



पशुपालन के बिना संभव नहीं टिकाऊ खेती

कृषि कार्य से धन अर्जन प्राचीन समय से किया जा रहा है प्राचीन सभ्यताएं स्वावलम्बी कृषि पर ही निर्भर रहीं। जब भी कृषि में स्वावलम्बन समाप्त हुआ सभ्यताएं गिर गई। स्वावलम्बी कृषक बाहर के आदानों का मूल्य नहीं चुकाता है, वह उन्हें स्वयं उत्पादित करता है। स्वावलम्बन का अर्थ है पर्याप्त उत्पादन करना, पैसा कमाना तथा विपत्ति के दिनों के लिये बचाकर रखना है। भारत के किसान अपने परम्परागत ज्ञान को परिमार्जित करते हुए कृषि कार्य द्वारा मिट्टी से सोना बनाने का कार्य करता रहे, परन्तु आज पाश्चात्य कृषि शिक्षा का प्रभाव, हरित क्रांति की चकाचौंध, कृषि के मशीनीकरण, रसायनिक खाद एवं कीटनाशकों के तात्कालिक लाभों को देखकर भारतीय किसान कृषि के स्वावलम्बन से दूर होकर रसायनिक खेती अपनाते जा रहे हैं।



किसान अधिक उपज लेने के लिये आवश्यकता से अधिक उर्वरक एवं रसायनिक दवाओं का प्रयोग करने लगा जिससे उत्पादन में बढ़ोत्तरी अवश्य होती है परन्तु साथ ही साथ प्रति हेक्टेयर खर्च भी बढ़ता जा रहा है। इससे न केवल किसानों की आय में कमी देखी जा रही है बल्कि पर्यावरण पर भी विपरीत असर होता दिखाई दे रहा है। पिछले चार दशकों में कृषि रसायनों (खाद, कीटनाशक, नीडानाशक, और बढ़वार कारकों) और पानी के अविश्वेकीय अन्धाधुंध उपयोग ने मृदा उर्वरता, कृषि उत्पादकता के कारकों, उत्पाद गुणवत्ता एवं पर्यावरण पर विपरीत प्रभाव डाला है। रसायनिक खेती या गहन कृषि पद्धति की ओर प्रेरित किया है क्योंकि विश्व की जनसंख्या दिन पर दिन बढ़ती जा रही है और खाद्यान्न की आवश्यकता में भी वृद्धि होती जा रही है। रसायनिक उर्वरकों एवं कीटनाशकों के प्रयोग से कृषि योग्य भूमि में निम्नलिखित परिणाम देखने को मिले हैं।

- भूमि की सतह का सख्त होना।
 - लाभप्रद जीवाणुओं की संख्या में कमी।
 - भूमि की जलधारण क्षमता में कमी।
 - मृदा की क्षारीयता, लवणता तथा जलजलम में वृद्धि।
 - भूमि में जीवाणु की मात्रा में कमी।
 - फसलों में कीट, व्याधियों व खरपतवारों की समस्या में वृद्धि।
 - भूमि की उत्पादकता में निरन्तर कमी।
- उपरोक्त कारणों की वजह से आज कृषक को खेती घाटे का सौदा बनती जा रही है। आज हमारे विश्व की जनसंख्या लगभग 6 अरब है व सन् 2050 तक इसका 9 अरब होने का अनुमान है। लेकिन हमारी कृषि उत्पादकता बढ़ने की बजाय स्थिर हो गई है। इन्हीं बातों को ध्यान में रखते हुए कृषि वैज्ञानिक आधारित या टिकाऊ खेती करने पर जोर दे रहे हैं। टिकाऊ खेती से तात्पर्य फसल एवं पशुपालन उत्पादन के एकीकरण तंत्र से है। जो लम्बे समय तक निम्न बातें पूर्ण कर सके।
- मनुष्य के भोजन की पूर्ति कर सके।
 - वातावरण की गुणवत्ता एवं प्राकृतिक संसाधनों को बचाये।
 - उन सभी संसाधनों का प्रभावी ढंग से उपयोग हो जिनका पुनःउत्पादन नहीं हो सकता है।
 - भूमि की आर्थिक उपयोगिता को बनाये रखें।
 - कृषक व समाज के जीवन की गुणवत्ता को बढ़ाएँ।
- इस प्रकार से टिकाऊ खेती में वह सभी बातें समाहित हैं जिससे वातावरण सुधरे, आर्थिक लाभ हो एवं समाज में समानता आए। यहां पशुपालन की

टिकाऊ खेती में बराबर की हिस्सेदारी है क्योंकि पशुओं की कृषि में आर्थिक उपयोगिता है, व साथ ही ये चराहाग एवं फसलों के अवशेषों आदि को मनुष्य को खाने योग्य बनाने में मदद करते हैं। टिकाऊ खेती का सबसे उत्तम उपाय है जैविक खेती। जैविक खेती से तात्पर्य है कि खेती में रसायनिक खाद, कीटनाशक व जैविक वृद्धिकारकों का उपयोग करके उत्पादन लिया जाय। जैविक खाद बनाने के लिये पशुओं की आवश्यकता पड़ेगी। क्योंकि पशुओं से ही गोबर, मलमूत्र इत्यादि प्राप्त होंगे। इसके अतिरिक्त मृगी खाद भी भूमि की उर्वराशक्ति को बढ़ाने में काफी मदद करती है, क्योंकि मृगी खाद में लगभग 20 प्रतिशत प्रोटीन पाई जाती है। जिससे इस खाद में नाइट्रोजन की मात्रा अधिकतम लगभग 3 प्रतिशत व फास्फोरस एवं पोटाश क्रमशः 2-2 प्रतिशत होती है। वहीं सुअर के मल में नत्रजन, फास्फोरस एवं पोटाश क्रमशः 0.7, 0.6 एवं 0.7 प्रतिशत पाए जाते हैं।

इसके अतिरिक्त जैविक खेती में विभिन्न खादों जैसे गोबर व फसल अवशेष के मिश्रण से खाद (नाडेप या कम्पोस्ट खाद), गोबर गैस संयंत्र से उपलब्ध खाद एवं वर्मी कम्पोस्ट आदि का उपयोग होता है। वर्मी कम्पोस्ट केंचुए की मदद से बनने वाला खाद है। एक क्विंटल ताजा वर्मी कम्पोस्ट से भूमि को 800 ग्राम पोटेशियम प्राप्त होता है। इसके अतिरिक्त इसमें सूक्ष्म पोषक तत्व जैसे कि जस्ता 0.16: तांबा 0.09 और लोहा 1.38 अनुपात होते हैं।



रसायनिक उर्वरकों के लाभकारी सुझाव

उर्वरकों के भरपूर लाभ कैसे लें इसके लिये निम्नलिखित बातें ध्यान रखें -

- मिट्टी परीक्षण के आधार पर नत्रजन, फास्फोरस एवं पोटाश तत्व का संतुलित मात्रा में प्रयोग करें।
- मिट्टी परीक्षण के आधार पर गौण व सूक्ष्म पोषक तत्वों का उपयोग करें।
- रसायनिक उर्वरकों के साथ जैविक खादों का समावेश करें।
- फसल चक्र अपनायें।
- उपयुक्त सस्य क्रियायें अपनायें।
- मिट्टी परीक्षण के आधार पर गौण व सूक्ष्म पोषक तत्वों का उपयोग--जैसा कि विदित है कि हमारे द्वारा लगातार अधिक मुख्य तत्वों वाले रसायनिक उर्वरक उपयोग कर उपज में बढ़ोत्तरी की है लेकिन जमीन से गौण व सूक्ष्म पोषक तत्व जमीन में नहीं दिये जा रहे हैं। जिसके फलस्वरूप हमारी जमीन में मुख्य पोषक तत्वों के साथ-साथ गौण व सूक्ष्म पोषक तत्वों की भी कमी हो गई है। जिसमें सल्फर तत्व चौथे आवश्यक पोषक तत्व के रूप में उभर कर आया है। जिसका मुख्य कारण सघन खेती के साथ जमीन में इन पोषक तत्वों का उपयोग न करना तथा कार्बनिक पदार्थों का खेतों में न डालना है।
- रसायनिक उर्वरकों के साथ जैविक खादों का समावेश-- परम्परागत खेती के समय रसायनिक खादों का उपयोग कम था लेकिन किसान खेती में गोबर खाद, हरी खाद एवं भूसा आदि को खेत में मिला दिया जाता था तथा सघन खेती भी नहीं होती थी जिसके कारण जमीन की जलधारण क्षमता अच्छी थी तथा पोषक तत्व भी पर्याप्त होते थे परन्तु वर्तमान युग मशीनरी की खेती का युग हो गया है जिसमें पशुपालन कम होता जा रहा है किसान भाई अधिक उपज प्राप्ति के लिये मिट्टी के स्वास्थ्य का ध्यान रखना भूल

गये हैं जिसके परिणाम किसानों को दिखने लगे हैं कि रसायनिक खाद दिये जाने पर फसल उसका उपयोग नहीं कर पा रहे हैं। इसलिये प्रत्येक तीन वर्ष में एक बार 15-20 टन गोबर खाद प्रति हेक्टर खेत में डालें।

फसल चक्र अपनायें— फसल चक्र से आशय एक ही फसल को लगातार न बोयें। पहली वर्ष यदि खरीफ में सोयाबीन और रबी में गेहूं तो दूसरी वर्ष खरीफ में मक्का एवं रबी में चना बोयें। फसल चक्र में दलहनी फसलों का समावेश अवश्य करें। दलहनी फसल वायुमंडलीय नत्रजन को अवशोषित कर स्थिर करती है। तथा नत्रजन दलहनी फसल में नहीं देना पड़ता है। उथली जड़ वाली फसल के बाद गहरी जड़ वाली फसल, अधिक पानी वाली फसल के बाद कम पानी चाहने वाली फसल बोयें। फसल चक्र अपनाते से उर्वरकों की क्षमता तो बढ़ती ही है साथ ही साथ कीड़े बीमारी भी कम लगती है।

उपयुक्त सस्य क्रियायें अपनायें— उपयुक्त सस्य क्रियायें अपनाते से रसायनिक उर्वरकों की दी गई मात्रा अधिक से अधिक फसल द्वारा ली जावेगी जिससे उपज भी अच्छी मिलेगी। इसके लिये कुछ मुख्य कृषि क्रियायें मुख्य हैं जो निम्नलिखित हैं।

- उपलब्ध साधनों के अनुरूप अधिक उपज देने वाली किस्म बोयें।
- बीज जनित रोगों से बचने के लिये बाबिस्टीन, थाइरम से बीज को उपचारित कर बोयें।
- किस्म की पकने की अवधि के अनुसार समय पर बुवाई करें।
- उर्वरकों को सही विधि व समय पर दें।
- फसलों की बढ़वार के क्रांतिक समय में खेत को खरपतवार रहित रखें।
- सिंचाई आवश्यकतानुसार एवं सही विधि से करें।
- रोग व बीमारियों का प्रबंधन करें।
- समय पर कटाई कर, श्रेणिक कर उचित भंडारण करें।

दूध के साथ रेशम उत्पादन मिलक विथ सिल्क सिल्कांत की जरूरत और महत्व

भारत के कई इलाकों में सिंचाई की सुविधाएँ सीमित मात्रा में होने से 50 प्रतिशत से ज्यादा खेती बरानी है। यह सर्वविदित है कि पिछले कुछ वर्षों से अनियमित मानसून, अमीसमी बरसात, कठोर जलवायु तथा अन्य कई कारणों से बरानी खेती बिना भरसे की तथा नुकसानमें दमिती हो रही है। इससे किसानों में निराशा आर्थिक नुकसान के कारण आत्महत्या तक हो रही है। इस स्थिति से उबरने का एक उपाय है खेती से जुड़े पूरक व्यवसाय शुरू करना और उन्हें ज्यादा प्रभावी तथा ज्यादा फायदेमंद बनाने हेतु दो या तीन पूरक व्यवसायों को एक साथ करना जैसे दुग्ध व्यवसाय और रेशमकीट पालन एक साथ करना जो एक-दूसरे के पूरक हैं।

