

A colossus in a landscape of pygmies

IT would be trite to say that Dr Manmohan Singh was an institution. He was a colossus who strode the economic and governance firmaments like an original intellectual giant in a landscape populated by pygmies. Manmohan Singh was born at Gah, now in Pakistan. He crossed over to India as a refugee during the Partition. By the dint of hard work and perseverance, he built a life for himself as a distinguished professor, thought leader, economist of repute, governance expert, union minister and, finally, the Prime Minister of India.

He held a diverse array of positions. However, he was always polite to a fault, humble, self-effacing, the epitome of gravitas, carrying success lightly on his shoulders. Perhaps, his humble origins and the traumatic Partition deeply impacted and influenced him at a subliminal level, giving him an acute sense of the ethereal nature of power and positions. Serving in such positions as Chief Economic Adviser in the Ministry of Finance and RBI Governor gave him an understanding of the economic and governance challenges. As Finance Minister from 1991-1996, he leveraged this understanding to preside over the most fundamental reset of India's economic trajectory when he dismantled the licence quota permit raj and unshackled the creative animal spirits of India's economic entrepreneurs. This reset took place when the post-World War-II world order had collapsed and political scientists were predicting the end of history. He created a new world for millions of youth in the post-globalisation and liberalisation period. It is unfortunate that the political lexicon and language of India never mirrored the economic reset and remains populist to this day. As Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha from 1998 to 2004, he brought a quiet dignity to the august office at a time when political polarisation had made parliamentary proceedings extremely toxic and contentious, to put it mildly.

As PM, he staked his government to break the nuclear apartheid that had been plaguing India since the first nuclear test on May 18, 1974, when the Buddha smiled in the deserts of Rajasthan at Pokhran. His experience in the mid-1970s as Member Finance of both the Atomic Energy Commission and Space Commission, perhaps, gave him a bird's eye view of how various constraining global architectures created in the aftermath of that peaceful nuclear explosion had impacted India's nuclear and space programme adversely. Notably, the architectures included the London Suppliers Club founded in 1974 (later called Nuclear Suppliers Group — NSG) to stunt India's nuclear potential by restricting access to technology and materials.

After becoming PM in 2004, Dr Singh built upon the Jaswant Singh-Strobe Talbott dialogue held in the aftermath of India's second nuclear test held in May 1998. It led to a second reset in Indo-US relations, with the signing of a New Framework for India-US Defence Relations on June 28, 2005, marking the full-scale start of defence cooperation between the two countries. Twenty days later, on July 18, 2005, the US and India announced the launch of the Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative. Under this, India agreed to commit all of its civilian nuclear facilities to IAEA safeguards.

In 2004, the Congress had only 145 seats in the 14th Lok Sabha. It was dependent on support of the CPI-M, CPI and others, who had 55 seats. The Left has had an anti-imperialist and, by extension, an anti-US worldview. It was an ideological anathema in the global world order after the collapse of the Communist USSR and its East European satellites in 1991. In June 2008, Dr Singh threw down the gauntlet and announced that India would go ahead with the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal. Ironically, the BJP — the author of the reset with the US after the 1998 nuclear test and a signatory to the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership in 2004 — brought a no-confidence motion against Dr Singh's UPA government in July 2008. Dr Singh, in turn, tabled a vote of confidence. Among unprecedented scenes in the Lok Sabha — including the then opposition (BJP) displaying wads of currency notes in the House — the government won the vote.

Why Bhutan King has visited India thrice in 20 months

India's worry will remain the Doklam package deal, which the Tshering government was on the verge of signing.

ON December 20, Home Minister Amit Shah said in Kolkata that the Siliguri corridor is the key link to the Northeast. Given the friendly regime change in Bangladesh, Bhutan plays a crucial role towards its security. On December 6, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck of Bhutan was on an unprecedented third official visit to India in the last 20 months.

No King of Bhutan has come to India that frequently, but there was a reason. This year, Bhutan has been relatively silent about border resolution with China, especially after the previous government had signed a three-step roadmap in January 2023, held three expert group (on the 11th, 12th and 13th) and two joint technical group meetings, all packed in 2023, even as the 10th expert group meeting was held in 2021. The cat was set among the pigeons after the previous PM, Lotay Tshering, in an interview to a Belgian newspaper in March 2023, said: "Soon we will be able to resolve the border issue, including Doklam, as there are no real differences between China and Bhutan." The Tshering interview triggered alarm bells in New Delhi and a chain of events, including a virtual air-dash by the King for talks with PM Narendra Modi. Following the joint statement which steered clear of the border issues, the then Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra said: "India will take all necessary measures to safeguard its national interest."

High-ranking officials believe that Modi did some plain-speaking with the King, emphasising that their border disputes with China were intertwined. In the past, Bhutanese officials consulted their Indian counterparts prior to holding border talks with China. Especially regarding Doklam, where, in 2017, New Delhi invoked the India-Bhutan Treaty of Perpetual Friendship 2007 to intervene on Bhutanese territory (which China claims) to prevent the PLA from constructing a road to Gipmochi — its version of the tri-junction between India, Bhutan and China. In an interview in October 2023 to an Indian newspaper, Tshering said his government had a month left in office, but "it was inching towards an agreement of the border." Also, last October, previous Foreign Minister Tandi Dorji had visited Beijing, a first for any Bhutanese minister, and met his counterpart Wang Yi, signed the Cooperation Agreement on Joint Technical Team for Delimitation and Demarcation of Border and endorsed the One-China policy. Wang urged Dorji to establish diplomatic relations with China as Thimphu has none with any P5 country. In 2023, the Tshering government was actually racing (not inching) towards a border resolution. Dorji, after his 25th round of talks in Kunming, told journalists in Thimphu that talks with China had been accelerated. His visit to Beijing and the agreements clinched with China, like the Tshering interviews earlier, shocked India's security establishment. It forced the King days later to make an



unprecedented second visit to India. Being asked to come to New Delhi twice within six months over border issues was plainly discomfiting for the King, though the second visit was disguised as Bhutan's curtain-raiser for the Gelephu Smart City Project. Tshering said: "The first leader the King wanted to discuss Gelephu with was PM Modi." In the elections held in November last year, Lotay Tshering's party was eliminated in the first round and Tshering Tobgay became PM in January 2024. Not a word has been heard about the three-step roadmap since then from the new PM or the Foreign Minister. In 2013, PM Jigme Thinley was defeated by Tobgay in elections after he was seen getting closer to China.

Clearly, the King was in the loop of the policy shift for an early resolution of the border with China, including the Doklam package deal, delinked from its adverse impact on India's strategic concerns in the Chumbi valley. 'Kuensel', a weekly broadsheet from Thimphu, has reported that young and educated Bhutanese have been urging the government to establish diplomatic relations with China and resolve the border issue. During my visit to Thimphu and Paro after Doklam, I felt that people were unhappy over the way Doklam was handled as also the economy and presence of Indian soldiers on Bhutanese soil. Thimphu's \$3-billion economy supports a population

of seven lakh Bhutanese, with hydropower as its main source of revenue, and with India financing all its five-year development plans. In fact, this year, the government doubled the Rs 5,000-crore outlay for the 12th plan to Rs 10,000 crore for the 13th plan.

Half the population is below 30 years and with 30 per cent unemployment, nearly 15,000 persons left Bhutan in 2023 for Australia, Canada and the US. Gelephu, the King believes, will be the open-sesame to get the young and educated Bhutanese to return. Some believe Gelephu is the King's idea of a diversion from the vexed border issues and economic hardship. The Gelephu SEZ will have energy and communication connectivity, an international airport, a university, a healthcare facility, etc. A new dream city on the India-Bhutan border will soon come up with international aid and assistance to address Bhutan's declining Gross National Happiness. India is a key player in the project.

India's worry will remain the Doklam package deal, which the Tshering government was on the verge of signing. It would have plunged the Chumbi dagger deeper into the Siliguri corridor, popularly called Chicken's Neck. While the Tobgay government will go slow on the three-step roadmap, the 26th round of Bhutan-China talks was held quietly at Thimphu in August.

