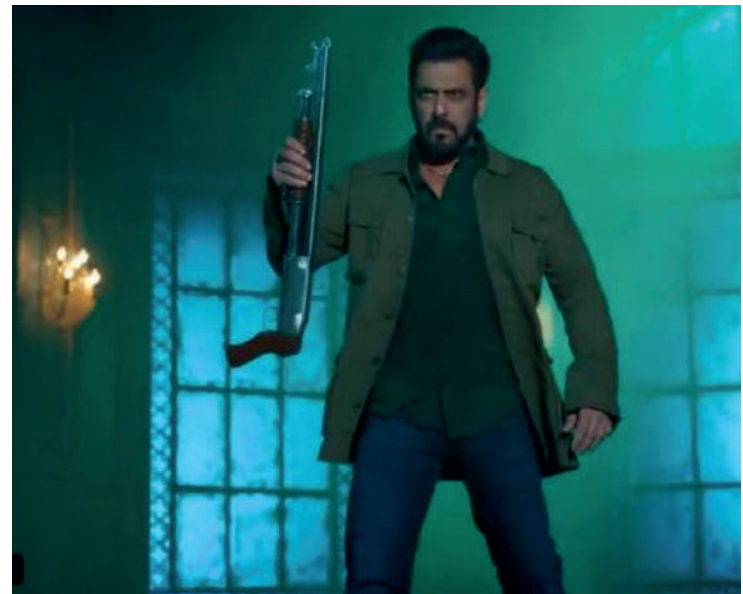
The actor is playing the titular action hero in the movie, directed by AR Murugadoss of "Ghajini" and "Holiday: A Soldier Is Never Off Duty" fame.

The teaser showcases Khan taking on adversaries with intensity and style. In the short clip, he says, "Suna hai ki bahut saray log mere peechay pade hai, bas mere mudne ki der hai."

Khan, who made cameo appearances in two movies this year "Singham 3" and "Baby John", said he hopes fans and his admirers would like the teaser of "Sikandar".

"Thank u all for your birthday wishes... much appreciated. Hope you like the teaser of Sikandar... #SikandarTeaser," the 59-year-old star wrote.

The teaser was earlier supposed to be released on Khan's birthday on Friday but was postponed following the demise of former prime minister



Manmohan Singh.

The movie is produced by Khan's long-time collaborator and close friend Sajid Nadiadwala under his banner Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment.

The production house said the teaser is a gift to all the fans of Khan.

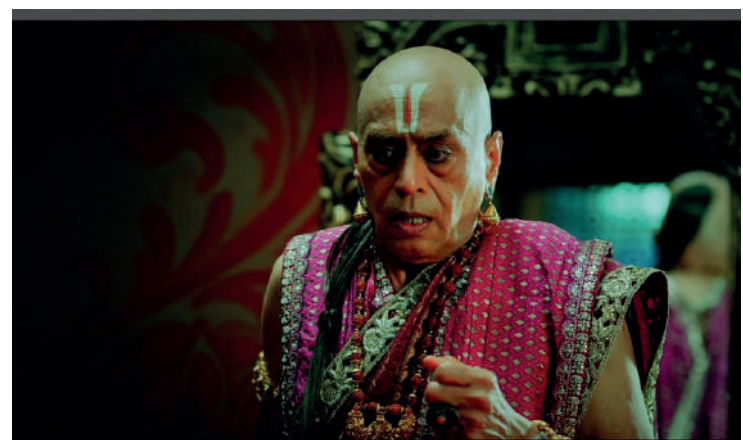
"Ab intezaar hua khatam. Here's presenting a glimpse of the world of Sikandar. A gift to all the fans who have been waiting to see

the First Look! Thank you for all the love and patience... See you all in cinemas this EID."

Also, featuring "Pushpa: The Rise" star Rashmika Mandanna, the movie is set to be released in theatres on Eid 2025.

Besides "Sikandar", Khan and Nadiadwala are set to reteam on the second part of their 2014 blockbuster "Kick".

## Pankaj Berry reprises his role in the show Tenali Rama



Sony SAB's show Tenali Rama has returned with an exciting new story. The show also marks the return of the clever and witty Raj Guru Tathacharya, played by the talented and seasoned actor Pankaj Berry. The much-loved and iconic character is known for his shrewdness and cunning nature, and is seen engaging

in his trademark battle of wit with Tenali (played by Krishna Bharadwaj).

Pankaj said, "Tathacharya is full of wit, mischief and charm, making him both a challenge and a joy to portray. Bringing his quirks and humour to life has been a rewarding experience."