दुग्ध उत्पादन हेतु पशुपालन तथा रेशम कीट पालन हेतु मलबेरी की काश्त करना एक-दूसरों के कई तरह से पूरक हैं। पशुओं को दूध उत्पादन हेतु पौष्टिक चारा चाहिए जो उन्हें मलबेरी की पत्तियों से मिलता है। इसके अलावा मलबेरी की पत्तियाँ जायकेदार पाई गईं। उनकी पाचकता 70 से 90 च पाई गईं। उनमें खनिज लवण 25 प्रतिशत तक पाये गये जो दूध उत्पादन बढ़ाने हेतु तथा पशु के स्वास्थ्य एवं प्रजनन क्षमता बरकरार रखने हेतु अत्यंत उपयुक्त हैं।

एक गाय को उसके शरीर पोषण हेतु रोजाना 7 ग्राम कैल्शियम तथा 7 ग्राम फास्फोरस आवश्यक होता है जबकि मलबेरी की पत्तियों में करीब 1.8 से 2.4 प्रतिशत कैल्शियम तथा 0.14 से 0.24 प्रतिशत फास्फोरस पाया गया है। इसका मतलब है कि अगर मलबेरी की पत्तियाँ भरपूर मात्रा में दुधारू पशु को खिलाई जाये तो उनके दूध उत्पादन में बढ़ोत्तरी होगी इसके अलावा उनका स्वास्थ्य भी अच्छा रहेगा। एक वैज्ञानिक प्रयोग में पाया गया कि खुराक और मलबेरी को पत्तियाँ अनुक्रम 60:40 तथा 25:75 प्रतिशत इस अनुपात में खिलाने पर

गायों का दूध उत्पादन 13.2 और 13.8 लीटर प्राप्त हुआ जबकि सिर्फ खुराक खिलाने पर 14.2 लीटर था। इसका मतलब यह हुआ की मलबेरी की पत्तियाँ खिलाने से दूध उत्पादन में ज्यादा कमी नहीं आई बल्कि खुराक की मात्रा कम लगने से उसके पोषण खर्च में कमी आई यानि मलबेरी की पत्तियाँ खिलाने से दूध उत्पादन का धंधा किफायती होता है।

रेशम कीटों को डाली हुई मलबेरी की जो पत्तियाँ बाकी रह जाती हैं वो पत्तियाँ, डालियाँ दुधारू पशुओं को खिलाया जाये तो वह बरबाद होने से बच जाता है। कुछ स्थानों पर रेशम की इच्छियों के अपशिष्ट पदार्थ पर नमक का घोल डालकर वह दुधारू पशुओं को खिलाया जाता है।

इस प्रकार रेशम कीट पालन तथा दुग्ध व्यवसाय का आपस में घनिष्ठ नाता जोड़कर दोनों ही व्यवसाय एक साथ एक ही खेत पर कर सकते हैं। इसमें जो मजदूर होते हैं उनका उत्कृष्ट इस्तेमाल होता है। रेशम कीटों द्वारा कोष निर्माण होने पर उन्हें बेचकर पैसा प्राप्त होता है। इसके अलावा दुग्ध व्यवसाय से दूध, खाद तथा बछड़े बेचकर अधिक धन प्राप्त होगा और इस प्रकार किसान भाईयों को कमाई के दो स्रोत प्राप्त होंगे जिससे ज्यादा आर्थिक सम्पन्नता का लाभ होगा।

रेशम कीट पालन हेतु प्रशिक्षण, जानकारी, तांत्रिक मार्गदर्शन, रेशम उद्योग, संचालनालय से प्राप्त होते हैं तथा दुग्ध व्यवसाय के विषय में जानकारी प्रशिक्षण तथा तांत्रिक मार्गदर्शन हर जिले में स्थित कृषि विज्ञान केंद्र, जिले के पशुपालन विभाग, कृषि विश्वविद्यालयों में स्थित पशुपालन एवं दुग्ध शास्त्र विभाग आदि जगह से प्राप्त कर सकते हैं।

ध्यान रहे, पूरक व्यवसाय के बिना किसान भाईयों की सही मायने में उन्नति नहीं हो सकती अतः पूरक व्यवसाय अवश्य अपनाएं और अपनी आर्थिक उन्नति हासिल करें।

Why the making of Constitution matters

THE deliberations in the two-day debate on 75 years of the Constitution in Parliament saw the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) highlighting their own commitment to the constitutional vision, but equally keen on pointing to lapses committed by the rival side.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi singled out the Congress for a no-holds-barred attack. He blamed the Nehru-Gandhi family for the subversion of the Constitution. He cited, for example, the Congress party's hand in suppressing the constitutional rights through the imposition of the Emergency and the role of Jawaharlal Nehru in the first amendment to the Constitution. Rahul Gandhi framed his intervention in terms of a conflict between the competing ideologies of civic nationalism and Hindutva, distinguishing the upholders of the Constitution from the supporters of Manusmriti — a text whose tenets challenge the basic premises of India's foundational doctrine.

The BJP relentlessly criticised the Congress as the principal offender when it comes to transgressions of the Constitution. However, the BJP overlooked that in some instances, it has surpassed the Congress in these transgressions. The debate was noteworthy in another respect, with doubts being raised about the Congress' preeminent role in Constitution-making. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, while initiating the debate in the Lok Sabha, said attempts had been made to project the Constitution as a contribution of a particular party in the last few years. "Today, I want to make it clear that our Constitution is not the gift of a single party." It might be interesting to ask why this unhistorical reconstruction is being made. It's certainly not the "gift of one party". But, having been largely absent from the freedom struggle and the Constituent Assembly, we can, perhaps, sympathise with the impulse of the BJP to downsize the Congress' role and insert its own ideas in the proceedings from which it was basically absent. But this is not just about downplaying the Congress' role in drafting the Constitution. It demonstrates more stark attempts to further mainstream the BJP's discursive and political agenda of rewriting the national script to reinterpret events in consonance with the needs of contemporary Hindu nationalist politics. The BJP is unmistakably leveraging its power at the Centre for a calculated reconstruction of modern history. There is no shortage of historical analyses of the origins of the Constitution and, yet, repeated attempts are being made to misrepresent and misinterpret its history. One has to see the Constitution as the product of a collective deliberation that stretched over three years — more than 7,500 amendments were tabled and 2,500 moved and a document of almost 400 articles emerged, one of the longest of its kind. Its drafters were chosen by indirect elections. But it was Indians who drafted it. No colonial theory and practice was involved in shaping the Constitution. Our own versions of democracy, secularism and federalism driven by principles of equality, justice and fraternity underlined it. This vision of a new India of "equal citizens" was articulated in the Karachi Congress Resolution of 1931. It went on to become the core of the Congress campaign in the 1937 elections and later, formed the core of the Constitution. Contrary to the Defence Minister's claim that the Congress was not the only party which drafted the Constitution, the fact is that the vast majority of the Constituent Assembly's members were elected on a Congress ticket, leading to charges that the Assembly was entirely dominated by the Congress. Granville Austin, in his monumental study of The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation, notes that the "Constituent Assembly was a one-party body in an essentially one-party country...." Thanks to Mahatma Gandhi, BR Ambedkar was appointed Chairman of the Drafting Committee and he, undoubtedly, played an important role in drafting the Constitution. But the Drafting Committee was not entirely a free agency. The draft of the Constitution was discussed as per the views and recommendations of various subject committees and the draft itself was discussed.

Look beyond simultaneous polls

A democracy needs much more than the efficient conduct of elections

THE relationship between the electorate and the elected representatives is that of demand and supply. In a democracy, the latter work towards fulfilling the former's aspirations. The ruling party tries to keep its poll promises, sometimes working to fulfil its own vision of what it thinks is good for the people and the country. One Nation, One Election (ONOE) may be a part of the BJP's election manifesto, but surely it wasn't demanded by any section of society, even though some people felt that India suffered from "too much democracy". That the ruling party was convinced about the merits of ONOE was evident from the repeated assertions of its leadership and the way in which the terms of the Ram Nath Kovind committee were drafted. Its recommendations were a foregone conclusion, but the speed with which the government acted on it has surprised many. Having been elected with a truncated mandate, few expected the NDA government to vigorously pursue this matter, especially since its implementation is far away.

The 'farsightedness' of the government in wanting to legislate on something to be implemented a decade from now is intriguing. Similar alacrity was exhibited in passing the Women's Reservation Bill (Nari Shakti Vandana Adhiniyam, labelled "a post-dated cheque") before the 2024 General Election. The difference is complete unanimity in passing the women's Bill but a total divergence in opinion about the desirability of the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill that pertains to ONOE.

The government won't mind referring the Bill to a joint parliamentary committee as this would satisfy the Opposition and reflect its own open-mindedness. The passage of the Bill in a hurry might not be the objective; bringing it on the table and opening up the possibility of a consensus would serve the purpose as everyone would feel they are deliberating a 'grand' electoral reform. But is it so?

Simultaneous polls were held for 15 years after 1951 without an express provision to this effect in the Constitution. The chain was broken due to the vicissitudes and dynamics of power politics. The right to vote in favour or against a government is an essential ingredient of a democracy. While the Bill doesn't take away the right of withdrawing support to a ruling party, it offers the voters the right to elect a government for a curtailed period in order to complete the "unexpired term" of the government that is voted out. Thus, an outgoing elected regime would pave the way for an incoming elected substitute for a limited period.

The voter will be electing the playing eleven once

every five years to fulfil the fetish of simultaneous elections and elect 'extras' or a 'nightwatchman' to replace an injured main player (government). The current system applicable to electing members of Parliament or legislative assemblies in a bye-election will now apply to the entire House in the event of mid-term polls. Parliamentarians may consider whether this twisting of the people's right would diminish the character of our democracy. What would be achieved by creating this duality? Is simultaneity such a sacred objective or a fundamental principle that issues affecting democratic choice should be thus subordinated to



managerial efficiency? The wisdom of the lawmakers is on trial. After all, the framers of the Constitution didn't provide for simultaneous elections and left it to the Election Commission of India (ECI) to act within the constitutional framework to deal with the exigencies of any situation. Nobody can dispute the benefits of a short, swift, single predictable exercise, especially when it involves a billion people. While holding elections is a routine democratic exercise, it is not like the UPSC conducting civil services exams once a year as per a fixed schedule. Administrative efficiency is desirable and there are ways in which the conduct of elections could be less time-consuming and involving less manpower. The excessive dependence on paramilitary forces, cited as a bottleneck forcing the ECI to conduct prolonged multi-phased elections, is due to the volatile nature of our politics and the vitriolic campaigning. The extant laws do empower the ECI to hold elections six months prior to the expiry of the term of any House, giving it a certain flexibility in scheduling and bunching elections for efficient management. However, recent examples show that the ECI has opted to stagger elections that could have been

easily combined. Clearly, expediency is more persuasive than a hidebound adherence to the principle of simultaneity.

Whether this so-called reform passes muster in Parliament or not, it is time the government and political parties took up more substantive electoral reforms pertaining to the issues of cash, crime, caste, community, the integrity of the electoral process, disqualification of candidates and capping the poll expenditure that have been suggested by the ECI and are languishing for long. Simultaneous elections are intended to reduce government expenditure in conducting elections, but what about controlling the use of black money in polls, and finding transparent ways for political funding? The Bill doesn't target these through the so-called reforms.

Let it be known that the Model Code of Conduct prohibits only a certain category of public expenditure with a view to denying the ruling party an unfair advantage by spending public resources. One wonders why ruling parties should wait till before the elections for taking major policy decisions and dub them as "disruptors of governance".

Further, elections in any state concern the voters and political leaders of that state, neither affecting the voters of other states nor the Central Government unless the party leadership is obsessed with campaigning everywhere, not letting the local leadership manage state-level campaigns. Would simultaneous elections further diminish the focus on elected local bodies and turn them into nondescript representatives of their central leadership rather than effective representatives of local voters?