A statesman for the ages

Nation mustn't forget Manmohan Singh's legacy

IT's a sad moment for the entire nation and the world at large that Dr Manmohan Singh is no more. What's even sadder is that they just don't make them like him anymore. He was truly a class apart, a statesman who managed to keep his gentleness and humility intact in the rough and tumble of politics. In his final address to the nation as Prime Minister on May 17, 2014, the day after the Congress-led UPA was routed in the Lok Sabha elections, he humbly reiterated that his life and tenure in public office were an open book. There was no reason to disbelieve him when he said that he had always tried to do his best in serving the nation. He gave it his all, first as Finance Minister — when he masterfully spearheaded liberalisation of the Indian economy — and then as PM. Things didn't always go his way, but that didn't stop him from working hard "with diligence as my tool, truth as my beacon". His stress on truth and transparency was not a sham. Among the greatest achievements of the government he headed was the enactment of the Right to Information (RTI) Act in 2005. This landmark legislation was aimed at empowering citizens and ensuring much-needed

accountability in the working of government departments. The veil of secrecy around governance was lifted at last, and the people realised that there was much more to democracy than casting their vote. The year 2005 also witnessed the rollout of another pathbreaking reform, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. This social welfare measure transformed the lives of people in the hinterland by bolstering the livelihood security of rural households. However, Manmohan Singh was not one to shout from the rooftops about his government's initiatives. Nor did he stoop to patting himself on the back or giving the impression that he was God's gift to the country. It was always service before self for him. His failing was that he did not do enough to stem the rot that triggered the decline and fall of the UPA government. It was this lapse that enabled the BJP to ride high on the anti-corruption plank and wrest power from the Congress. At the international level, his visionary leadership propelled the India-US civil nuclear deal, which acted as a game-changer for strategic cooperation between the two nations. Their presently strong bilateral

ties owe a lot to the efforts made by the Manmohan Singh government. And he wisely chose to avoid retaliation against Pakistan after India was rocked by the Mumbai terror attacks of 2008. This was not a sign of weakness; it was a pragmatic decision that prevented the two neighbours from plunging headlong into yet another war. Though he was generally soft-spoken and self-effacing, he didn't flinch from speaking his mind when things became intolerable. In a letter released ahead of the final phase of polling in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, he lambasted his successor, Narendra Modi, for indulging in the "most vicious form of hate speeches, which are purely divisive". He went on to say that Modi was the first PM to lower the dignity of public discourse. Leading the nation in paying tributes to Manmohan Singh, PM Modi has said that his predecessor's commitment to the people and the country's development would always be respected and remembered. It remains to be seen if the BJP-led NDA, which misses no opportunity to blame Jawaharlal Nehru for the ills afflicting the nation today, will desist from defiling the legacy of Manmohan Singh.

Lessons that MMS taught us

Manmohan Singh realised that the PM must take all people along, even if they haven't voted for you

CONGRESSMAN Manish Tewari, writing on the other side of these pages, and fellow journalist Pradeep Magazine on social media, have these last few hours since the passing of Dr Manmohan Singh, been among those reflecting on why parts of the media adopted some of the characteristics of a Doberman Pinscher — with due apologies to Dobermans — and unusually went after the good Doctor in the last months of his prime ministership in 2014. Magazine's very telling comment on X speaks a world.

"That terrible feeling: India will have to live with the guilt of having vilified Manmohan Singh," he wrote.

Those of us old enough to watch this grim story unfold between 2012 and 2014 were participants in the denouement, make no mistake. We watched the house come down, piece by piece. We watched as Rahul Gandhi, in the Press Club of India in 2013, tore up an ordinance that Manmohan Singh was piloting through the House to give temporary protection to convicted politicians — this, when the BJP had accused Dr Singh of being a "puppet" of the Gandhi family. We watched as the BJP simply didn't allow Parliament to function that winter session that followed and BJP leader Arun Jaitley defended his party's aggressive stalling of the House. Earlier, we had watched from the press galleries how the BJP didn't allow the PM to speak in defence of the Indo-US nuclear deal in Parliament and the House was nearly brought down in 2008 when cash was found ostensibly to steer MPs to vote one way instead of another. Of course, the UPA had the numbers, so that vote was won — and the nuclear deal was signed with George W Bush. Most, including Prakash Karat of the CPM, simply refused to understand what the nuclear deal was really about — it was never about playing second fiddle to a foreign power, but the reassertion of

global responsibility; being at ease with America would open the doors to foreign investment that India was desperately in need of, so as to reforge its own destiny.

Remember Deng's favourite slogan, "you don't ask whether the cat is black or white, as long as it can catch mice"? The Chinaman, general secretary of the Communist Party of China, had of course, been referring to the country's need to partner with Western nations because they had the ability to invest in China. If the Chinese understood the need to embrace its ideological enemy, why couldn't Karat? Dr Manmohan Singh would ask that question — or at least then minister of state in the PMO Prithviraj Chavan, who had MMS's ear, would often ask that question. Friendship with America, MMS also knew, would worry the Chinese; it may even persuade it to deal more kindly with India. And so it came to pass, in 2005, that India and China opened talks on resolving the border dispute — China would later withdraw that offer, when it saw India withdrawing from the world, become weaker, but that would be later.

The tragedy is that Sitaram Yechury, who openly protested the CPM's decision to link the Indo-US deal with domestic politics, was overruled by his own party. Yechury lost, Karat won and pulled the rug from under the UPA. The irony is that years later, Kerala's Left government led by Pinarayi Vijayan, a staunch ally of Karat, would back "masala bonds" at the London Stock Exchange, through which money was raised to fund pathbreaking health and education initiatives across Kerala, which would transform the state. Except for Kerala, the CPM would wither away in the rest of the country. MMS's mantra of the need to move with the times would resonate across India — it would

practically wipe out the Left and allow an unleashing of the "animal spirits" that would allow Indian entrepreneurs to make the geographical leap towards brave new worlds that Dr Singh may not have imagined when he and his family trudged across the Radcliffe



Line into India that long-ago summer of 1947. Dr Singh's passing, this rainy weekend, allows us to indulge in two "imaginings". The first, imagine if MMS had been able to pull off a border solution with the Chinese. Galwan would never have happened, the Chinese wouldn't have sat on your border for four years and stared down at you. Peace would have broken out on the LAC. Imagine, also, if Manmohan Singh had made that visit to his birthplace, Gah, back in 2008. Things had been going swimmingly well with Pakistan. Friendship had been in the air for some time. Musharraf had come to Delhi to watch a cricket match in 2005 and invited MMS to make the return trip; MMS had done a

short tour of Siachen and described the glacier that ended at NJ9842, whose heights both India and Pakistan coveted, as a "peace park". MMS had even gone to Kashmir for a day-long trip, to speak to all kinds of Indians there and set up eight round-tables to carry on

the conversation — Vice-President Hamid Ansari would chair the one on politics. Meanwhile, Indians and Pakistanis had already decided that the Radcliffe Line should be consigned to history — so people travelled back and forth, Pakistani singers sang for Bollywood films and real estate prices in Amritsar and Lahore shot up. Musharraf gave special permission to light up Gah with streetlights that TERI's RK Pachauri would personally supervise. The school in which MMS studied was given a spruce-over. "Raaste jaldi hi khull javaange" was at the heart of the conversation in both towns. The 2008 Mumbai attacks dealt a body blow to the opening up. In Pakistan, by 2009, the lawyers' movement had taken charge and Musharraf lost power. Attempts to revive the conversation would start and stall until the eve of the 2014 polls, when a serious attempt to lay a pipeline from Amritsar to Lahore would finally founder. Narendra Modi would not pick up on the pipeline but took a leaf out of Manmohan Singh's book when he invited all South Asia's leaders to Delhi for his inauguration. Both Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh (not even going as far back as Nehru or Shastri or Indira) realised that the Prime Minister of India must take all the people along, even if they haven't voted for you. That a country as diverse as India cannot be divided along communal or sectarian or ethnic lines. That peace at home is a function of peace in your neighbourhood.