## Ananya bags maiden senior air rifle gold



Maharashtra's Ananya Naidu won her maiden senior women's 10m air rifle gold medal after staving off a late charge from Meghana Sajjanar. Naidu stood top of the podium after totalling 252.5 in the finals of the ongoing 67th National Shooting Championship Competitions in Bhopal on Tuesday.

Naidu's final tally was a mere 0.2 more than the more experienced Sajjanar, who was representing the Railways. The bronze medal was won by Tamil Nadu's Narmada Nithin, who finished with a score of 231.3 points.

In the final, Naidu led the

field with 1.4 points after the first five shots but while she led the 24-shot final, it became a close fight between her and Sajjanar during the final stages. Both Naidu and Sajjanar tallied 20.6 points in the last two shots.

In the junior women's competition, Gautami Bhanot won the gold medal with a score of 251.5 points followed by Mayuri Pawar. They were both tied at 168.0 points at one stage in the final but Gautami edged with a score of 21.6 in the next two shots to Mayuri's 20.5 to regain the lead. The bronze was won by Disha Dhankar after she tallied 229.9 points.

## World Championships Rapid and Blitz: Vaishali enters quarters of blitz, others fade away

Indian Grandmaster R Vaishali surprised herself with a stellar performance to enter the quarterfinals of the World Blitz Championship here, even as recently-crowned rapid champion Koneru Humpy made an early exit.

Following Humpy's stellar performance in rapid, which earned her the gold medal and a prize of \$60,000, it was Vaishali's turn to impress her fans. She scored 9.5 points out of a possible 11 to top the qualifying round.

"I'm very happy with today's performance. Tomorrow will be a big day. Honestly, it (performance) was completely unexpected. I was not expecting the result like how it went today. Tomorrow, I have to be ready and prepare well and then see," she said.

Russian Kateryna Lagno came closest to Vaishali, scoring 8.5 points, while the remaining six qualifiers finished with an identical eight points. Despite meeting the points criteria, Humpy was eliminated due to the worst tiebreaker, finishing ninth.

In the quarterfinal, Vaishali



will face Chinese Grandmaster Zhu Jiner.

In the open section, 10 players were tied for first place, including world No. 1 Magnus Carlsen. Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi won the qualifier with 9.5 points, benefiting from the best tiebreak, while Fabiano Caruana of the United States finished second, ahead of Carlsen, who was placed third.

Surprisingly, none of the Indians made the top-eight. Arjun Erigaisi played brilliantly at the start, securing victories in the first five rounds, but faded away to finish with a sub-par seven points. R Praggnanandhaa was the best-placed Indian, with 8.5 points, but a last-round loss to Russian Daniil Dubov cost him a spot in the quarterfinals.

## Manchester United lose again as Ipswich upset Chelsea

Alexander Isak scored for the sixth straight Premier League game as Newcastle beat Manchester United 2-0 at Old Trafford to condemn Ruben Amorim's side to their worst home run in the top tier since the 1970s. Relegation-threatened Ipswich beat Chelsea 2-0 to win at home for the first time this season, and Aston Villa and Brighton drew 2-2. Newcastle's commanding display marked the first time since February 1979 that Man United have lost three home league games in a row. It is also the first time since 1962 that United have lost five league matches in the same calendar month.

Isak started the misery for home fans with his eighth goal in six matches. The Sweden striker put Newcastle ahead with a header after four minutes and Joelinton doubled their lead 15 minutes later when he rose above Lisandro Martinez to head in a second.

The defeat was the fifth in eight league games since Amorim joined from Sporting Lisbon in November.

Chelsea started the day with the best away record in the league after leaders Liverpool but they were trailing at Portman Road after



just 12 minutes thanks to a mistake from goalkeeper Filip Jorgensen.

The Scandinavian fouled Liam Delap in the box and Delap got up to convert the penalty with aplomb. Chelsea pushed forward in search of an equaliser but it was Ipswich

that doubled their lead early in the second half. A poor pass from Axel Disasi allowed Delap to stretch the Chelsea defence and his pass set up Omari Hutchinson to score against his former club.

## Indian cricket has depth to fill Rohit, Virat's void: Lehmann

Indian cricket has produced a generational superstar in Yashasvi Jaiswal and will remain in good health even when Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma decide to call time on their careers, feels former Australia head coach and two-time World Cup winner Darren Lehmann. The 54-year-old, who played 27 Tests and 117 ODIs during his decade-long career, is also captivated by Jasprit Bumrah's skills, claiming to have never seen any player have more impact in a single series.

Talking about impending retirements of Rohit and Kohli following their poor show in the ongoing series where India trail 1-2, Lehmann was empathetic and practical about the transition in Indian cricket.