The efficient conduct of elections is definitely a source of satisfaction, but a democracy needs much more. As parliamentarians spend their precious time making the conduct of elections more efficient in the distant future, they would do well to devote time to the issues affecting the people here and now. The hazardous air quality in the Capital, especially outside Parliament, the depletion of groundwater, the pollution of our rivers, the pathetic conditions of our educational institutions and public health facilities, and the environmental degradation facing the country are more immediate and pressing issues of governance and deserve their attention as much as the matter of simultaneous polls.

The citizens of India may not be exhausted by exercising their voting right frequently, but they might be exhausted waiting for their aspirations of a decent living to be fulfilled.

Terror alert in Punjab

Police force can't afford to let its guard down

TERROR groups working in tandem with gangsters, mostly based abroad, are keeping Punjab Police personnel on their toes. These are dangerous portents for a state that remained in the throes of militancy for a decade and is yet to fully recover from that prolonged nightmare. The targeting of police stations or posts in Majha, which is vulnerable to cross-border smuggling of guns, explosives and drugs, is a brazen attempt to dent the morale of law enforcement agencies and fuel tensions in the state. According to the police top brass, this is the handiwork of pro-Khalistan groups backed by the usual suspect — Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence. Handlers based in Germany and other Western countries are also in the thick of things, going by the recent arrest of three members of the Khalistan Zindabad Force terror module and the busting of an inter-



state gun racket. Two decades after rooting out militancy from the state, the Punjab Police had been jolted out of complacency in July 2015 when terrorists from Pakistan

stormed Dinanagar police station in Gurdaspur district. Barely five months later, the Pathankot airbase was attacked. The two incidents taught the police a harsh lesson — there is no room for laxity when anti-India elements are hell-bent on creating trouble. The latest surge in terror activities is another wake-up call — it should spur the state's cops to be more vigilant and work in closer coordination with Central organisations such as the Border Security Force and the National Investigation Agency.

The recent attempt on the life of former Deputy CM Sukhbir Singh Badal outside the Golden Temple is a stark reminder that violent extremism is not yet dead and buried in Punjab. The embers of radicalism are still glowing, with efforts afoot to resurrect the bogie of Khalistan. The onus is on the police to enforce the rule of law and reassure the people about their safety and security.

Buddha Nullah a toxic story of industrialisation

For restoring Buddha Nullah, strict regulations to enforce industrial compliance with environmental standards, robust monitoring of industrial discharge and heavy penalties for non-compliance are crucial.

Buddha nullah, once a pristine tributary of the Sutlej river, has endured a slow and painful decline for over 50 years. Flowing through Ludhiana, Punjab's industrial heartland, it is now an infamous toxic drain. It carries untreated industrial waste, urban sewage and agricultural runoff. The drain symbolises the environmental costs of industrialisation and urban expansion, coupled with human negligence.

Yet, despite the grim reality, a glimmer of hope persists. Restoration efforts, though challenging, offer the promise of renewal and resilience, provided they are supported by bureaucratic efficiency, political will and community participation. In its prime, Buddha Nullah was a lifeline for the region. Its clear waters nourished aquatic ecosystems, supported agriculture and contributed to the livelihoods of local farmers and businesses. However, it began declining as Ludhiana saw rapid industrialisation. Factories proliferated along the waterway, discharging untreated effluents. Domestic sewage, agricultural runoff and unchecked growth of dairies along its banks compounded the pollution. The effluents overwhelmed the nullah's natural ability to purify itself. Over time, it could no longer support the communities that once thrived along its banks.

Buddha Nullah's deterioration to a toxic drain has impacted the quality of life of the locals. Children contend with harmful fumes, exacerbating respiratory issues. Adults face chronic illnesses like skin diseases and gastrointestinal disorders directly linked to the polluted water. Fishing communities have abandoned their trade as aquatic life has vanished. The toxic water has not only deprived these communities of their livelihoods but also poses a broader public health crisis. Statistics paint a troubling picture. The health authorities have reported that respiratory diseases are 40 per cent more prevalent in areas near the nullah as compared to the unaffected regions. A 2022 study by Punjab

Agricultural University revealed alarmingly high levels of heavy metals like lead and chromium in the water, far exceeding the safe limits. These pollutants have seeped into the groundwater, further compromising public health. The polluted waters also contaminate the Sutlej river and Harike reservoir downstream. Being the vital sources of water for both Punjab and Rajasthan, the issue has strained inter-state water relations. Efforts to restore the nullah have been sporadic and riddled with challenges. Early attempts in the 1980s focused on awareness and monitoring industrial waste, but they lacked enforcement mechanisms. In the 1990s, industries were mandated to install effluent treatment plants (ETPs), but compliance was inconsistent, with many ETPs remaining dysfunctional. Bioremediation was also attempted, but success remained elusive.

Recent initiatives, such as the Buddha Nullah Rejuvenation Project and installation of sewage treatment plants (STPs) during 2018-2022, have been undermined by funding delays, poor enforcement and resistance to the removal of encroachments. The lack of coordination between government bodies and civil society organisations has further hindered progress, leaving the pollution and its impacts largely uncontained. The judicial interventions sought by environmentalists have been limited to ad hoc measures for a persistent problem. Deeper thought and innovative solutions for a durable impact are needed. Achieving meaningful progress requires a combination of policy reforms, technological innovation and active community engagement. The following strategies can help improve the situation. Stricter regulations are essential to enforce industrial compliance with environmental standards. Robust monitoring of industrial discharge and heavy penalties for non-compliance are crucial. A dedicated task force should oversee the implementation of these

regulations, holding the polluting industries accountable.

Relocating the most harmful industries to designated zones, supported by incentives, could mitigate environmental risks. Such incentives should be comparable with those offered to the new industries and those which move to safer places may also be allowed to



make commercial capital out of their present premises. Comprehensive policy reforms must prioritise the tributary's health with clear goals and timelines while ensuring that livelihoods are protected.

Expanding and updating treatment infrastructure is critical. Increasing the number of STPs and common effluent treatment plants (CETPs) will reduce the influx of untreated waste into the nullah. Real-time monitoring can ensure industrial effluents are treated before discharge. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping can identify pollution hotspots, allowing targeted interventions. Community

engagement is also vital for successful restoration efforts. Educating residents about waste segregation and proper disposal methods can reduce domestic garbage dumping into the nullah. Cleanliness campaigns involving local participation can remove pollutants and foster a collective sense of responsibility. Grassroots initiatives can transform public attitudes and promote environmentally responsible behaviour. It will

be in the interest of the industry to actively associate itself in such endeavours. A clean environment in Ludhiana may attract more industrial consumers. International examples offer valuable lessons. The Thames river in the UK, once known as "The Great Stink", was revitalised through sustained political will, heavy investment and implementation of strict environmental laws. The Rhine in Europe underwent a transformation due to coordinated global efforts. Similarly, the Ganga Action Plan has demonstrated the effectiveness of community involvement and public-private partnership. These examples demonstrate that with a committed, multifaceted approach, Buddha Nullah can also be restored. Restoring it is not merely an environmental endeavour; it is a chance to create a legacy of resilience and collective action. A revitalised tributary can once again sustain vibrant aquatic ecosystems and provide clean water for the local communities.

The future of Buddha Nullah, thus, lies in the hands of the government, industries and local communities. Together, they can restore it to its former glory. Even the most polluted waterways can be revived with determination and collaboration. Punjab and Punjabis can do it for sure.

Stock market today: BSE Sensex tanks over 150 points; Nifty50 near 23,900

NEW DELHI. Stock market today: BSE Sensex and Nifty50, the Indian equity benchmark indices, plunged in trade for the fifth consecutive day on Friday. While BSE Sensex was just above 79,000, Nifty50 was near 23,900. At 9:19 AM, BSE Sensex was trading at 79,049.92, down 168 points or 0.21%. Nifty50 was at 23,907.15, down 45 points or 0.19%.

On Thursday, Indian markets experienced a broad-based decline, following global market turbulence triggered by the US Federal Reserve's hawkish position on interest rates. Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking said: "Despite the weakness, oversold conditions and resilience in select pockets present buying opportunities. Traders are advised to align their positions carefully, with an emphasis on prudent stock selection." Markets remain under pressure following Fed's strict commentary. Support exists at 23,850, with resistance at 24,200, according to Rupak De of LKP Securities. US markets remained stable on Thursday after the Federal Reserve projected fewer rate cuts. Asian equities remained constrained in early Friday trading, as the US Federal Reserve's strict stance continued to affect American equities and bonds whilst strengthening the dollar. Gold prices were heading towards a weekly decline on Friday following the Federal Reserve's decision on monetary policy adjustments indicated slower rate reductions, whilst attention turned to the U.S. Personal Consumption Expenditure data scheduled later. Foreign portfolio investors became net sellers at Rs 4,224 crore on Thursday. Domestic institutional investors disposed of shares worth Rs 3943 crore. FIIs' net short position increased from Rs 1.01 lakh crore on Wednesday to Rs 1.25 lakh crore on Thursday.

Markets decline in early trade amid unabated foreign fund outflows

NEW DELHI. Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty declined in early trade on Friday amid unabated foreign fund outflows and concerns over the US Federal Reserve signalling fewer rate cuts next year. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 214.08 points to 79,003.97 in early trade. The NSE Nifty also dipped 63.8 points to 23,887.90. From the 30 blue-chip stocks, Axis Bank, Tech Mahindra, IndusInd Bank, JSW Steel, ITC, Larsen & Toubro, UltraTech Cement and HDFC Bank were the biggest laggards. In Asian markets, Seoul quoted lower while Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong were trading in the positive territory.

Wall Street ended on a mixed note on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,224.92 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. "The FII buying witnessed in early December is getting reversed now with this week's selling reaching Rs 12,229 crore. This change in FII strategy is getting reflected in market trends, too, with largecaps, particularly financials, coming under pressure due to FII selling. The negative response to the Fed's commentary yesterday will be temporary. Recovery led by largecaps is possible in the near-term," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said. Falling for the fourth day running, the 30-share BSE benchmark tanked 964.15 points or 1.20 per cent to settle at 79,218.05 on Thursday. The Nifty tumbled 247.15 points or 1.02 per cent to sink below the 24,000 mark at 23,951.70.

\$11.3 billion: Startup funding sees marginal rise in 2024

MUMBAI. After two years of funding slump, investments into India's startups are seeing some revival. Investors infused about \$11.3 billion into startups this year, a slight improvement from funding worth \$10.7 billion recorded last year, data sourced from market research firm Tracxn showed. In the coming year, companies are expected to see a sizeable amount of funding cheques but the deployment of capital will be cautious, keeping in line with the trend seen for quite sometime now and late-stage deals (over \$100 million) will take time to close, venture capital (VC) firms said.

Not to say that there's a lack of capital-VC firms raised an estimated \$2.5 billion in funding in 2024 alone compared to less than \$2 billion in 2023 and some of them plan to raise new funds in 2025; but investors want to ensure they make the right bets. "As investors, we are very clear that we need to see a company's path to profitability, we need to see good governance structures, assess firms' go-to market strategies deeply and figure out founders' ability to deliver. When you diligence all of these, it takes some time and investing capital takes longer," Padmaja Ruparel, co-founder at IAN (Indian Angel Network) Group told TOI.

Quick commerce player Zepto led startup funding this year having bagged \$1.4 billion in investments alone amid a surge in investor appetite for rapid deliveries.

A clutch of companies including Physics Wallah, Rebel Foods, Eruditus and Purple also managed to raise funding worth more than \$100 million from investors. There were also few big secondary transactions like Lenskart's \$200 million round. In a secondary deal, shares change hands among a company's investors and no money is added to the firm's coffers. Funding was rather uneven across quarters, probably hinting at a measured pace of deal closures. Funding in the December quarter (so far), for instance, slipped to a three year low of \$1.8 billion after touching \$3.5 billion in the September quarter. "Funding patterns have evolved towards fewer, larger rounds," said Neha Singh, co-founder at Tracxn.