West Bengal & Rajasthan new migrant destination hotspots; Uttar Pradesh tops

New Delhi. West Bengal and Rajasthan are the new centres of migrants movement from across the country and have found place in the list of top five states where maximum numbers of general or second class passengers travelled to by the Indian Railways, shows the latest working paper of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) on migration trends. Other three states in the top five are Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. According to the analysis of data from the Indian Railways on unreserved tickets of non-suburban passengers (150+ kms journey), the council has concluded that while most of the states showed reduction in the passenger headed to them from outside, possibly as a result of an overall reduction in migration, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Karnataka are the states that showed the maximum amount of growth in percentage share of the arriving passengers. Compared to 2012 data, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar are now ranked a notch lower. Titled as "400 Million Dreams!", the PM advisory body in its report said that the overall number of migrants in the country has reduced by 11.78 per cent as compared to the 2011 census. The paper hypothesised that improved economic opportunities in smaller cities are among the reasons for the slowing migration in India. Apart from ticket bookings data from Indian Railway Unreserved Ticketing System (UTS) for year 2023 and 2012, EAC-PM used mobile telephone subscribers' roaming data and district level banking data on remittances to come up with the figure of 40.20 crore migrant, as of 2023, in the country. The total number of migrants in Census 2011 were 45.57 crore. According to its analysis, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka and Telangana are the major origin states for arrivals into Maharashtra. Similarly, for Delhi, the major origin states are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh.

Apart from this, the major destinations for general class travellers heading out from Uttar Pradesh are Delhi, Bihar, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana. Similarly, major Destinations for passengers heading out from Bihar are Delhi, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Jharkhand.

Indian economy to grow at 6.5-6.8% in FY25 on high consumption: Deloitte

NEW DELHI. Indian economy is likely to grow at 6.5-6.8 per cent this fiscal and slightly higher between 6.7-7.3 per cent in FY2026, boosted by domestic consumption, Deloitte said on Sunday. Deloitte India Economist Rumki Majumdar said the growth in the first half of the fiscal year 2025 turned out to be slower than estimated as election uncertainties followed by disruptions in activity due to heavy rainfall and geopolitical events weighed on domestic demand and exports.

However, India continues to show resilience in certain pockets that are worth noting -- be it in consumption trends, services growth, the rising share of high-value manufacturing in exports, or the capital market.

The government's continued focus on infrastructure development, digitisation, and attracting FDI will be the additional growth booster, enhancing overall efficiency. "We remain cautiously optimistic and expect the growth rate to remain between 6.5 and 6.8 per cent this fiscal year and slightly higher between 6.7 and 7.3 per cent in FY2026," Majumdar told PTI. Earlier this month, the Reserve Bank of India cut its growth forecast for the current fiscal to 6.6 per cent from 7.2 per cent projected in June.

Deloitte said manufacturing exports in high-value segments like electronics, semiconductors, and chemicals reflect India's strengthening position in global value chains. Meanwhile, capital markets have shown stability despite significant FII outflows over the past two and a half months, thanks to rising participation from retail and domestic institutional investors. "We anticipate several of these trends to persist through 2025. We believe domestic consumption will remain the cornerstone of India's economic growth, with both rural and urban demand playing key roles." A myriad of factors, such as improved agricultural incomes, targeted subsidies, social welfare programmes, government employment initiatives, advancements in digitisation, and stronger services sector growth will help broad-based consumption spending," Majumdar said. India will have to ride out the rough patch, as several global headwinds pose challenges. Geopolitical tensions, trade disputes, supply chain disruptions, and the escalating impact of climate change could weigh heavily on growth and long-term economic stability, she added.

Mcaps of 6 of top 10 most valued firms climbs Rs 86,847.8 cr; HDFC, RIL lead

NEW DELHI. Six of the top-10 most valued firms together added Rs 86,847.88 crore in market valuation last week, with HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries emerging as the biggest gainers in line with an overall optimistic trend in equities. Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 657.48 points or 0.84 per cent, and the Nifty rose 225.9 points or 0.95 per cent. While Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, ITC and Hindustan Unilever were the winners, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, State Bank of India and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) suffered erosion from their market valuation. The market capitalisation (mcaps) of HDFC Bank surged by Rs 20,235.95 crore to Rs 13,74,945.30 crore. Reliance Industries added Rs 20,230.9 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 16,52,235.07 crore. The valuation of ITC jumped Rs 17,933.49 crore to Rs 5,99,185.81 crore, and that of ICICI Bank climbed Rs 15,254.01 crore to Rs 9,22,703.05 crore. The market cap of Bharti Airtel soared Rs 11,948.24 crore to Rs 9,10,735.22 crore, and Hindustan Unilever rallied Rs 1,245.29 crore to Rs 5,49,863.10 crore. However, the valuation of State Bank of India tumbled by Rs 11,557.39 crore to Rs 7,13,567.99 crore. The valuation of LIC declined by Rs 8,412.24 crore to Rs 5,61,406.80 crore, and that of Infosys dropped by Rs 2,283.75 crore to Rs 7,95,803.15 crore.

Exclusive: Firm run by Russian national dupes Rs 800 crore from Indian investors

The ED filed a second chargesheet against Octafx India, its operating company overseas, OctaMarkets, its founder Pavel Prozorov, OctaFX CEO, who handled India operations, Anna Rudaia, and nine other individuals accused apart from a total of 41 companies and entities. Read this

New Delhi. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a chargesheet in the alleged Rs 800 crore Ponzi scheme scam orchestrated by a forex firm run by a Russian national named Pavel Prozorov. In the last four to five years, OctaFX, a Forex trading platform, was visible everywhere on social media, from advertisements to sponsoring IPL teams. Very few, or say, no one knew that OctaFX was an elaborate long-term Ponzi scheme

launched in India to dupe people of their hard-earned money. The ED recently filed a second chargesheet against Octafx India, its operating company overseas, OctaMarkets, its founder Pavel Prozorov, OctaFX CEO, who handled India operations, Anna Rudaia, and nine other individuals accused apart from a total of 41 companies and entities.

WHY IS IT AN ELABORATE PONZI SCHEME? According to the exclusive details accessed by IndiaToday, the predicate offence, on the basis of which the ED started investigating, was an FIR filed at Shivajinagar police station in Pune in 2021, against two to three brokers and agents who had duped deaf and dumb persons with a promise of doubling their savings through forex trade at OctaFX in five months and triple it in eight months. The investors lost huge sums in crores, following which an FIR was filed against the brokers, who are also called 'introducers' by OctaFX. With aggressive online and social media advertising promotions by hiring area-wise

influencers and TV personalities, and even top Bollywood actors to promote the platform, they managed to lure numerous investors. OctaFX employed a number of brokers who helped people invest in the platform. They were called introducers and were paid handsomely for luring



people, with gifts like luxury cars, bikes, gold coins and gold bars.

The firm also organised events at 5-star hotels in Goa and invited agents and brokers and felicitated them with hefty bonus amounts and gifts at these events.

According to sources, the platform also offered to invest huge amounts of crores in cash from select customers and

Russia aims to double tourism GDP by 2030 from India, China

NEW DELHI. Russia is looking to double its GDP contribution from tourism by 2030, increasing it from 3.8% to about 10%. The country has increased investment in the tourism sector and set to launch its new national project "Tourism and Hospitality" in 2025 to attract more tourists. Evgeny Kozlov, chairman of the Moscow City Tourism Committee, speaking to TNIE said Moscow will prioritise attracting tourists and MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) from India and China. He mentioned that to boost tourist arrivals from India, Russia has liberalised visa regime, introducing e-visa. Kozlov said the number of Indian tourists visiting Russia in the first half of 2024 reached 28,500, a 1.5-fold rise as against the same period in 2023. "From August 1, 2023,

holders of Indian passports can apply for e-visa, which is fast (issued within 4 days), easy (no invitations or



confirmations required), and convenient to get (online)," said Evgeny Kozlov.

Kozlov said its tourism industry has generated revenue exceeding 1.3 trillion rubles (\$12.35 bn), surpassing the record set before the pandemic in 2019. By 2030, they expect that the impact of tourism on Moscow's

economy will be even greater. As per forecasts, by 2030, revenue from tourism will grow 2.7 times, reaching 3.6 trillion rubles (\$34.2 bn). However, Kozlov said the transport links between Moscow and India still need to be improved. He said at the moment, there is only one airline that operates flights between India and Moscow. "I would like to encourage the Indian government and airlines to consider introducing direct flights to Moscow to meet growing demand of travelers," Gajesh Giridhar, founder and national coordinator of the Network of Indian MICE Agents (NIMA), agreed with Kozlov's request for improved air connectivity. He said destinations like Baku and Thailand enjoy significant popularity among Indian travellers due to better flight connectivity.