# Bumrah named captain of cricket.com.au 'Test XI of 2024'; Jaiswal also featured

In a massive honour, Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was named as the captain of the 'Test XI of 2024' made by cricket.com.au, which also includes Yashasvi Jaiswal.

Bumrah, who has led India in two Test matches, secured his first victory as Test captain during the Perth Test, the first of the five Border-Gavaskar Trophy matches. In the match, the pacer led the team from the front with an eight-wicket haul and an all-round Team India crushed Australia by 295 runs to secure a famous win just after a series whitewash loss to New Zealand at home by 0-3, their first Test series loss in 12 years.

Here is cricket.com.au's Test XI of 2024:

Yashasvi Jaiswal (India)

In 2024, Jaiswal scored 1,478 runs in 15 matches at an average of 54.74, with three centuries (two double tons) and 11 fifties in 29 innings, with the best score of 214. His two double centuries against England in the home series earlier this year, which saw him score 712 runs in five matches was a huge standout. However, his adaptation to Australian conditions is just as stunning, having scored 359 runs in eight innings at an average of 51.50, with a masterclass 161 at Perth and fighting knocks of 82 and 84 at Melbourne being standouts.

Jaiswal's run tally is the highest by an Indian opener during a calendar year and his 36 sixes during this year is also a world record, having beaten legends Virender Sehwag and Brendon McCullum in these aspects respectively, as per cricket.com.au.

Ben Duckett (England)

The England opener, who takes pride in taking a chance to score at every ball, once again delivered consistent numbers in Tests, with his knock of 153 against India at Rajkot as a huge statement about his greatness in tackling subcontinent conditions. He is England's highest run-getter this year and overall third, with 1,149 runs at an average of 37.06 and a strike rate of 87.04. He has scored two centuries and six fifties in 32 innings, with best score of 153. His high strike rate makes him the poster boy of England's 'Bazball' school of cricket.

Joe Root (England)

Largely a one-format player nowadays, Root was in monstrous form in Tests this year, leading the run-



charts with 1,556 runs at an average of 55.57 and a strike rate of over 63 in 17 matches, with six tons and five fifties in 31 innings and best score of 262.

Root broke two massive Test records this year, becoming England's highest century-maker (36) and Test run-getter (12,972 runs), going past legendary Alastair Cook and touching the 20,000 run mark in international cricket, being the first England player to do so.

Also, he is chasing Sachin Tendulkar's record of highest Test runs (15,921) and is the fifth-highest run-getter this year.

Rachin Ravindra (New Zealand)

The Kiwi all-rounder had a brilliant run in Tests this year, scoring 984 runs in 12 matches at an average of 42.78, with two centuries and four fifties in 24 innings and best score of 240. The youngster played a crucial role in the Kiwis' first-ever series win against India, scoring an aggressive 134 in the first Test and a crucial 65-run knock in Pune. He had kickstarted the year with a fiery 240 against South Africa.

Harry Brook (England)

England's next-generation superstar continues to impress, adding plenty to

his away exploits. In 12 Tests this year, he made 1,100 runs at an average of 55.00, with four centuries and three fifties in 20 innings, with best score of 317, which came against Pakistan in Multan. Also, he continued his brilliant run in New Zealand with two stunning centuries and getting the 'Player of the Series' award. In 11 Tests away from home, Brook averages 80.00 and has scored seven of his eight Test tons.

Kamindu Mendis (Sri Lanka)

The Sri Lankan all-rounder went on a Bradman-like run in Tests, with 1,049 runs in nine matches and 16 innings at an average of 74.92, with five centuries and three fifties. His best score was 182\*. He reached 1,000 runs in Tests within 13 innings, same as Aussie legend Don Bradman, becoming the second-fastest to reach this landmark. He also made fifty-plus scores each in eight of his first Tests, becoming the first player to do so.

Alex Carey (Australia)

The Aussie wicketkeeper-batter was in top form across all formats in international cricket and domestic. In nine Tests, he made 46 dismissals, including 42 catches and four stumpings

and also scored 440 runs at an average of 33.84, with three half-centuries in 15 innings. His best score was 98\*. During the Christchurch Test against New Zealand, Carey took 10 dismissals, a career-high and played a match-winning knock of 98\* during a run chase of 279 runs.

Matt Henry (New Zealand)

The Kiwi pacer was a workhorse this year for his side, taking 48 scalps in nine Tests at an average of 18.58, with four five-wicket hauls and best figures of 7/67 in an innings. He was his side's leading Test wicket-taker and overall fourth. His standout spell was 5/15 against India at Bengaluru to skittle them out for just 46, setting the tone for a landmark series win. His best figures of 7/67 came against the Aussies, though in a losing cause.