Yet, the sheer size of the Indian market and the shift in consumption patterns towards better quality and more premium products creates growth opportunities for companies, making it an equally attractive bet for investors, industry experts said. "There is no lack of belief in the fundamental opportunity that exists in India. Growth opportunities will always be exciting and India is a growth market," said Sandeep Murthy, managing director at Lightbox India Advisors which plans to raise a new fund in the range of \$200 million next year.

Low affordability hits car demand: Kia India MD

NEW DELHI. With car prices going up between 35-50% over the past 3-4 years, owing to safety and emissions mandates, affording a vehicle has become difficult for mass consumers and sales are likely to see a moderate growth of 3-4% in the coming year, Kia India MD Gwanggu Lee said on Thursday. To generate demand, Lee suggests, govt can look at reducing taxes on cars from the current levels where mid-sized cars and bigger ones have a GST rate of over 45%, while smaller ones (under 4-meters) are taxed at over 28%.

As the company prepares to launch affordable EVs as well as other mainstream cars, Lee said that the increase in car prices came at a time when incomes for many middle-class users did not go up at the same pace.

As part of its strategy to perk up demand in the volume-laden entry SUV market, Kia drove in the all-new Syros mini offroader,



which will stand besides its Sonet model, also an under 4-meter car. Lee said that the boxy Syros, which will come with a 1-litre petrol engine and a 1.5-litre diesel, will also be offered with an electric version over the next one year. The company has developed the new vehicle after taking into account the customer

preferences here, something it also did during the development of the Seltos and Sonet SUVs and the Carens MPV. But while the company expects to generate healthy volumes from the new model, whose price will be revealed at a later date, the Syros also comes in a segment that is crowded. Formidable models

include Maruti Brezza, Tata Punch, Hyundai Venue, and Mahindra 3XO.

"Kia India has always been driven by a challenger spirit... With the Syros, we are further enhancing our product portfolio, and are confident of taking on the competition," Lee told TOI.

Kia India expects to sell nearly 2.6 lakh units this year, and Lee said the company is looking at 3-lakh unit sales next year. Despite the slowdown pangs, the Kia MD said that India still remains "one of the most promising markets" for the company globally. "The country is still amongst the fastest-growing economies of the world, promising a lot for carmakers."

Lee also said that the govt should not tamper with the duty benefits given to electric, which currently are taxed at 5%. A lower duty makes them affordable, or else the prices may be higher. "Without any tax incentive from govt, it will be very difficult."

Govt proposes new legislation to curb proliferation of illegal lending apps

If a regulated entity fails to provide information sought by the authority, they would be fined by up to Rs 5 lakh.

NEW DELHI. The government is planning a comprehensive legislature to curb the proliferation of illegal lending apps. The department of financial services, Ministry of Finance, has prepared a draft bill, which proposes severe punishment with jail term of up to 10 years and monetary fines of up to ₹1 crore for those found involved in promoting unregulated lending activities. The Bill seeks to ban all illegal lending activities whether carried out by digital means or otherwise. It has also proposed to designate an authority which would maintain a database of all authorised lenders operating in the country. The database will have a facility for the public to search any authorized lender



in the country. If a regulated entity fails to provide information sought by the authority, they would be fined by up to Rs 5 lakh.

Every regulated lender will have to inform the authority about the activities being undertaken by them. This information has to be shared by the authority with law enforcement authorities like the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and state police. The bill provides for not only severe punitive measures against those found involved in illegal lending, but also

raids without warrant against the alleged culprit. Mayank Arora, director-regulatory, Nangia Andersen India, says the intent of the proposed legislation is strong, as it provides for criminalisation of offences and punishments for persons involved as accomplice, apart from persons directly involved.

Two years ago, the RBI notified the Digital Lending Guidelines to curb unfair practices by regulated entities.

"One of the main issues in the digital lending domain is that the consumers are not aware of the real lenders as there is no physical interaction in the lending transaction. Unregulated entities used this to camouflage as authorised lenders, affecting the entire ecosystem," added Arora. Mushrooming illegal loan apps have become a menace in the country. These loan apps typically offer small loans at exorbitant high interest rates, and use extortionist ways to recover money from borrowers, forcing many borrowers to even take their own lives. Many of these apps operate from overseas countries with the help of little-known local finance companies.

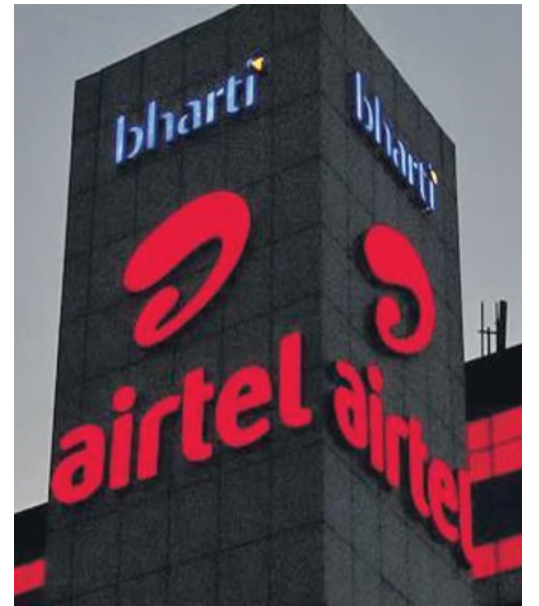
IT sector to drive 15% growth in hiring in 2025, followed by retail

BENGALURU. With the expansion of Global Capability Centers (GCCs) and multi-cloud adoption, the IT sector will drive 15% growth in hiring in 2025, as per the latest data from jobs platform foundit. It is followed by retail with 12% growth, telecommunications 11% and Banking and Financial Services (BFSI) with 10% growth.

foundit said the telecom sector's 11% forecasted growth is driven by advancements in AI, 5G, and IoT, with demand for skills in edge computing, SDN (software-defined networking), NFV (network function virtualisation) and cybersecurity. Overall, the talent platform predicts a

9% hiring growth in the country in 2025. Anupama Bhimrajka, Vice President - Marketing, foundit, said, "As we enter 2025, India's job market looks set to broaden its horizons, with a projected 9% growth in hiring. Companies are not only looking for seasoned professionals but also broadening their search beyond established hubs." "We believe this approach will create a healthier, more diverse environment, allowing businesses to access new talent pools and build a workforce aligned with future needs," she added. The report says technology advancements will drive demand for specialised talent, creating opportunities across

industries. Industries like manufacturing, healthcare, and telecom will adopt edge computing to power real-time IoT applications. Engineers and analysts skilled in managing connected devices and infrastructure will play a critical role. It also points out that with retail media expected to grow into a \$100 billion market, companies will hire digital marketers, programmatic ad managers, and strategists to tap into advertising opportunities on e-commerce platforms. Bengaluru to lead city-wise growth with a 10% job growth, followed by Coimbatore at 9%. The report added that the job market showed.



2015 auctions, amounting to Rs 7,904 crore. Airtel acquired spectrum worth ₹8.67 crore in 2012 and Rs 29,129 crore in the 2015 auction.

Earlier this year, in January 2024, the company prepaid Rs 8,325 crore to the telecom department to clear part of its deferred liabilities for the spectrum it acquired in the 2015 auction.

Airtel has consistently worked on prepaying its spectrum-related dues over the past few years. In July 2023, the company prepaid Rs 8,024 crore to the DoT, and in March 2022, it cleared ₹8,815 crore for airwaves bought in the 2015 auction. This was followed by a significant prepayment of Rs 15,519 crore in December 2021, which cleared all dues related to spectrum purchases in 2014.

Zerodha launches Margin Trading Facility: What it is and how it works

Zerodha's Nithin Kamath introduces Margin Trading Facility, enabling investors to leverage funds for stock delivery.

NEW DELHI. Zerodha CEO Nithin Kamath has announced the launch of the Margin Trading Facility (MTF), a feature that allows users to borrow funds to buy stocks for delivery. Despite initial reservations about market timing and potential risks for customers, Kamath emphasised the growing demand and the business need to offer MTF. Sharing the news on X, Nithin Kamath said, "I don't know if it is a good time with the fall in the markets, but we are finally launching MTF, which allows you to buy stocks for delivery by borrowing money from us." He added, "I haven't been sure about this product for a long time because of obvious reasons. Customers who trade for delivery tend to ignore the impact of the cost of borrowing, and there's always the risk of the trade going against them, which



leads to a bigger loss." Talking about the growth of MTF in the last few years, he said, "But in the last 3 to 4 years, MTF has grown tremendously, with pretty much everyone offering it. Considering the number of customers asking us for the feature, it didn't make business sense for us to not offer it."

WHAT IS MTF?

The Margin Trading Facility (MTF) enables investors to trade with leverage, allowing them to buy stocks for delivery even if they don't have the full amount upfront.

Investors can borrow up to 80% of the stock's value, depending on the stock. In simpler words, through MTF, investors pay only a portion of the total stock value, with the broker funding the remainder as a loan. Interest is charged on the borrowed amount, making MTF a strategic yet cost-sensitive trading option.

HOW DOES MTF WORK?

MTF allows investors to purchase stocks for delivery with leverage, enabling them to trade even if they don't have the full

amount. Up to 80% of the stock value can be borrowed, subject to an interest rate of 0.04% per day (Rs. 40 per lakh).

For example, if you want to buy shares worth Rs. 400 but have only Rs. 100, you can use MTF. Providing 25% of the total value as your initial investment, the broker funds the remaining Rs. 300, allowing you to purchase shares worth Rs. 400. The stocks must be pledged with the broker as per Sebi guidelines.

WEIGHING THE REWARDS AND RISKS

MTF can amplify your returns. If a stock you buy for Rs. 400 rises to Rs. 450, your profit of Rs. 50 translates to a 50% return on your Rs. 100 investment. However, if the price drops to Rs. 350, you lose Rs. 50, eroding 50% of your investment. While MTF offers the potential for higher gains, it also comes with increased risks due to leveraged trading and borrowing costs.

The Margin Trading Facility can be a powerful tool for maximising limited funds, but it demands responsible usage. Stay informed, diversify your investments, monitor balances, and have a clear exit strategy to navigate risks effectively and unlock the full potential of this feature.

Opposition boycotts Speaker's tea meet as tumultuous Parliament session ends

Delhi diversity: Signages to have info in four languages

► **Amid an uproar over the Ambedkar issue, both Houses adopted a motion to send One Nation One Election bills to a joint parliamentary committee for further scrutiny.**

New Delhi. The tumultuous winter session of Parliament saw no exception on the last day as an uproar by the opposition over the alleged insult to Dalit icon BR Ambedkar by Home Minister Amit Shah saw both the Houses being adjourned. As a mark of protest, the INDIA bloc skipped the Lok Sabha Speaker's customary tea party. Opposition leaders said there was no point in joining such a tea party when FIRs were being filed against their MPs, and they were not getting a chance to speak in the House.

ONE NATION ONE ELECTION BILLS SENT TO JOINT PANEL

Amid the din, both Houses adopted a motion to send the two bills to enable One Nation One Election to a 39-member joint parliamentary committee for further scrutiny.

In the Lok Sabha, the opposition shouted 'Jai Bhim' slogans as the Speaker read out directions barring demonstrations and protests at the gates of Parliament following the scuffle between BJP and INDIA bloc MPs on Thursday. As the protests continued, the



Speaker adjourned the House sine die. The Rajya Sabha also witnessed similar protests from the opposition, even as chairman Jagdeep Dhanekar said that such "persistent disruptions" were steadily eroding public trust in democratic institutions.

Dhanekar said the winter session's productivity was just 40.03%, with the Upper House functioning for just 43 hours and 27 minutes. "As Parliamentarians we are drawing severe criticism from the people of India and rightfully so... It is time to choose between meaningful debate and destructive

disruptions," he said before adjourning the House.

BJP, OPPOSITION HOLD PROTESTS

Before the session began, opposition MPs, including Congress's Priyanka Gandhi, held a protest march to Parliament from Vijay Chowk demanding Amit Shah's apology and resignation for allegedly "insulting" BR Ambedkar.