All states/UTs expected to complete draft labour code rules by March

NEW DELHI. All 36 states and Union territories (UTs) are expected to complete "harmonisation and pre-publication" of draft rules under the four labour codes by March 31, 2025, a release by the Labour Ministry said on Saturday.

So far, barring five states and UTs, all others have pre-published the rules, setting the stage for the much-awaited rollout of the four codes — Code on Wages, Code on Social Security, Code on Industrial Relations, and Code on Occupational Health & Safety — by next year. The Labour Ministry has been consistently working for harmonisation of rules under the four codes across the states, said the release.

This year, six regional meetings were held between August and October to facilitate the states and Union territories for framing the rules. Labour laws fall under the concurrent list of the Constitution. Hence, both the Centre and states are empowered to make rules. But in the event of a conflict between state and central laws, central legislation generally takes precedence, unless the state's law has obtained presidential assent. The four labour codes are a judicious combination of reforms aimed at easing labour market rigidities, and reinforcing workers' rights and welfare. As many as 44 labour related Acts were consolidated into the four codes in 2019-2020 with the objective of reinforcing trade and investment, facilitating ease of doing business and easing compliance. Several minor offences were decriminalised via the codes, while skill development and dispute resolution have been accorded due priority. Meanwhile, the ministry also is working towards development of a framework for social security coverage to gig and platform workers, said the release. Extensive stakeholder consultations were conducted with aggregators, knowledge partners, platform worker organisations, and state/UTs this year to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the Social Security Code, 2020, and to develop collaborative approaches for a social security framework tailored to gig and platform workers, it said. Also, a collaborative study is being undertaken with the International Labour Organization to comprehensively assess various factors related to platform workers. "These include the number of platform workers, prevalent business models, potential schemes, financial implications (such as aggregator turnover and contributions), and a roadmap for implementing a social security scheme for platform workers," the release said.

Missing the wood for the trees

NEW DELHI. Forests are a natural resource crucial to feeding and regulating rainfall cycles. They also provide essential biodiversity — being home to millions of species of plants and animals — for the coupled existence of humankind and nature. As the bells toll louder on climate change, forests are the first line of defense. They act as a carbon sink, absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it in their wood, and soil. On the other hand, deforestation and degradation of forests releases carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere, driving up temperatures and triggering climate catastrophe. Between 2001 and 2020, global forests lost 10% of their area coverage, releasing 165 gigatons of carbon dioxide. It was music to the ears when the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023, released by the Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bhupender Yadav, announced India's forest and tree cover had increased to just over a quarter — or 25.17% — of the country's geographical area. The minister said there had been an increase of 1,445 square kilometers

of forest and tree cover over the last count in 2021. After all the back-thumping, much of the data has been met with a degree of skepticism. The high numbers have been drummed up by including commercial bamboo plantations, coconut groves and orchards, Kerala's former principal chief conservator of forests, Prakriti Srivastava, conservationist researcher Krithika Sampath and former National Board for Wildlife member Prema Singh Bindra, told PTI. Calling it "another faulty report with inflated data", they claimed 1,488 sq km of "unclassified forests" or non-notified forests under government ownership had vanished between 2021 and 2023. A former principal chief conservator of Forests of Karnataka, BK Singh, told the environmental magazine Mongabay, while plantations are increasing 18,000 sq. km. annually, forest and tree cover was shown to have gone up by a meagre 1,400 sq. km in two years. Either the forests are being cut and plantations are partly supplementing the deficit; or a major chunk of plantations are failing. An

inquiry would be in order, Mr B.K. Singh said. The Forest Survey does admit the decline in forest cover in eco-sensitive zones like the Western Ghats, and the lower Himalayas. The report concedes, for example, the Western Ghats Eco-Sensitive Areas (WGESAs) have lost 58.22 sq km of forest cover, while the north-east lost 327 sq km. The impact of the deforestation was seen less than 6 months ago in Kerala's Wayanad region. Incessant rains brought down denuded sections of the hills on the villages below killing over 250 persons. While anecdotal evidence points to the retreat of core forests falling to mining and road building activity, "flexible" interpretations of what constitutes 'trees' and 'forest cover' ensures the picture remains rosy and green. The earlier 2021 'State of Forest Report' released in January 2022 claimed the country's forest and tree cover had gone up by 2,261 sq km since the last assessment in 2019. Contrary to this, in April this year, Global Forest Watch (GFW) released a report based on satellite imagery on the losses of forest cover on a world scale.

Luxury housing market shines in 2024

While this steep increase impacted overall housing sales in 2024, luxury housing demand and new supply increased exponentially in 2024.

NEW DELHI. Demand for lavish and luxurious housing projects remained resilient in 2024 despite a sharp surge in property prices. This particular segment defied a slowdown in economic growth as the growing tribe of high-net-worth individuals did not shy away from making big-ticket purchases. As per data issued by real estate consultant firm Anarock, housing prices rose between 13-30% year-on-year in 2024 across the top 7 cities, primarily due to increased input costs and strong homebuyer demand. Delhi-NCR recorded the highest yearly jump of 30% in average residential housing price — from Rs 5,800 per sq. ft. in

2023 to nearly Rs 7,550 per sq. ft. in 2024. The top 7 cities together saw a 21% yearly jump in average residential price — from Rs 7,080 per sq. ft. in Q4 2023 to over Rs 8,590 per sq. ft. in Q4 2024.

While this steep increase impacted overall housing sales in 2024, luxury housing demand and new supply increased exponentially in 2024. "The new luxury supply addition across the top 7 cities rose by 24% in 2024 against 2023. There is no reason to expect luxury housing demand to taper off in 2025," said Anarock. The country's largest real estate developer - DLF - said 2024 has been an encouraging period for the real estate sector, with markets across the country witnessing positive momentum, a trend that continues into 2025. "For us at DLF, the year began with the remarkable success of two consecutive launches within the DLF Privana ecosystem in Gurugram, both achieving complete sell-outs in under a week during their pre-launch phase. This milestone underscores the robust demand for premium real estate and Gurugram's status as a key hub for luxury living," said Aakash Ohri, JMD & Chief Business Officer, DLF Homes.

DLF achieved a milestone with the Rs 190 crore sale of an apartment in its Camellias project and is now set to launch The

Dahlias in Gurugram, poised to become India's most expensive residential project. Comprising 400 residences with starting prices of Rs 80,000 per sq. ft., the average ticket size is expected to hover nearly Rs 100 crore, as per PropEquity.

Ohri said the demand for luxury homes remained resilient, contrary to the perception of a slowdown, as buyers



increasingly seek expansive, well-designed residences with world-class amenities that cater to their elevated lifestyles. Besides DLF, other top-tier players like Godrej Properties, Macrotech Developers (Lodha), Oberoi Realty and Prestige Estate recorded robust demand for their luxurious properties. Samir Jasuja, founder & CEO, PropEquity said luxury housing continued its dominance which is reflected in the fact that the market size of apartments, priced over Rs

5 crore has gone up from \$4 billion to \$16 billion in the last 4 years witnessing 4x growth. Sunny Bijlani, joint MD at Supreme Universal stated that in 2023, luxury segment achieved a historic milestone with a 12-15% YoY rise in sales, a trend that strongly continued in 2024. "This year, Mumbai documented a 13% rise in prime residential property prices, reflecting the growing appetite for premium high-end homes in the city. This momentum is expected to continue into 2025, with the premium realty market poised for more dynamic growth. The new generation of buyers, increasingly drawn to bespoke residences in prime locations such as South Mumbai and Bandra are fueling this demand," said Bijlani.

While the luxury segment grew, overall housing sales across top seven cities recorded a 4% decline, with approximately 4,59,650 units sold in 2024 compared to 4,76,530 units in 2023, as per Anarock data. Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) saw the highest sales of about 1,55,335 units in 2024, registering a 1% yearly rise. Pune followed with 81,090 units sold, down 6% YoY. Among other cities, Bengaluru saw a 2% surge in sales. Demand fell in Kolkata (20%) and Chennai (11%), followed by a 5% fall in Hyderabad, and a 6% decline each in Pune and Delhi NCR.