Jasprit Bumrah (India) (captain)

The Indian pace spearhead enjoyed one of the greatest calendar years by a bowler, with 71 scalps in 13 matches at an average of 14.92, with five five-wicket hauls and best figures of 6/45, delivering fantastic spells home and away alike. During the England series at home, he took 19 wickets in four Tests on spin-friendly conditions to win the series for India and also has taken 30 wickets in the ongoing BGT in Australia in four matches at an average of 12.83, with three-five-wicket hauls, emerging as a lone warrior for India.

Josh Hazlewood (Australia)

A fine year for one-fourth of the great Aussie quartet (of Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon) despite fitness issues as he took 35 scalps in 15 matches at an average of 13.60, with best figures of 5/31, two five-wicket hauls to his name. Also, his average of below 14 is the best by an Australia in a calendar year since World War 2.

Keshav Maharaj (South Africa)

If the Proteas were to make it to their first-ever World Test Championship final, Maharaj was going to be one of the key reasons. The spinner took 35 wickets in 15 games at an average of 19.20, best figures of 5/59 and two five-wicket hauls. Though he did not bowl a single over during the Newlands Test against India to start the year, he went on to play a crucial role in series wins over West Indies, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka



## Seniors have not really made the contribution that they should have: Gavaskar

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar on Monday lashed out at senior players such as Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli for letting the team down and blamed the Indian top-order for losing the Boxing Day Test against Australia here.

Set a 340-run target on the final day of the fourth Test, the Indian batters, with the exception of Yashasvi Jaiswal (84), faltered yet again to lose the match by 184 runs and trail 1-2 in the five-match series.

"It all depends on the selectors. The contributions that were expected have not come. It is the top-order which has to contribute, if the top-order is not contributing, why blame the lower-order.

"The seniors have not really made the contribution that they should have, all that they had to do was bat out today and live to fight another day in Sydney," Gavaskar told India Today.

"...it's just that the top-order didn't contribute and that is the reason India found itself in this position." While Gavaskar praised Jaiswal for his gritty knock, the batting great once again was not impressed by Rishabh Pant's shot selection, which opened the floodgates

for Australia.

Joining hands at 33 for 3, Jaiswal and Pant looked to have settled down, taking India to 121 in the post-lunch session, before a rash shot from Pant set the team back.

"Yes, absolutely around tea time when Rishabh Pant and Yashasvi Jaiswal had batted through the post-lunch session, it certainly looked India could achieve a draw because it was a matter of batting for another hour really without losing a wicket, and Australia would have then given up," Gavaskar said.

"The whole idea was try and take into the mandatory overs and if around the mandatory overs India had just lost maybe four wickets then Australia, after a couple off overs, would have asked to shake hands but that didn't happen." As Pant got a long hop from Travis Head after a 103-ball vigil, during which he shared 84 runs for the fourth wicket with Jaiswal, he hit it straight to Mitchell Marsh at in the deep in search of a six.

"...the issue is you know there is this shot called sixer in cricket and which is like a drug. Once you hit a couple of sixes, then you think that's a real high

because once you hit the ball cleanly of the middle of the bat and it goes into the stands, there is no better feeling for a batter. Sixer is a different feeling and it's a drug, it gets into your system," Gavaskar said.

"The difference between a boundary and a six is just two runs but the risk percentage is 100 per cent. Boundary is hit along the ground no risk at all, a six is attempted with the ball up in the air and if you don't time it, if it hits the toe of your bat, it can go up and you can be out caught."

"At that particular point of time there was no need to go for a six, it was not going to win us the match. There was a long on there, there was a deep square leg there, so if a pull shot along the ground would have been attempted it would have got you four runs, and that is how it opened the door for Australia."

Gavaskar also criticised the TV umpire for ignoring technology and giving Jaiswal out caught-behind controversially off the bowling of Pat Cummins.

"That is not how it should be because in Perth you had a dismissal of KL

Rahul where you didn't go by the visual evidence, you went by technology. You can't be saying technology one day and visual evidence the next day.

"Visual evidence, if you ask me, was not so much to make a difference for you to overturn," the former India captain said.

"I always believed that it has got to be overwhelming evidence to overturn an umpire's call in the middle. I don't think there was overwhelming evidence because the fact of the matter is there is an element of optical illusion with the ball.

"The ball sometimes moves a little bit later after it has gone past the bat, it looks as if it's an edge and then you realise it's not an edge, so that is the reason why you have a snickometer, if you have it go by it. I just failed to understand why the TV umpire gave that out."

Gavaskar had word of advice for Kohli, who continues to struggle with deliveries outside the off-stump.

"The foot is not going to the pitch of the ball, the foot is going straight down the pitch, not towards the ball. If the foot goes more towards the ball, you have more chances of hitting the ball from the middle.

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