The BJP also held a counter-protest and party MP Aparajita Sarangi gifted Priyanka Gandhi a bag with '1984' written on it, referencing the year of the anti-Sikh riots. The Opposition and the BJP have been at loggerheads this week over Shah's remarks on Ambedkar in the Rajya Sabha during a debate on the Constitution. Matters came to a head on Thursday as MPs from both sides came face to face in the Parliament complex, resulting in injuries to two BJPMs.

The BJP alleged that its MP Pratap Sarangi was pushed by Congress's Rahul Gandhi. An FIR has been registered against Rahul Gandhi after the BJP filed a complaint accusing him of "physical assault and incitement".

Additionally, bureaucrats working with the Delhi government will also be required to display their names in the four languages on boards outside their offices.



NEW DELHI. To promote linguistic inclusivity, the city will soon feature Hindi, English, Punjabi, and Urdu on road signages, directional boards, and the names of the public places, in compliance with a recent directive from the Department of Arts, Culture and Language.

This order applies to metro stations, hospitals, public parks, and roads managed by the PWD. The department oversees 1,250 km of roads in the city, and updates to signages will begin immediately.

Additionally, bureaucrats working with the Delhi government will also be required to display their names in the four languages on boards outside their offices.

One Nation One Election bill referred to joint parliamentary panel

New Delhi. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Friday sent two bills that lay down the mechanism to hold simultaneous elections to a joint parliamentary committee that consisted of 39 MPs from both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

The Constitution (129th Amendment) bill and the Union Territories Amendment bill were introduced in the Lok Sabha after a fiery debate on December 17, with the Opposition terming the move "dictatorial" and Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal asserting that the legislation would not tamper with the powers enjoyed by states. According to a statement by the Lok Sabha Secretariat, the joint parliamentary committee, consisting of 27 Lok Sabha and 12 Rajya Sabha MPs, will scrutinise the bill and send its recommendation to the Lok Sabha Speaker.

The bills have been vehemently opposed by the Opposition MPs, who called the idea of simultaneous polls, terming it a violation of the "basic structure of the Constitution". Congress member Manish Tewari opposed the introduction of the bills, and termed the move an assault on the basic structure doctrine that stipulates certain features of the Constitution are beyond the amending power of Parliament.

"One of the essential features is federalism and the structure of our democracy. The bills assault the basic structure of the Constitution and exceed the legislative competence of this House," Tewari, a former Union minister, said. Samajwadi Party member Dharmendra Yadav said the measure to introduce "one nation, one election" by the BJP was an attempt to bring dictatorship in the country.

Meanwhile, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) leader and Lok Sabha MP Asaduddin Owaisi said that the bill will "finish off" the regional parties.

"This Bill is aimed at maximising political gain and convenience. This Bill will finish off regional parties," Owaisi said.

Total ban on crackers in Delhi, top court told



NEW DELHI. The Delhi government, on Thursday, apprised the Supreme Court that it has imposed a complete ban on manufacturing, storing, selling, and bursting all kinds of firecrackers in the national capital throughout the year with immediate effect.

"By December 19, 2024 order, it (Delhi government) has decided to completely ban firecrackers," the Delhi government told the two-judge bench of the apex court, led by Justice Abhay S Oka and Justice Augustine George Masih.

However, the Haryana government told the apex court that it has kept green crackers out of the ban. Rajasthan government, which is also affected by the air pollution, said it, too, has banned firecrackers completely in areas falling in the National Capital Region (NCR), while the Uttar Pradesh government said they have decided against banning the firecrackers completely.

After hearing these, the bench said that ban will only become effective only when all states forming part of NCR take the same decision on ban of firecrackers.

"For the time being, we direct Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to impose similar ban which is imposed by Delhi," the top court ordered. The Court was hearing the petition filed by noted environmentalist, M C Mehta, seeking appropriate directions and orders relating to air pollution in national capital and NCR.

The Court, on December 12, ordered Delhi government and other NCR states (Haryana, UP, and Rajasthan) to take a final call on prohibiting the use of firecrackers throughout the year.

Dalits, students' outfits stage demonstrations after Shah's speech on Ambedkar

The protests erupted following Shah's controversial remarks in Parliament.



NEW DELHI. Several organisations working on issues related to social justice and students' outfits held protests on Thursday accusing Home Minister Amit Shah of insulting B R Ambedkar. Some Dalit organisations

said bigger protests were being planned across the country. The protests erupted following Shah's controversial remarks in Parliament. The NSUI president, Varun Choudhary, said, "Amit Shah has not only insulted Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar but also disrespected our nation. We demand a public apology from him. If he fails to do so, he must resign immediately."

Echoing this sentiment, the AISA organised a protest at Ambedkar University Delhi (AUD), where students burned effigies of Shah. A senior AISA leader said, "Amit Shah's statement is not a casual remark; it is a deliberate insult to Ambedkar's legacy of equality and social justice. We demand a public apology."

SFI state committee member Sohan said, "Shah's remarks shows his deeply rooted hatred towards Ambedkar."

AAP steps up heat over Shah's remarks against Ambedkar

► **Two Indian Coast Guard patrol vessels arrived in the Maldives for a four-day visit focused on enhancing maritime collaboration, environmental protection, and regional security aligning with India's SAGAR framework.**

NEW DELHI. The Aam Aadmi Party on Thursday demanded an apology and resignation from Union Home Minister Amit Shah over his remarks on B R Ambedkar in Parliament.

With Delhi Assembly elections approaching, party sources revealed that AAP is positioning this issue to consolidate its Dalit voter base and retain dominance in the 12 reserved seats of the national capital. Dalit voters constitute nearly 17-18% of Delhi's electorate and play a decisive role in about 30 constituencies. While AAP traditionally dominates Dalit support in Assembly polls, the BJP has garnered significant backing from the community during Lok Sabha elections.

The reserved constituencies include Bawana, Sultan Pur Majra, Mangolpuri, Karol Bagh, Patel Nagar, Madipur, Deoli, Ambedkar



Nagar, Trilokpuri, Kondli, Seemapuri, and Gokalpuri. Additionally, constituencies like Bijwasan, Narela, Nangloi, and Shahdara also see strong Dalit voter influence. AAP swept all 12 reserved seats in the 2015 and 2020 Assembly elections.

However, in the 2014, 2019, and 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP outperformed AAP and Congress in these segments. Despite the

AAP-Congress alliance in the 2024 general elections, BJP secured victory in 8 of the 12 reserved constituencies. Facing anti-incumbency, AAP has reportedly changed candidates on several seats to address voter dissatisfaction.

AAP sources suggest that the party will intensify its focus on Dalit constituencies and leverage Shah's remarks as a key campaign issue. "AAP is making Shah's statement a central issue to regain Dalit voter trust. It aims to highlight the BJP's alleged disrespect toward Babasaheb Ambedkar," said a senior party source. Addressing the controversy, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal criticised the BJP and accused it of betraying Ambedkar's legacy.

Speaking after offering prayers at Valmiki Mandir, he said, "Those who revere Babasaheb must reject the BJP."

After Priyanka Gandhi, BJP MP makes a statement with '1984' bag

BJP MP Aparajita Sarangi gifted Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi a bag referencing the 1984 anti-Sikh riots after her earlier statement in Parliament with bags featuring Palestinian motifs, sparking political controversy.

New Delhi. Days after Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi made a political statement in Parliament by carrying bags featuring motifs of Palestine and Bangladesh, BJP MP Aparajita Sarangi on Friday gifted Gandhi a bag with '1984', written on it, referencing the year of the anti-Sikh riots. Following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards, widespread riots broke out against Sikhs in 1984, during which over 2730 people from the community were killed, according to Union Home Ministry data. The Nanavati Commission, appointed to investigate the riots, concluded that Congress leaders including top figures Jagdish Tytler, Sajjan Kumar HKL Bhagat, were responsible for the riots. On December 16, Priyanka Gandhi turned up in Parliament with a bag



emblazoned with "Palestine" on it, along with other Palestinian symbols, including a watermelon, a long-recognised motif of resistance in the region, as well as a pattern of keffiyeh, a Palestinian stole.

Congress leaders called it a "gesture of compassion, commitment to justice and humanity", as Israel's ongoing bombardment killed thousands and displaced many in Palestine.

However, it was slammed by the BJP, accusing the Congress MP of remaining silent over the atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh.

"She did not speak a word on atrocities on Hindus in Bangladesh but wants to make a fashion statement with the Palestine bag," BJP MP and Anurag Thakur said. Other BJP leaders, including Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also criticised her. The next day, on December 17, she arrived in Parliament carrying a bag that read, "We stand with the Hindus and Christians of Bangladesh".

Just a week ago, the Congress MP was also seen carrying a bag with a picture of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and billionaire industrialist Gautam Adani on one side and the slogan "Modi Adani Bhai Bhai" printed on the other.



NEWS BOX

Man suspected of killing three people fatally shot by police near Chicago

BERWYN. A man suspected in the fatal shootings of three people in central Illinois was shot and killed by police after opening fire on them in suburban Chicago, authorities said Thursday. Officers in Berwyn responded to a report of a man with a gun around 11:30 p.m. Wednesday. The man ran away and forced his way into a home where he fatally shot two dogs, police said. He then ran into a nearby yard where he refused police commands to stop. The man then shot at Berwyn officers and they returned fire, killing him. The man later was identified as John Lyons, 24, of Westchester, west of Chicago.

Police said he was suspected in the fatal shootings of three people at a home in Mahomet, about 120 miles (190 kilometers) southwest of Chicago. One of the victims, identified Thursday by Champaign County Coroner Laurie Brauer as Sara E. Mason, 26, died at the scene where the three were found about 9:40 p.m. Wednesday. The other two, Janis Mason, 61, and Caleb Mason, 23, were both pronounced dead at a nearby hospital, WCIO-TV reported. A vigil was held for the victims at a local church Thursday evening.

UK Teen Drowns in Reservoir As Friends Mistook Waving For Joke

World A teenager in the UK who did not know how to swim, drowned in a reservoir as his friends thought he was "joking" when he started waving for help, according to a report in The Telegraph. 16-year-old Tyrese Johnson was out with his friends on the last day of the school at Lodge Farm Reservoir, in Netherton, Dudley, in July, earlier this year when the incident took place. A friend said during the inquest hearing that he saw Mr Johnson waving but initially believed it to be a joke with others having a laugh as well. The situation, however, soon turned grim as Mr Johnson disappeared beneath the surface.

As per the group of friends, they had been in the water for under three minutes when Mr Johnson started facing difficulty. The water had been shallow but then the ground below suddenly dropped off "like a cliff edge" into deep water, which led to Mr Johnson's drowning, the friends said at the Black Country coroners court.

The friends desperately tried to pull him out but could not with one brave paddler diving under the surface for 40 minutes. Mr Johnson's body was only recovered the following day around 11:30 am.

"I could see six or seven lads on the edge of the water — three were in the water and it looked like they were having a laugh like lads do," James Birks, the paddler, told the court. "Then the tone changed and I realised someone was struggling," added Mr Birks. Mr Birks said he heard people shouting "he's drowning" and paddled over. He dived into the water to the point where Mr Johnson should have been, but the water was muddy. "I wish I could have done more to help," Mr Birks added. Tribute from family

In a tribute released by the family, Mr Johnson's parents said their son had been afraid of water and "never wanted to go to swimming lessons or go into the pool when on family holidays".

Early Signs Suggest Trump 2.0 Will Be Bringing The Chaos Back

Washington. Donald Trump still has a month until he becomes US president but he has already displayed his unique capacity to sow confusion and steal headlines with remarks belittling Canada, intimidating the media and torpedoing a budget deal in Congress.

"We're going to see more chaos in Trump's second term than his first," said Todd Belt, political science professor at George Washington University. "I think what has happened this week is a good indication of what is to come." He added that a Supreme Court ruling that grants presidents sweeping immunity for official acts will give Trump "more of an opportunity to act on his worst impulses."