Delhi Police's Big Action Against Infiltrators, 8 Illegal Bangladeshi Immigrants Deported

➤ **According to police, Jahangir admitted to entering India through unofficial routes and subsequently, bringing his family over.**

NEW DELHI. The Delhi Police has deported eight Bangladeshi nationals who were residing in the Rangpuri area of the national capital, an official said on Sunday. Those deported are Jahangir, his wife and

their six children, hailing from Keckerhat village in Madaripur district of Bangladesh, he said.

According to police, Jahangir admitted to entering India through unofficial routes and subsequently, bringing his family over. They had destroyed their Bangladeshi identification documents and were living in Delhi while concealing their original identities. "A team from the Vasant Kunj South police station was tasked to identify illegal immigrants. As part of the intensified efforts to address concerns about unauthorised migrants, police conducted door-to-door verifications of 400 families in Rangpuri," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southwest) Surendra Choudhary said.

He added that verification forms were sent to the addresses of suspected individuals in



West Bengal and a special team was dispatched to manually verify their documents. During the verification drive, the team identified Jahangir and his family, who confessed to their Bangladeshi origins during questioning, the DCP said, adding that the deportation process was carried out in coordination with the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO).

On Friday, the Delhi Police deported an illegal Bangladeshi migrant who unlawfully stayed in different areas for the last six years. The 28-year-old woman stayed in Delhi and Mumbai in violation of the Foreigners Act, police had said.

The city police launched a drive to identify illegal Bangladeshi immigrants residing in the capital, after the LG Secretariat ordered a crackdown on such people this month.

Teams from various police stations are visiting slums and the Kalindi Kunj, Shaheen Bagh, Hazrat Nizamuddin and Jamia Nagar areas to check voter IDs and Aadhaar cards for identifying suspected Bangladeshi immigrants.

The LG Secretariat directed the Delhi chief secretary and police chief to launch a two-month special drive to identify and take strict action against illegal Bangladeshi immigrants residing in the city.

Delhi weather: Cold wave intensifies with further temperature drop and dense fog

The Safdarjung Observatory, which measures the city's weather, reported a significant dip in temperatures on Sunday, continuing the cooling trend.



NEW DELHI. Delhi experienced a cool and foggy start to Sunday as the capital recorded a minimum temperature of 13°C, which is six notches above the season's average, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The maximum temperature for the day is expected to reach around 16°C, with mostly clear skies ahead. The city is still feeling the aftereffects of a record-breaking rainfall on Friday, which brought 41.2 mm of rain, setting a new record for the highest single-day rainfall in December. The Safdarjung Observatory, which measures the city's weather, reported a significant dip in temperatures on Sunday, continuing the cooling trend. The IMD predicts that the minimum temperature will drop further to 6°C on December 30 and 5°C on December 31.

While clear skies are expected, Delhi's air quality has been a concern. On Sunday morning, the Air Quality Index (AQI) deteriorated to the 'poor' category, with the AQI reaching 223 at 7 am and further rising to 230 by 9 am. The air quality had been in the 'moderate' category just the previous day, with a 24-hour AQI of 135 recorded at 4 pm on Saturday. According to the IMD, an AQI between 201 and 300 is classified as 'poor'.

Humidity was also high on Sunday, recorded at 95% at 8:30 am, adding to the discomfort in the chilly conditions. The IMD has issued a dense fog alert for Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, and Chandigarh, particularly during the early morning and late-night hours on both Sunday and Monday. An orange alert has been issued for several cities in Punjab due to the forecasted dense fog. Overall, Delhi will experience clear skies but colder temperatures, while the air quality remains a significant concern. Residents are advised to take necessary precautions, especially those with respiratory issues, and be cautious during early mornings and late nights due to the foggy conditions.

Cold wave to intensify in Delhi with further dip in temperature, fog engulfs city

New Delhi. Delhi, on Sunday, woke up to yet another foggy morning as temperature in the national capital-NCR region continued to dip after record-breaking rainfall on Friday. The capital's Safdarjung Observatory reported a minimum temperature of 13 degrees Celsius for today, more than 6 notches above



normal. With no further rainfall forecasted for Delhi for this year, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted the minimum temperature to go down to 6 degrees Celsius and 5 degrees Celsius for December 30 and 31 respectively.

Delhi received 41.2 mm of rainfall in a day, breaking a 101-year-old record of receiving the highest single-day rainfall in the city in December.

Meanwhile, cold wave conditions are predicted to intensify in Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana and Chandigarh. The IMD has issued orange alert across several cities in Punjab due to dense fog conditions.

Dense fog alert has also been issued for Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh for both Sunday and Monday during the early morning and late night hours. On Sunday, Delhi's air quality declined to the 'poor' category range as the AQI stood at 223 at 7 am. The city's air quality further deteriorated to 230 at 9 am. On Saturday, the 24-hour AQI was in the 'moderate' category at 135 at 4 pm.

Statue Of Chhatrapati Shivaji Installed At 14,300 Feet Near India-China Border

New Delhi. The Indian Army has installed a statue of Maratha warrior Chhatrapati Shivaji on the bank of Pangong lake at an altitude of 14,300 feet, a region that is close to the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China in the eastern Ladakh sector. The Army's Leh-based 14 Corps said the inauguration of the statue celebrated the "unwavering spirit" of the Indian ruler as his legacy remains a source of inspiration.



The statue was unveiled on Thursday by Lt Gen Hitesh Bhalla, the General Officer Commanding of the 14 Corps, widely known as Fire and Fury Corps. The towering symbol of valour, vision and unwavering justice was inaugurated by Lt Gen Hitesh Bhalla, the 14 Corps said on X.

"The event celebrates the unwavering spirit of the Indian ruler, whose legacy remains a source of inspiration for generations," it said. The Army has been making efforts to integrate India's "ancient strategic acumen" into the contemporary military domain.

The unveiling of the Shivaji statue came weeks after India and China completed the disengagement process in the last two friction points of Demchok and Depsang marking an end to the nearly four-and-half-year-long border standoff. Following an understanding reached on October 21, the two sides completed the disengagement of troops at the two remaining friction points.

Madhya Pradesh boy dies after being trapped in 39-foot borewell for 16 hours

The boy was trapped at a depth of approximately 39 feet, and efforts to rescue him have been ongoing since Saturday night.

New Delhi. A 10-year-old boy who fell into a borewell in Madhya Pradesh's Guna district has died after he was taken out after 16 hours, a top official confirmed on Sunday. The incident, which took place at 6 pm on Saturday in Janjali area of Raghogarh, triggered a massive rescue operation involving multiple teams.



The boy, who was taken out of the borewell at around 9.30 am this morning, was trapped at a depth of approximately 39 feet, and efforts to rescue him had been ongoing since Saturday night. Teams from the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), and local police were deployed at the site. Guna ASP Man Singh Thakur said, "Sumit fell into the borewell yesterday afternoon at around 3.30 pm. The rescue operation to take him out

began at around 6 pm. This morning at around 9.30 am, Sumit was taken out of the borewell."

Guna Collector Satyendra Singh told ANI that the rescue teams dug a parallel pit up to 40 feet to rescue the boy. Also, oxygen support was being given continuously to ensure the child's safety. A team of doctors was also present at the site.

This comes almost a week after a 3-year-old girl fell into a 700-foot-deep borewell in Rajasthan's Kotputli and got stuck at 150 feet. She is still trapped in the borewell and specialised teams have intensified their efforts to rescue the girl.

Two weeks ago, a five-year-old boy fell into a borewell in Dausa district and the rescue operation lasted over 55 hours. However, the boy had lost the battle for life by that time he was taken out.

Kisan Mahapanchayat in Punjab on January 4, farmers to press for MSP demand

Farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been on a fast-unto-death since November 26, is scheduled to address the "Kisan Mahapanchayat" on January 4 at the Khnauri border.

New Delhi. Amid the ongoing protest at the Punjab-Haryana border, farmers have announced that they will hold a "Kisan Mahapanchayat" in Khanauri on January 4.

A unanimous decision was reached by the leaders of farmer outfits, Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Majdoor Morcha, to hold the Mahapanchayat as a mark of protest against the Centre, with their demands for a Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops. "On January 4, lakhs of farmers will be fathering at the Khanauri border and a Mahapanchayat will be held as leaders of both forms have decided," farmer leader Abhimanyu Kohar was quoted as saying by news agency ANI.

The decision comes against the backdrop of SKM leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal's fast-unto-death at the Khanauri border, which he began on November 26. Jagjit Singh



Dallewal told us that he wanted to see all those farmers who he has served over the last 44 years. As we all know that his health is deteriorating continuously, doctors are saying that his health situation could be out of control any time," Kohar added.

On Saturday, the Supreme Court pulled up protesting farmers objecting to attempts by the Punjab government to hospitalise farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, while also lashing out at the Punjab government for

their failure to shift the farmer leader, who has now gone without food for 34 days, to hospital.

The court's stern remarks came while hearing a contempt petition against the Punjab chief secretary for non-compliance with its December 20 order regarding medical aid to Dallewal, who is scheduled to address the "Mahapanchayat" on January 4, and convince him to go to hospital. Meanwhile, Punjab Advocate General Gurminder Singh said a medical board was constituted and a team of eight doctors was monitoring the health of Dallewal. The advocate, citing the compliance report, said efforts were made to persuade the SKM leader.

Jagjit Singh Dallewal, 70, has emerged as the face of Kisan Andolan 2.0. The ailing leader's fragile health has drawn attention from the government, the Opposition, and even the Supreme Court.

DU's Academic Council approves a one-year PG programme under NEP

➤ **The one-year postgraduate programme will be available to graduates of Du's four-year undergraduate course.**

NEW DELHI. The Delhi University's Academic Council (AC) has approved the introduction of a one-year PG programme under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The council has also approved the reservation of additional seats for single female students in PG programmes. The proposal advocates for reserving one supernumerary seat in each

postgraduate course for single girl students. The implementation of the "Postgraduate Curriculum Framework 2024" (PGCF 2024), was approved by the council in the 1021st meeting.

The one-year postgraduate programme will be available to graduates of DU's four-year undergraduate course. Students with a three-year undergraduate degree can opt for the existing two-year programme. Students in the one-year programme will earn 44 credits, while those in the two-year programme will complete 88 credits.

The resolution passed by the council will now be presented to the university's highest decision-making body called the Executive Council. Some AC members have raised strong objections to the proposed framework, citing various challenges and potential drawbacks.



Additionally, the council approved the introduction of a PhD in Hindu Studies from the 2025-26 academic sessions and reaffirmed the reservation of additional seats for single girl students in postgraduate programmes.

The council also agreed to increase seats in specialised courses such as DM (Neuroanaesthesia) at GIPMER and BSc (Medical Technology) Radiology at Lady

Hardinge Medical College, starting from the 2025-26 academic session, subject to regulatory approvals. During the meeting, questions regarding health facilities were also raised, wherein DU South campus director professor Prakash Singh informed that on the instructions of the vice-chancellor, the work of making DU Health Center a four-story building has also begun to increase the facilities in the university. The number of doctors will also be increased. He informed that a hospital of Railways has also been affiliated with DU to provide medical facilities for all the teaching and non-teaching staff of DU at par with the railway employees.

Recently, the varsity found itself in a controversy when it announced its proposal to offer four value-addition courses on the Hindu religious scripture Bhagavad Gita.

NEWS BOX

Giant waves kill one in Ecuador, Peru ports closed

PERU. One person died in Ecuador and ports closed across Peru as massive waves up to four meters (13 feet) high pummeled the region, officials said Saturday. Many beaches along the central and northern stretches of the Peruvian coastline were closed to prevent risk to human life, local authorities said. Waves there submerged jetties and public squares, sending residents fleeing to higher ground, according to images on local media.

In neighboring Ecuador, the National Secretariat for Risk Management said a body was recovered in the coastal city of Manta. "The Manta Fire Department reported that, at 6:00 am, the body of a missing person was found lifeless in the Barbasquillo sector," the agency announced on social media.

Peru closed 91 of its 121 ports until January 1, the National Emergency Operations Center said on its X social media account. The municipality of Callao, close to the capital Lima and the location of the country's main port, closed several beaches and barred tourist and fishing boats from venturing out.

"These waves are being generated thousands of kilometers away from Peru, off the coast of the United States," navy Captain Enrique Varea told Channel N television. "They are waves generated by a persistent wind on the surface of the ocean that is approaching our coasts," he said. Dozens of small fishing boats and businesses near the sea were affected, according to images broadcast on television and social networks.

I've Always Been In Favour...': Donald Trump Backs H-1B Visa Programme

World In a major shift from his earlier stance, US-President elect Donald Trump has expressed his support for the H-1B visa programme and acknowledged frequently using it for his own properties, calling it a "great programme," according to a report by the New York Post. Calling it a "great programme," the President-elect said he has "always" been in its favour. I've always liked the visas, I have always been in favour of the visas. That's why we have them," Trump said in a telephonic interview with the New York Post. He added, "I have many H-1B visas on my properties. I've been a believer in H-1B. I have used it many times. It's a great programme." Notably, during Trump's first term, the administration imposed restrictions on H-1B visas, citing concerns over "abuse" and "economic strain." In 2016, Trump condemned the program, describing it as a means for companies to replace American workers with lower-paid foreign employees. Restrictions tightened further in 2020 in response to economic challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Trump's latest remarks comes after a major divide emerged within his MAGA team in the United States, as Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy who advocated for the expansion of the visa program for 'highly skilled workers' faced heavy backlash from within President-elect's base. Musk and Ramaswamy -- both foreign origin leaders heading Trump's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) -- reignited the debate on H-1B visas, while reflecting a divide over immigration policy as Trump prepares to assume office. The debate over H1B visas and immigration policy has intensified following Trump's announcement of Sriram Krishnan as the White House policy adviser on artificial intelligence. Krishnan has previously supported removing per-country caps for green cards, a stance that has sparked mixed reactions.

Man, Fishing With Family In Australia's Great Barrier Reef, Killed In Shark Attack



Sydney, Australia. A shark has attacked and killed a 40-year-old pastor who was fishing with his family in the waters of Australia's Great Barrier Reef, officials and local media said. The predator bit him on the neck on Saturday afternoon off Humpy Island on the country's east coast, emergency services said. The victim was Luke Walford, a youth pastor at the Cathedral of Praise church in the central Queensland town of Rockhampton, according to local media including public broadcaster ABC. "The man was fishing with family members when he was bitten by a shark," Queensland state police said in a statement.

He sustained "life-threatening injuries" and died about an hour-and-a-half afterwards, police said, adding that a report would be prepared for the coroner. They were unable to confirm whether he was spearfishing at the time. Photos posted by Walford on social media in 2021 showed him aboard a boat in a wetsuit holding up large fish.

A Queensland ambulance spokeswoman told AFP on Sunday that he died at the scene after sustaining a "significant life-threatening wound to his neck".

Humpy Island, which lies in the Great Barrier Reef's Keppel Bay Islands National Park, has a popular camping ground that gives easy access to reefs for diving and snorkeling. The country's last fatal shark attack was in December 2023, when what was believed to be a great white killed a 15-year-old boy at a remote surfing spot in South Australia.

There have been more than 1,200 shark incidents in Australia since 1791, of which over 250 resulted in death, according to a national database.

120 dead as plane carrying 181 people bursts into flames at Muan airport in South Korea

SEOUL. A plane carrying 181 people burst into flames after veering off a runway at Muan international airport in South Korea on Sunday, killing at least 120 people on board, The National Fire Agency confirmed. "120 people are confirmed dead after a Jeju Air plane crashed on landing in South Korea," the country's fire agency confirmed. "So far two rescued, 120 dead," the national fire agency said in a statement, adding that 25 of the victims were male, 37 female. Video shared by the local MBC broadcaster showed the Jeju Air plane -- a Boeing 737-8AS according to Flight Radar -- landing at the Muan airport runway, with smoke streaming out from the engines before the entire aircraft is quickly engulfed in flames. A collision with birds and adverse weather conditions were cited by the authorities as likely causes of the crash that flung passengers out of the plane and left it "almost completely destroyed", according to fire officials. One flight attendant and one passenger have been rescued so far, South Korea's fire agency said. Currently two have been rescued, one passenger and one flight attendant," the

national fire agency said in a statement, adding that 32 fire trucks and scores of firefighters had been deployed to the crash site at Muan airport. There was little chance that remaining passengers on a crashed Jeju Air flight survived, a South Korean fire department official said. "Passengers were ejected from the aircraft after it collided with the barrier, leaving little chance of survival," a local fire department said in a statement. "The plane is almost completely destroyed, and identifying the deceased is proving difficult. The process is taking time as we locate and recover the remains," the fire department in Muan said in a statement.