The Republican has stolen the limelight from outgoing President Joe Biden, who has largely



disappeared from public view in his final weeks in office. On Monday, Trump gave his first news conference since winning the November 5 election, talking to journalists for more than an hour about various topics — and savoring the attention. "Everyone wants to be my friend," he said when commenting on the visits of various billionaire tech CEOs and other leaders to his Florida residence, which he will leave on January 20 for the White House. He told reporters that he wanted to "straighten out" the press — something his team has pursued through lawsuits that observers and rights groups worry are signs of escalating censorship tactics. While commenting on a wide gamut of issues, Trump has also shown that he has not changed in his predilection towards delivering vague, sometimes contradictory, messages. Take vaccines, for example. The Republican said that he is a "big believer" in the polio vaccine, but also sowed doubt over a widely debunked link between vaccination and autism. "There's something wrong. And we're going to try finding that," Trump said, noting a rise in autism cases in the United States that experts say is due to changes to diagnostic criteria, increased awareness and better screening.

'Decision to invade Ukraine should have been made earlier': Putin at annual news conference

MOSCOW. President Vladimir Putin boasted that his military operation in Ukraine has strengthened Russia and denied that the ouster of key ally Bashar Assad in Syria had hurt Moscow's prestige, as he took questions at his annual news conference and call-in show Thursday.

He used the tightly choreographed event, which lasted about 4 and a half hours, to reinforce his authority and demonstrate a sweeping command of everything from consumer prices to military hardware.

Sending troops into Ukraine in 2022 has boosted Russia's military and economic power, Putin said, adding that if he could do it over, "such a decision should have been made earlier" and Russia could have "prepared for it in advance and more thoroughly." "Russia has become much stronger over the past two or three years because it has become a truly sovereign country," he said. "We are standing firm in terms of economy, we are strengthening our defense potential and our military capability now is the strongest in the world." Putin, who has held power for

nearly a quarter-century and began another six-year term earlier this year, said the military was "advancing toward achieving our goals" in what he calls the special military operation in Ukraine. In response to a question about a new hypersonic ballistic missile that Russia used for the first time last month to strike Ukraine, Putin scoffed at claims by some Western experts that it could be intercepted by NATO's air defences. He mockingly challenged Ukraine's allies to a "high-tech duel," suggesting that Moscow could give advance notice of a strike on Kyiv with the Oreshnik missile and see if the West could protect the city. "Let them select a target, possibly in Kyiv, put their air defense assets there and we shall strike it with the Oreshnik," he said with a dry smile. "Let's see what happens."

Speaking on a visit to Brussels, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy responded to Putin's comment by asking, "Do you think it's a sane person?" Putin calls general's killing a security 'blunder' Russia is making steady, if slow,



advances in Ukraine, but has also suffered embarrassing setbacks. On Tuesday, Lt. Gen Igor Kirillov was killed by a bomb planted outside his apartment building in Moscow — a brazen assassination claimed by Ukraine that brought the conflict once again to the streets of the Russian capital.

Putin described Kirillov's killing as a "major blunder" by Russia's security agencies, noting they should learn from it and improve their efficiency. Moscow's troops are also battling Ukrainian forces in the Russian region of Kursk, where they have launched an incursion. Asked when they

would drive the Ukrainians out, Putin said "we will certainly kick them out" but wouldn't say how long it would take.

In a flourish typical of the marathon news conferences, he asked members of the audience to unfurl a banner presented to him by marines fighting in Kursk as he spoke about Ukraine. Open to talks on Ukraine but reiterates Russia's demands Putin said he was open to possible talks with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, who has pledged to negotiate a deal to end the conflict in Ukraine.

"If we meet with Mr. Trump, we will have things to discuss," he said, without elaborating. Putin said Russia also is open for compromise in potential peace talks on Ukraine. "Politics is the art of compromise," he said. "We have always said that we are ready for both talks and compromises." At the same time, Putin added that the talks should be based on "the situation on the ground" referring to some of the conditions he previously laid out.

Russian Prez Putin Once Again Hails India's Growing Economy Under PM Modi

Moscow. Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday once again acknowledged India's growing economic prowess while highlighting his government's continued efforts to keep the overall economic situation in the country normal and stable despite the long and ongoing conflict with Ukraine. "International financial and economic institutions have placed Russia first in Europe in terms of economic volume, purchasing power parity, and fourth in the world. Ahead are China, the United States, and India. We overtook Germany last year and have overtaken Japan this year. But this is not an indicator that we should fall asleep and calm down on. Of course not," said Putin while answering questions during his annual press conference in Moscow on Thursday. He mentioned that the Russian economy continues to develop despite external threats and attempts to influence it. "Everything is developing, everything is actively moving forward. If the Eurozone has fallen asleep, then there are other centres of world

development, they are also moving forward. And in the Eurozone and in the States, the situation is also changing. We must maintain the momentum, change the quality of our



economy," Putin asserted. Earlier this month, the Russian President had lauded Prime Minister Modi's 'India-first' policy and the 'Make in India' initiative while expressing Russia's willingness to establish manufacturing operations in India. Addressing the 15th VTB Russia Calling Investment Forum in Moscow, Putin had drawn parallels between Russia's import substitution programme and India's 'Make in India'

initiative. Prime Minister Modi has a similar programme called 'Make in India'. We are also ready to set up our manufacturing operations in India. The Indian government, under the Prime Minister's leadership, has been creating stable conditions, driven by a policy of putting India first. We believe that investing in India is profitable," the Russian President said. In September, during his one-on-one meeting with National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval in Saint Petersburg, Putin had hailed India's rising global stature and the strength of its growing economy under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. "Our special privileged strategic partnership is gaining momentum, gaining strength, which we are only happy about. We are also happy about India's success in building, strengthening its statehood, and developing the economy, which is happening under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi," the Russian President had said during his meeting with NSA Doval.

Pakistan's Pickup Trucks: A Status Symbol Showing Country's Power Gulf

Karachi, Pakistan. In Pakistan's largest city, cars inch forward in bumper-to-bumper traffic. But some seamlessly carve through the jam: SUVs flanked by Toyota Hilux pickup trucks.

The Hilux has become a symbol of power, affluence and intimidation in a society marked by significant class divisions. "The vehicle carries an image that suggests anyone escorted by one must be an important figure," 40-year-old politician Usman Perhyar told AFP. "It has everything -- showiness, added security and enough space for several people to sit in the open cargo bed."

On Karachi's chaotic roads, Hiluxes part the traffic — speeding up behind cars and flashing their lights demanding drivers move out of their way. The Hilux first became popular among feudal elites for its reliability in rural and mountain regions. But in recent years, the "Dala", as it is locally known, has soared in popularity as an escort vehicle among newly successful urban business owners. Guards with faces wrapped in scarves and armed with AK-47s can be packed into the back of the truck, its windows blacked out. "It is a status

symbol. People have one or two pickups behind them," said Fahad Nazir, a car dealer based in Karachi.

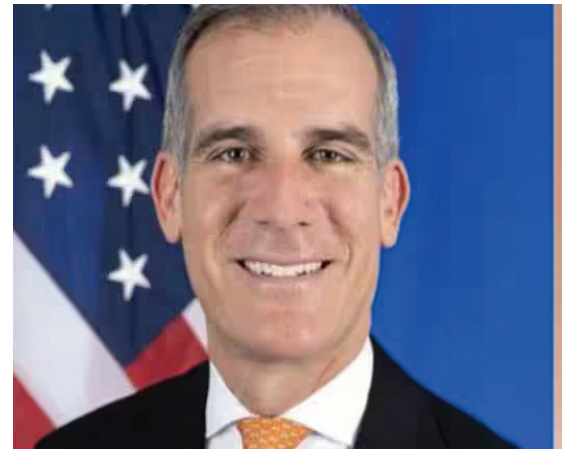
Vehicle for politics The Hilux debuted in 1968, but the model that became popular in Pakistan was the mid-2000s Hilux Vigo. It was later upgraded and rebranded as the Revo, with prices ranging from 10 to 15 million rupees (approximately \$36,000 to \$54,000). Their prices have remained steady and they retain excellent resale value in a market traditionally dominated by their manufacturer, Toyota. "Amongst whatever luxury items we have, this is the fastest-selling item," car seller Nazir told AFP. Dealers say there was a spike in rentals during February's national elections. "I swear to God, you can't run an election without a Revo," said Sajjad Ali Soomro, a provincial parliamentarian from Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. In the eastern city of Gujrat, politician Ali Warraich — from the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party — finds it essential to travel with an escort of two of the trucks. "It is a status symbol. People

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Vehicle for politics The Hilux debuted in 1968, but the model that became popular in Pakistan was the mid-2000s Hilux Vigo. It was later upgraded and rebranded as the Revo, with prices ranging from 10 to 15 million rupees (approximately \$36,000 to \$54,000). Their prices have remained steady and they retain excellent resale value in a market traditionally dominated by their manufacturer, Toyota. "Amongst whatever luxury items we have, this is the fastest-selling item," car seller Nazir told AFP. Dealers say there was a spike in rentals during February's national elections. "I swear to God, you can't run an election without a Revo," said Sajjad Ali Soomro, a provincial parliamentarian from Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. In the eastern city of Gujrat, politician Ali Warraich — from the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party — finds it essential to travel with an escort of two of the trucks.

So let us renew our commitment to being more ambitious, to not settling for what is, and what is good, but reaching for what can be and what will be great." The US Ambassador further praised India's workforce, calling it as the "most extraordinary resources that humanity has on its planets."

Garcetti said, "And to realise these ambitions, we must recommit ourselves to a mutual path of trust and transparency so that people know what to expect. India's workforce, which numbers more than a billion people, is one of the most extraordinary resources that humanity has on its planet. They are builders, thinkers, innovators and entrepreneurs. The Indian dream is the flip side of what we used to call the American dream. In some ways you see it even more optimistically sometimes than our own country. And we can leave inspired when we work together about what's possible." Garcetti also called for merging "American scientific and financial acumen" with "India's grassroots ingenuity." The US and India can create ecosystems that tap into this human capital to merge American scientific strengths in research, our financial acumen and business strategy with Indians' jugaad finding a solution to everything, your deep talent pools, your grassroots ingenuity and your readiness to scale solutions on a massive level," Garcetti said.



House rejects Trump-backed plan on government shutdown, leaving next steps uncertain

WASHINGTON. A day before a potential government shutdown, the House resoundingly rejected President-elect Donald Trump's new plan Thursday to fund operations and suspend the debt ceiling, as Democrats and dozens of Republicans refused to accommodate his sudden demands. In a hastily convened evening vote punctuated by angry outbursts over the self-made crisis, the lawmakers failed to reach the two-thirds threshold needed for passage — but House Speaker Mike Johnson appeared determined to reassess, before Friday's midnight deadline.

"We're going to regroup and we will come up with another solution, so stay tuned," Johnson said after the vote. The cobbled-together plan didn't even get a majority, with the bill failing 174-235. The outcome proved a massive setback for Trump and his billionaire ally, Elon Musk, who rampaged against Johnson's bipartisan compromise, which Republicans and Democrats had reached earlier to prevent a Christmas-time government shutdown.

It provides a preview of the turbulence ahead when Trump returns to the White House with Republican control of the House and Senate. During his first term, Trump led Republicans into the longest government shutdown in history during the 2018 Christmas season, and interrupted the holidays in 2020 by tanking a bipartisan COVID-relief bill and forcing a do-over.

Hours earlier Thursday, Trump announced "SUCCESS in Washington!" in coming up with the new package which would keep government running for three more months, add \$100.4 billion in disaster assistance including for hurricane-hit states, and allow more borrowing through Jan. 30, 2027. "Speaker Mike Johnson and the House have come to a very good Deal," Trump posted. But Republicans, who had spent 24 hours largely negotiating with themselves to cut out the extras conservatives opposed and come up with the new plan, ran into a wall of resistance from Democrats, who were in no hurry to

appease demands from Trump — or Musk. House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said Democrats were sticking with the original deal with Johnson and called the new one "laughable." "It's not a serious proposal," Jeffries said as he walked to Democrats' own closed-door caucus meeting. Inside, Democrats were chanting, "Hell, no!" All day, Johnson had been fighting to figure out how to meet Trump's almost impossible demands — and keep his own job — while federal offices are being told to prepare to shutter operations. The new proposal whittled the 1,500-page bill to 116 pages and dropped a number of additions — notably the first pay raise for lawmakers in more than a decade, which could have allowed as much as a 3.8% bump. That drew particular scorn as Musk turned his social media army against the bill. Trump said early Thursday that Johnson will "easily remain speaker" for the next Congress if he "acts decisively and tough" in coming up with a new plan to also raise the debt limit, a stunning request just

before the Christmas holidays that has put the beleaguered speaker in a bind.