"The cause of the accident is presumed to be a bird strike combined with adverse weather conditions. However, the exact cause will be announced following a joint investigation," Lee Jeong-hyun, chief of Muan fire station, said during a briefing. A photo showed the tail section of the jet engulfed in flames on what appeared to be



the side of the runway, with firefighters and emergency vehicles nearby. Acting President Choi Sang-mok called for the mobilisation of all resources to save the passengers. "All related agencies... must mobilise all available resources to save the personnel," he instructed officials in a statement. Choi is convening an emergency meeting with cabinet members to discuss rescue operations and response, his office said. Jeju Air says 'sincerely apologises'

after fatal crash. Low-cost carrier Jeju Air apologised Sunday and vowed to do all it could to help after its plane carrying 181 people from Bangkok to South Korea crashed on arrival, killing scores. "We at Jeju Air will do everything in our power in response to this accident. We sincerely apologise for causing concern," the airline said in a statement posted on its social media channels. It is the first fatal accident in the history of Jeju air, one of South Korea's largest low-cost carriers, which was set up in 2005. On August 12, 2007, a Bombardier Q400 operated by Jeju Air carrying 74 passengers came off the runway due to strong winds at the southern Busan-Gimhae airport, resulting in a dozen injuries. South Korea's aviation industry has a solid track record for safety, experts say. Last year, a passenger opened an emergency exit on an Asiana Airlines flight as it was preparing to land, with the aircraft landing safely but several people hospitalised.

Trump sides with Musk in right-wing row over worker visas

WASHINGTON. Donald Trump weighed in Saturday in a bitter debate dividing his traditional supporters and tech barons like Elon Musk, saying that he backs a special visa program that helps highly skilled workers enter the country. "I've always liked the (H-1B) visas, that's why we have them" at Trump-owned facilities, the president-elect told the New York Post in his first public comments on the matter since it flared up this week. An angry back-and-forth, largely between Silicon Valley's Musk and traditional anti-immigration Trump backers, has erupted in fiery fashion, with Musk even vowing to "go to war" over the issue. Trump's insistent calls for sharp curbs on immigration were central to his election victory in November over President Joe Biden. Trump has vowed to deport all undocumented immigrants and limit legal immigration. But tech entrepreneurs like Tesla's Musk -- as well as Vivek Ramaswamy, who is set to join Musk in co-chairing a government cost-cutting panel -- say the United States produces too few highly skilled graduates, and they

fervently champion the H-1-B program. Musk, who migrated from South Africa on an H-1-B, posted Thursday on his X platform that luring elite engineering talent from abroad was "essential for



America to keep winning." Adding acrimony to the debate was a post from Ramaswamy, the son of immigrants from India, who deplored an "American culture" that he said venerates mediocrity, adding that the United States risks having "our asses handed to us by China." That angered several prominent conservatives who were backing Trump long before Musk noisily joined their cause this year, going on to pump more than \$250 million into the Republican's

campaign. "Looking forward to the inevitable divorce between President Trump and Big Tech," said Laura Loomer, a far-right MAGA figure known for her conspiracy theories, who often flew with Trump on his campaign plane. "We have to protect President Trump from the technocrats." She and others said Trump should be promoting American workers and further limiting immigration.

MAGA civil war Musk, who had already infuriated some Republicans after leading an online campaign that helped tank a bipartisan budget deal last week, fired back at his critics. Posting on X, he warned of a "MAGA civil war" over the visas, which he said were critical "for those who want America to win." Musk swore at one critic, adding: "I will go to war on this issue." That, in turn, drew a volley from Trump strategist Steve Bannon, who wrote on the Gettr platform that the H-1-B program brings in migrants who are essentially "indentured servants" working for less than American citizens would.

New York Teacher Sexually Abused Teen Student In 'Escape Room' And Home 'Bat Cave': Report

World A disturbing report has revealed allegations of sexual abuse against Scott Biski, a 50-year-old music teacher at Jamaica Gateway to the Sciences High School in Queens. Investigators claim that Biski created a manipulative "escape room" environment to exploit a female student, whom he allegedly began grooming when she was just 14 years old. The abuse allegedly escalated into a sexual relationship when the student was a senior. Biski is also accused of inviting the student to his home, referred to as "the bat cave," for illicit encounters when his family was away, the New York Post reported. "I now understand that these weird hugs, embraces were actually just groping. He was touching me for sexual pleasure without my consent," the now 25-year-old ex-student told investigators in 2022. Biski allegedly created a manipulative environment in his music

classroom and office by setting up "makeshift dividers and old desks" and inviting students to hang out in his so-called "escape room." According to the report, Biski made unwanted advances towards the student, touching her breasts and attempting to kiss her. The girl promptly pulled away and left. Biski also invited the girl to his home under the guise of playing board games with other students. However, on one occasion, she arrived to find herself alone with him. The report further alleges that Biski showered the girl with lavish gifts, including a flute, his favourite childhood book, new clothes, and cash. He even gave her \$200 to buy Ugg boots. Moreover, the Special Commissioner of Investigation (SCI) found that Biski sent the teenager nearly 700 messages, with 82 of those messages being sent during school hours. He allegedly instructed the student to save his phone number under

a pseudonym, Arthur Dent to avoid raising suspicion. According to court documents and the SCI report, Biski engaged in explicit and non-consensual behaviour with the student in his school office. He allegedly forced her to touch him inappropriately and made suggestive comments. Biski seemingly used his position of authority to groom the student, granting her favorable treatment such as assigning her lead flute roles, providing coveted solos, and writing outstanding college recommendation letters. After the student graduated, Biski allegedly continued to harass her, persuading her to visit his home for illicit encounters when his family was away. The inappropriate text messages also persisted. "No Halloween party? No s**t outfit?" he texted her during her first year in college. The student, who saw Biski as a "father figure," reported feeling "disgusted" by his behaviour.



to protect themselves from the severe weather. Even the provincial capital of Peshawar has recorded a significant drop in temperature, reaching as low as 1 degree Celsius due to the cold wave in the rural areas.

At least six people, including women and children, died, and three others were injured in a car accident caused by dense fog at Tandlianwala in Pakistan's Punjab, Ary News reported. Pakistan has seen severe smog blankets across the country as the cold wave intensifies. The crisis hits Pakistan's most populous province every winter, but in recent years, air pollution has worsened due to cold air trapping dust, emissions from low-quality diesel, and smoke from illegal crop burning. The combination of smog, low temperatures, and high pollution levels presents major health risks to residents, underscoring the urgent need for decisive action to address the growing crisis.

Syria's Interim Authorities Deploy Helicopters Against 'Former Regime Remnants' In Coastal Regions

Damascus. Military forces of Syria's interim administration have begun deploying attack helicopters against what it described as "remnants of the former regime" in the country's coastal regions, media reported.

The helicopters are taking off from Istamo Airfield in rural Latakia, targeting armed elements still active in the coastal countryside, media channels cited a statement by the administration, which did not elaborate on the number of helicopters in use or the scope of the operation. The deployment came as part of a series of security initiatives nationwide, aimed at consolidating the new leadership's authority, Xinhua news agency reported. On Saturday, Syria's newly-appointed intelligence chief Anas Khattab pledged in an official statement to restructure the country's security apparatus "in a manner befitting our people's sacrifices and long heritage". All existing security branches in Syria will be dissolved and reorganised, Khattab said, without outlining a timeline or providing specific details for the overhaul. Khattab's announcement came as Syria navigates a sensitive political

transition following the downfall of the previous government on December 8. A military coalition led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham waged a major military operation from northern Syria on November 27. It swept southwards, captured the capital Damascus, and overthrew former Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government within 12 days. The Syrian Information Ministry declared a ban on what it described as "the circulation or publication of any media content or news with a sectarian tone aimed at spreading division" among Syrians. The Syrian civil war took on sectarian dimensions as Assad drew on Shia militias from across the Middle East, mobilised by his ally Iran, to battle the insurgency dominated by members of the Sunni Muslim majority, many of them Islamist. Dissent has also surfaced in the city of Homs, 150 km (90 miles) north of Damascus.