And if not, the president-elect warned of trouble ahead for Johnson and Republicans in Congress. "Anybody that supports a bill that doesn't take care of the Democrat quicksand known as the debt ceiling should be primaried and disposed of as quickly as possible," Trump told Fox News Digital. The tumultuous turn of events, coming as lawmakers were preparing to head home for the holidays, sparks a familiar reminder of what it's like in Trump-run Washington. Musk and Vice President-elect JD Vance tried to blame Democrats, though rank-and-file Republicans helped sink Trump's plan. "They've asked for a shutdown," Vance said of Democrats. "That's exactly what they're going to get."

For Johnson, who faces his own problems ahead of a Jan. 3 House vote to remain speaker, Trump's demands left him severely weakened, forced to abandon his word with Democrats and work into the night to broker the new approach.

NEWS BOX

Australia selector explains 'very difficult decision' of dropping Nathan McSweeney

Australia's chief selector George Bailey has addressed the decision to replace Nathan McSweeney with 19-year-old Sam Konstas for the Boxing Day Test against India, explaining that the move was intended to bring a "point of difference" to the squad. Australia recently announced their 15-member team for the final two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, with Konstas coming in for McSweeney, who had only made his Test debut in this BGT series opener in Perth. McSweeney, who debuted in the ongoing series, was dropped after just three matches, a move that sparked mixed reactions amongst fans and former cricketers alike. However, Bailey emphasised that the decision was made to strengthen Australia's top-order batting, which has struggled against India's formidable pace attack, particularly Jasprit Bumrah, who has been in some record-breaking form down under. "We remain confident Nathan has the ability and temperament to succeed at Test level in the future...It was a difficult decision to leave him out," Bailey told cricket.com.au on McSweeney.



"It has clearly been a challenge at the top of the order for batters throughout the series, and we want to provide the option of a different line-up for the next two matches... Sam gets a call-up to the Test squad for the first time. His style of batting offers a point of difference and we look forward to watching his game develop further," he added. Australia's batting unit took a concerning shape in the second innings of the Brisbane Test, where the lineup faltered despite a stellar first-innings performance. Travis Head had smashed 152 off 160 balls, and Steve Smith added a solid 101, but their collapse in the latter innings raised questions about the consistency of their opening pair in McSweeney and Usman Khawaja. McSweeney, who was shifted to the opener's role despite being a middle-order batter in domestic cricket, struggled to adapt, scoring only 72 runs across six innings—a record low for an Australian opener in their first six innings in over five decades. Khawaja, the senior opener, has also faced challenges, averaging just 12 runs in the series with a top score of 21. However, the selectors chose to back Khawaja while dropping McSweeney, prioritising experience over youth.

R Ashwin retires: India's greatest match-winner deserved more respect

Ravichandran Ashwin, one of cricket's most decorated spinners, stunned the cricketing world with the announcement of his retirement. The abruptness of his decision has left fans and experts alike grappling with the void his departure creates. For a player of his stature, the goodbye felt all too quiet, almost unworthy of a cricketer who has done so much for Indian cricket.

India's most successful off-spinner deserved a grand farewell. He merited the roar of a packed stadium, a guard of honour, and the chance to weave his magic one last time on the field. Instead, his announcement came in a room full of reporters at the end of the third Test in Brisbane. There were no rousing tributes or emotional speeches to a stadium filled with adoring fans. Ashwin's final words as an Indian cricketer were shared in



the dressing room, amidst scattered teammates, a low-key farewell to a high-impact career. The only solace is that Ashwin walked away on his terms. As skipper Rohit Sharma observed, the off-spinner saw the writing on the wall and decided there was no point in continuing if his services were no longer required. Still, one cannot help but wonder if the lack of a regular spot in the playing XI, despite his extraordinary record, weighed heavily on his decision.

ASHWIN DESERVED A BETTER FAREWELL

Ashwin's father, Ravichandran, alleged that his son faced humiliation, which may have influenced his decision to retire during India's ongoing tour of Australia. While he could not pinpoint a specific incident, it appears he was pointing fingers at how his son was repeatedly overlooked in overseas tours. World Cup-winning captain Kapil Dev lamented the unceremonious nature of Ashwin's departure, stressing the importance of a respectful send-off for such a legendary all-rounder. "The next generation has to be better than us. If not, the world is not going ahead."

Australia drop Nathan McSweeney for Boxing Day Test, add teenage opener to squad

Border-Gavaskar Trophy: Australia named a 15-man squad for the last two tests against India on Friday. In a bold call, the Australian selectors dropped Nathan McSweeney and roped in 19-year-old Sam Konstas. Pacers Jhye Richardson and Sean Abbott also returned to the squad.

Melbourne. Australia dropped their latest Test debutant, Nathan McSweeney, after just the first three matches in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Australia announced a 15-member squad for the last two Tests of the series. The fourth Test, a Boxing Day blockbuster, starts December 26 in Melbourne. Teenager Sam Konstas has been added to the squad and he is likely to open the batting with Usman Khawaja at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. While the decision to drop 25-year-old Nathan McSweeney after just three Tests

has divided opinions, Australia have added the attacking Sam Konstas in a bid to inject some firepower at the top of the order. McSweeney, who made his debut in Perth, had a tough time dealing with Jasprit Bumrah in the first three games.

Meanwhile, Australia have also recalled express pacer Jhye Richardson to the squad for the first time in three years. Along with him, pacer Sean Abbott and Tasmania all-rounder Beau Webster have been added to the squad, which is 15 members in size.

AUSTRALIA SQUAD FOR LAST 2 TESTS OF BGT 2024-25

Pat Cummins (c), Travis Head (vc), Steve Smith (vc), Sean Abbott, Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Josh Inglis, Usman Khawaja, Sam Konstas, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Marsh, Jhye Richardson, Mitchell Starc, Beau Webster.

WHY WAS MCSWEENEY DROPPED?

25-year-old McSweeney was slotted into the opening spot in Perth despite him being a middle-order batter in domestic cricket. McSweeney struggled to get going and keep the scoreboard moving in the first three Tests of the series. While Usman Khawaja, the senior opener, has also struggled, scoring with an average of just 12 and a top score of



21 so far in the series. However, Australia have backed their senior opener and dropped the youngster, who is just three Test matches old. McSweeney has managed 72 runs in his first six innings, the lowest by an Australian opener in 50 years in the first six of their career in the longest format of the game. Chief selector George Bailey explained the decision, backing McSweeney's ability to find success at the highest level, adding Sam Konstas' ability to score at a good pace worked in his favour.

"We remain confident Nathan has the ability and temperament to succeed at Test level in the future," Bailey said. "It was a difficult decision to leave him out," he added.

BIG BACKING FOR SAM KONSTAS

Australia have rewarded 19-year-old Sam

Konstas for some exciting performances in the ongoing season. Known for his aggressive approach, Konstas is expected to fill the void that David Warner left in the Australian Test team.

25-year-old McSweeney was slotted into the opening spot in Perth despite him being a middle-order batter in domestic cricket. McSweeney struggled to get going and keep the scoreboard moving in the first three Tests of the series. While Usman Khawaja, the senior opener, has also struggled, scoring with an average of just 12 and a top score of 21 so far in the series. However, Australia have backed their senior opener and dropped the youngster, who is just three Test matches old. McSweeney has managed 72 runs in his first six innings, the lowest by an Australian opener in 50 years in the first six of their career in the longest format of the game. Chief selector George Bailey explained the decision, backing McSweeney's ability to find success at the highest level, adding Sam Konstas' ability to score at a good pace worked in his favour. "We remain confident Nathan has the ability and temperament to succeed at Test level in the future," Bailey said. "It was a difficult decision to leave him out," he added.

Who is Sam Konstas 19-year-old Australian opener set for Boxing Day Test debut

New Delhi Australia are set to hand teenage opener Sam Konstas his Test debut in the Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. After months of anticipation, Konstas has finally received his Test call-up for the final two matches of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. It promises to be a baptism by fire for the young New South Wales cricketer, but the Australian cricket community is quietly confident that Konstas will thrive under pressure. On Friday, December 20, Australia announced a 15-man squad for the last two Tests against India. With the series level at 1-1 after Australia were denied victory at the Gabba, the selectors have made some pivotal changes to the squad. In a major decision, they have dropped 25-year-old Nathan McSweeney after just three Test matches. McSweeney, who struggled against the Jasprit Bumrah-led pace attack, scored only 72 runs across six innings—the lowest tally for an Australian Test opener in their first six knocks since 1974.

Usman Khawaja fared no better. The 38-year-old managed just 63 runs in six innings but retained his place due to the invaluable experience he offers. Border-Gavaskar Trophy: Full Coverage

Australia appear to have learned a hard lesson.



When McSweeney, primarily a middle-order batsman in domestic cricket, was added to the squad at the start of the series, doubts were raised about his ability to handle India's high-quality attack. McSweeney struggled to keep the scoreboard moving, and Khawaja's poor form exacerbated the fragility of Australia's top order.

WHO IS SAM KONSTAS

By including Sam Konstas, Australia hope to inject aggressive intent at the top of the order. Konstas enters the Border-Gavaskar Trophy with an impressive record across formats. In December 2024, Konstas made

his debut for the Sydney Thunder in the Big Bash League. Opening alongside David Warner, he smashed a blistering 57 off 26 balls, marking the fastest half-century in Sydney Thunder's history. His innings included eight boundaries and two sixes, playing a key role in the team's victory over the Adelaide Strikers.

Konstas also featured for the Prime Minister's XI in a pink-ball warm-up match against India at Manuka Oval. He scored an outstanding 107 off 97 balls, including 14 fours and a six, against a formidable Indian bowling attack featuring Mohammed Siraj and Ravindra Jadeja. This performance further solidified his reputation as a rising star in Australian cricket. In October-November 2024, Konstas was selected for Australia A in their series against India A. In the second unofficial Test, he played a crucial role with an unbeaten 73 in the second innings, helping secure a victory for his team.

'LIKE CLARKE, WARNER AND SMITH'

With 736 runs across formats this summer, Konstas has drawn widespread acclaim from cricketing legends and commentators. Former England captain Michael Vaughan had championed his inclusion in the Test squad, describing him as "fearless" and "unflappable."

Bangladesh secure 1st-ever 3-0 T20I sweep vs West Indies after Jaker Ali special

Kingstown. Bangladesh capped off a strong comeback on their Caribbean tour with a commanding 80-run win over West Indies in the third T20I at Arnos Vale, St. Vincent, on December 20. This victory secured a 3-0 series sweep, marking their first clean sweep in T20Is in nearly two years. Batting first, Bangladesh set a formidable total of 189/7, their highest T20I score in the West Indies. Jaker Ali played a starring role, smashing an unbeaten 72 off just 41 balls. The bowlers then delivered a clinical performance, bundling out the West Indies for 109, their lowest-ever T20I total against Bangladesh.

Jaker Ali Shines Bright

Jaker Ali continued his stellar form, anchoring the innings with six sixes and three fours. The match saw a dramatic moment when Jaker appeared to be run out after a mix-up with Shamim Hossain. However, the third umpire adjudged Shamim out instead, allowing Jaker to resume his innings. He



capitalised on the reprieve, smashing 20 runs off the 18th over and three sixes in the final over bowled by Alzarri Joseph, leading Bangladesh to a strong finish. Earlier, Parvez Hossain Emon provided a quick start, replacing the injured Soumya Sarkar. His 39 off 21 balls included two sixes and four boundaries, helping Bangladesh score 54 runs in the powerplay. Despite losing wickets in the middle overs, Jaker's

brilliance ensured a competitive total.

ishad Hossain's Impactful Bowling

Bangladesh's bowlers, led by Rishad Hossain, dominated the West Indies batting lineup. Taskin Ahmed set the tone by dismissing Brandon King early, while Mahedi Hasan continued his fine run by removing Nicholas Pooran for the third time in the series. Rishad Hossain was the standout performer with 3/20, executing a sharp run-out of Johnson Charles and dismissing Rovman Powell, Gudakesh Motie, and Alzarri Joseph. The hosts struggled to build partnerships, with Johnson Charles and Nicholas Pooran offering the only resistance. This sweep marked a significant turnaround for Bangladesh, coming after a 3-0 loss in the ODI series. The emphatic performances from Jaker Ali and Rishad Hossain signal promising prospects for the team as they build momentum for future challenges.



with boys every time," Akshita said in an exclusive interview with India Today. But he, my mother and brother supported me; they said, 'khelo, kya fark padta hain kaun kya bol raha hain, apko jo achha lagta hain wo karo (play, it doesn't matter what people are saying, do what your heart says). Then I got to know that there are academies and I looked out for Neerja Modi Academy. "But they said that they don't teach girls. It was five to six years ago. I went to the KL Saini Cricket Academy for running and I saw another girl training. I immediately called my father, after which I registered there, and it started from there," Akshita said.

The surreal moment

With only 19 slots to be filled in the mini-auction, Akshita had to fight with 122 players who threw their hat in the ring. In the opening round and first accelerated round, her name did not pop up. But in the second accelerated round, the franchises shortlisted her, and it was MI, who roped her in at a base price of Rs 20 lakhs. Akshita was plying her trade with Rajasthan in the Senior Women's One-Day Trophy when MI picked her.

Ruben Amorim endured his first major setback as Manchester United manager, with his side crashing out of the Carabao Cup after a thrilling 4-3 defeat to Tottenham Hotspur, despite a spirited effort for a late comeback driven by the likes of Amad Diallo and Joshua Zirkzee.

London. Ruben Amorim's time at Manchester United faced its first significant challenge as his team exited the Carabao Cup quarter-finals with a thrilling 4-3 defeat to Tottenham Hotspur on December 20. Despite a spirited comeback attempt, Ange Postecoglou's Spurs managed to hold their ground and secure a spot in the semi-finals.

Tottenham took control early in the game, with Dominic Solanke netting twice and Dejan Kulusevski adding a third to put the hosts ahead 3-0 by the 54th minute. However, two critical mistakes by Spurs' 36-year-old goalkeeper Fraser Forster dramatically shifted the momentum. Forster, filling in for the injured Guglielmo Vicario, initially made a stunning save to deny Joshua Zirkzee's header. But moments later, under pressure from Zirkzee, he attempted a poor pass intercepted by Bruno Fernandes. Fernandes set up Zirkzee for a simple finish, making it 3-1. The drama heightened seven minutes later when Forster mishandled another backpass, allowing Amad Diallo to slide in and deflect his clearance into the net for 3-2. Diallo, who recently scored a decisive goal against Manchester City, came close to an equaliser with a long-range effort that rattled Forster



further.

United's Late Surge Falls Short

United ramped up their attacks in the final stages, driven by substitutes Alejandro Garnacho and Diallo. Jonny Evans added to the tension by heading in a goal during

stoppage time to bring the score to 4-3. Despite the relentless pressure, Tottenham managed to secure the victory with Son Heung-min's clever goal directly from a corner, which caught United keeper Altay Bayindir off guard.

Rashford's Absence Raises Questions

The match was also marked by the absence of Marcus Rashford, who was left out of the squad following recent remarks about his future. Amorim's decision to exclude Rashford entirely, along with limiting Garnacho to a substitute role, has fueled speculation about the manager's approach to squad management. This defeat leaves Amorim with the challenge of rallying his team amidst rising expectations and a demanding schedule. With questions looming over player management and on-field consistency.

Triptii Dimri

Shares Picture From Her 'Last Workday Of The Year'

2024 is undoubtedly the star year for Triptii Dimri. Following her impressive appearances in *Bad Newz*, *Vicky Vidya Ka Woh Wala Video*, and *Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3*, Dimri will shine with a slew of upcoming exciting projects under her belt. She will be next seen alongside Siddhant Chaturvedi in the highly anticipated *Dhadak 2*. This movie is a sequel to the 2018 original, which starred Janhvi Kapoor and Ishaan Khatter in lead roles. In line with this, the Qala actress has been tirelessly filming until a few hours ago, when she joyfully announced that today marks her final working day on the set year. Taking to her Instagram stories, Triptii Dimri shared a collage of two mirror selfies, reportedly from her makeup room. She was seen posing for candid clicks with her makeup artist, Nikita Kapoor, hair stylist, Hrishikesh Naskar, and two other members of her team, Aanchal Talreja and Utkantha Lokhande. Looking effortlessly stunning, the actress showcased her beautiful no-makeup look with her hair pulled back in a stylish ponytail, all while wearing a chic black outfit. Above the picture, she sweetly shared, "Last workday of the year...see y'all in 2025!"

In her recent Instagram stories, the actress flashed a cheerful thumbs-up. Further, when we looked closely at the blurred background, we caught a glimpse of some ropes, hinting at the intense stunts she'd been working hard to master.

A month back, a picture featuring Triptii and Siddhant went viral on social media. This was a subtle confirmation that the two actors had started shooting for the highly anticipated film in Mumbai. The picture circulating on social media was from Somaiya Vidyavihar University. In the snap, Triptii wore a casual outfit, while Siddhant sported a dishevelled look.

Dimri will also reportedly star in another upcoming yet-untitled film. This will also star Shahid Kapoor, Nana Patekar, and Randeep Hooda in key roles. The action thriller will be directed by Vishal Bhardwaj and has been sealed for a theatrical release on December 5, 2025. Sajid Nadiadwala, on behalf of Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment, took to his X handle and shared that the filming will begin on January 6, 2025. "#SajidNadiadwala presents a @VishalBhardwaj film! A spectacular cinematic journey begins on 6th Jan 2025 Film releasing on 5th December 2025 @shahidkapoor @triptii_dimri23 @nanagpatekar @RandeepHooda @WardaNadiadwala," the tweet on Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment's X handle read.



Malaika Arora's Cryptic Post Talks About Self-Worth: 'Invest Your Energy In Those...'

Ever since Arjun Kapoor confirmed his breakup with Malaika Arora, all eyes have been on her. While the *Singham Again* actor revealed his single status at a Diwali party, Malaika has maintained her silence on the matter and has not spoken about it in public. However, her cryptic social media posts since her breakup have often garnered the attention of her fans and followers. On Thursday, December 19, Malaika shared another such cryptic post on her Instagram Stories.

The picture featured a red heart made with fingerprints and discussed the importance of realising one's worth, self-respect and setting boundaries. It read: "Invest your energy in those who truly value your time and presence."

Malaika Arora and Arjun Kapoor started dating in 2018 soon after the *Chaiyya Chaiyya* star parted ways with her ex-husband, Arbaaz Khan. Nearly six years later, they decided to call it quits. In other news, the 49-year-old actress is gearing up for Christmas already. She shared a video on her Instagram account, showcasing her preparation for the festive season. The actress was dressed in a classic white mini bodycon dress. She paired

the full-sleeved dress with golden heels and a cute red bow to add a pop of colour. In the caption of the post, Malaika wrote, "Santa hasn't even started packing, and I'm already in full Christmas mode. Bring on the hot cocoa, holiday movies, and all the sparkle!" Malaika recently took a train trip to an undisclosed location. While she shared the first part of her journey



back in November, she released the second part of her train journey just days ago. In the video, she recreated Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge's iconic train scene but with the roles reversed. As the reel began, Malaika was seen standing at the gate of the coach dressed in a white comfy co-ord set, helping her co-passengers run to catch her hand to get on the train.

On the work front, Malaika is currently judging the first season of the dance reality show *India's Best Dancer vs Super Dancer: Champions ka Tashan* alongside Remo D'souza and Geeta Kapoor.

Rana Daggubati's Birthday Wish For Wife Miheeka Bajaj Is Love



Rana Daggubati's wife Miheeka Bajaj is celebrating her birthday today, and the actor made sure to make the day memorable with a special wish. Rana shared a throwback photo from their wedding celebration on Instagram. In the photo, suggestively from their haldi celebrations, Miheeka is dressed in yellow attire whereas the actor chose an all-white look. The couple can be happily posing for the photo while embracing each other. Rana wrote, "Happiest to you", followed by heart emoticons.

Rana Daggubati also shared a recent selfie with Miheeka where the duo were all smiles for the camera. The actor was dressed in a white sweatshirt while the birthday girl was seen in a bright red dress. Miheeka's birthday comes days after the actor turned 40. Sharing her birthday wishes, Miheeka dropped a series of candid pictures of Rana. "The man with the ever-changing looks and personalities that go hand in hand. There isn't a moment of dullness with you around. The constants in life have been entertainment and an unending supply of love. May you shine bright and don a lot of looks and personalities in the coming years. This year as you turn 40 my only wish is for you to remain forever 14! It never ceases to amaze me how you've managed to maintain the vigour, excitement, thoughts and passion of a kid who's just starting off on their journey. May you always be excited, inquisitive, passionate and ambitious," Miheeka wrote in a long caption accompanying the post.

On the work front, Rana Daggubati is currently busy with his chat show, *The Rana Daggubati Show* on Prime Video. Last month, the show premiered at the 55th International Film Festival of India (IFFI). The launch featured the first episode, starring Nani, Teja Sajja, and Priyanka Arulmohan. The eight-part Telugu Original chat show will feature Dulquer Salmaan, Naga Chaitanya Akkineni, S.S. Rajamouli, Ram Gopal Varma, Rishab Shetty, Siddhu Jonnalagadda, Sreeleela, and others as gets.

Nana Patekar Recalls Visiting Irrfan Khan's Madh Home: 'He Loved Jasmine Plants'



Nana Patekar, widely acclaimed for his versatile acting, recently shared touching memories of the late Irrfan Khan, celebrating the actor's profound impact. He revealed Irrfan's love for night-blooming jasmine plants and how the actor had expressed a desire to have them. Nana also reminisced about an early conversation with Sutapa, Irrfan's wife, where he assured her of Irrfan's bright future in the film industry. Reflecting on a visit to Irrfan's home in Madh, Nana shared how deeply connected he feels to Irrfan's memory. In a heartfelt conversation with Vishal Bhardwaj for Zee Studios, Nana Patekar described Irrfan as a remarkable individual and shared how Sutapa, who worked as a screenwriter for *Khamoshi*, encouraged him to recommend Irrfan for roles. Nana, however, was confident in Irrfan's talent and future, telling Sutapa, "He will suggest our name in the future. He is a very big actor, don't worry."

Nana also recalled Irrfan's humility despite his success. He shared a poignant memory of visiting Irrfan's house in Madh, where Irrfan spoke about his love for night-blooming jasmine plants. The actor had asked Nana to plant one for him, a request that left a lasting impression on Nana, deepening his connection to Irrfan's legacy.

In another conversation with Anil Kapoor, Nana revealed his initial hesitation to watch the film *Animal*, starring Ranbir Kapoor. However, upon being persuaded by friends, he praised Anil's restrained and balanced performance, contrasting it with the more exaggerated portrayals of other cast members. This admiration showcased the respect between the two actors, further exciting fans about their dynamic after their iconic roles in the *Welcome* series. Currently, Nana Patekar is preparing for the release of his upcoming movie, *Vanvaas*.

Directed by Gadar filmmaker Anil Sharma, the movie also stars Utkarsh Sharma and Simrat Kaur. With its focus on family, honor, and self-acceptance, *Vanvaas* offers an emotional narrative that redefines the concept of familial bonds. Ahead of its release, the makers of *Vanvaas* have arranged a special screening for Aamir Khan in Mumbai. A source revealed, "Nana and Aamir Khan share a great bond, the team of *Vanvaas* has already arranged a special screening for the actor in Bombay. Aamir will be watching the film on 20th December." The trailer, released earlier this month, teases a story of resilience and belonging, adding to the anticipation for its release under the Anil Sharma Productions banner.