State media reported that police imposed an overnight curfew on Wednesday night, following unrest linked to demonstrations



that residents said were led by members of the Alawite and Shia religious communities. Footage posted on social media on Wednesday from Homs showed a crowd of people scattering, and some of them running, as gunfire was heard.

Assad's long-time Shia regional ally, Iran, has criticised the course of events in Syria in recent days. On Sunday, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called on Syrian youth to "stand with firm determination against those who have

orchestrated and brought about this insecurity". Khamenei forecast "that a strong and honourable group will also emerge in Syria because today Syrian youth have nothing to lose", calling the country unsafe. Syria's newly appointed Foreign Minister, Asaad Hassan al-Shibani, said in a social media post on Tuesday that Iran must respect the will of the Syrian people and Syria's sovereignty and security. "We warn them against spreading chaos in Syria and we hold them accountable for the repercussions of the latest remarks," he said.

Lebanon said on Thursday it was looking forward to having the best neighbourly relations with Syria, in its first official message to the new administration in Damascus.

Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah played a major role in propping up Assad during the civil war, before bringing its fighters back to Lebanon over the last year to fight in a bruising war with Israel -- a redeployment that weakened Syrian government lines.

NEWS BOX

'It's why we've got five-day Tests and really stick it up those who want four days!' — Mitchell Starc

New Delhi. With Australia refusing to declare before Day 4 ended and their tail wagging for 55 runs for the 10th wicket, the MCG Test set itself up for an exciting Day 5, even as Nathan Lyon and Scott Boland continued to frustrate India. But Mitchell Starc speaking to ABC Cricket stressed this was exactly why Test matches needed to be 5 days long, as it built towards an enthralling contest.

"We've got 98 overs tomorrow. This why we've got five days for a Test match and really stick it up those who want four days!" Starc told ABC, even as an impatient restless cricket world has been brewing thoughts of making Tests into 4-day affairs. Suggestions are dime a dozen to truncate the longest format send cut it by a day, but Starc was clearly no fan of this brainwave. The Border-Gavaskar Trophy series has seen some exciting last sessions across venues from Adelaide to Brisbane, with drama pouring out in the last hour or over too. There was a smite of a chance that India dawdled and let things drift in the last hour on Day 4, not risking a bat. But concerns are swelling in Australia over



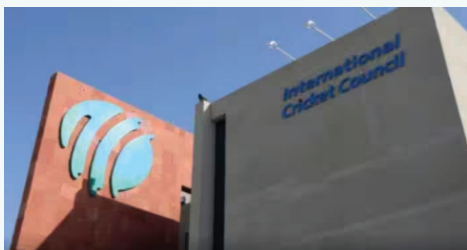
fitness of their bowling ace, Mitchell Starc, who received continuous treatment for his back problem, while he bowled in the first innings. The physio was stationed at the fine leg boundary, and Starc was even slow on a long shot attempt at a catch. Mitchell Starc however would tell ABC he wasn't stressed about what would be solid workload on Monday, Day 5: "It's not something that is bothering me. My pace is up... If I need to bowl 20 (overs) tomorrow, I'll bowl 20."

When asked if Australia should've chanced a declaration and bought itself more time and overs to enforce a win, Starc said, "You'll have to ask Pat Cummins... you'll have to ask the braintrust." Clearly, the Aussies reckoned there was something in the Melbourne pitch that could see Indians go after the total. At any rate, reports say MCG could witness over 40,000 trooping in on a Monday to watch the exciting final day, reiterating Starc contention that 5 days are worth spending over for a Test match.

ICC Names First List Of Emerging Cricketers Of The Year Awards 2024

New Delhi. The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Saturday unveiled the first wave of nominees for the ICC Awards 2024, spotlighting the emerging talents in men's and women's cricket. These nominees for the Emerging Men's and Women's Cricketer of the Year awards have made significant impacts over the past year, showcasing their skills in a year filled with international competition, as per ICC. With a host of exceptional new talent thriving on the international stage, the Emerging shortlists span eight nations, and are packed with elite performers from all formats of the game.

A hugely competitive field in the ICC Emerging Men's Cricketer of the Year sees four strong contenders vie for the accolade. England's Gus Atkinson enjoyed a memorable start to his Test career, and is joined on the shortlist by Pakistan's multi-format run-scorer Saim Ayub, West Indies pacer Shamar Joseph and record-breaking Sri Lankan batter Kamindu Mendis. Elsewhere, the ICC Emerging Women's Cricketer of the Year pits four leading short-format talents against each other for the coveted title. Comprising the nominees are South African all-rounder Annerie



Dercksen, Scotland's Saskia Horley, India's Shreyanka Patil and Ireland's Freya Sargent, after all left a significant mark on international competition in 2024. More information about each of the nominees can be found in the news section of the ICC website. The ICC Awards 2024 comprises 12 individual awards, with shortlists in nine categories being revealed by the ICC between 28 and 30 December. Shortlists have been drawn up by a specialist panel of cricket writers and broadcasters, who selected the nominees according to on-field performances and overall achievements in international cricket throughout the calendar year. Fans are now able to vote for their favourite Emerging players at www.icc-cricket.com, with other categories unlocked as further nominees are revealed by the ICC over the next two days. Fan voting results will be combined with selections made by a prominent panel of international cricket media - the ICC Voting Academy - to identify the winner in each of the shortlisted categories.

Rise of women's sports, in crowd, spirit

Riding the wave of 2023, the year 2024 has seen visible growth with attendance at venues multiplying and endorsements too climbing. More is to come in 2025.

CHENNAI. It was the semifinal day of the 2024 Women's Asian Champions Trophy in Rajgir. Conventionally speaking, Bihar is not known for anything related to the sport. Odisha followed by Jharkhand and to a certain extent Chennai have come to be known as the centers of hockey when it comes to hosting in recent times. However, the roar the crowd let out when the ground announcer started introducing the Indian players at the Rajgir Sports Complex in late November would tell you that the state of Bihar had embraced the sport like never before. It is not just hockey, women's sports in India are slowly and steadily gaining the imagination of people. The crowd at various sporting events are an indication of what is to unfold in the coming years. Female athletes, who have played in front of empty chairs in the not-so-distant past feel this is one of those watershed moments they never thought they

would witness in their careers. Take Harmanpreet Kaur, for example, the current captain of the national side played in the 2013 ODI World Cup hosted in India. The fixtures were played across two cities, Mumbai and Cuttack, on five grounds. Despite Wankhede Stadium being within walking distance, the Indian team played their matches at the Cricket Club of India's Brabourne Stadium. The final of the ICC event was played at the same venue with empty stands and minimum fanfare. Ten years later, in March 2023, Kaur led Mumbai Indians to their title in the inaugural season of the Women's Premier League at the same venue in front of a packed house. "It was a great experience for all of us, we were waiting for this moment for so many years. I think everybody enjoyed in our dressing room. It feels like a dream, I think not only for me but for everyone here, even for the crowd also. So many people were asking us, "when the WPL is going to come?" and today that day is here and I'm so happy and so proud that our team did so well," Kaur had said after the final in Mumbai.

When the season expanded in two cities in the 2024 edition, the two iconic venues M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru and Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi showcased their love for the game. Royal Challengers Bengaluru's final home game of the season fetched a crowd of over 26k spectators at the Chinnaswamy Stadium, while the final of the competition saw close

to 30k loud audience in New Delhi. One must notice that these were the ticketed matches and even though the prices of those tickets were not as high as their men's counterpart competitions are, still spectators were ready to pay some amount of money to



watch these fixtures.

Apart from adding to the marketability of women's sports and athletes, these increased numbers have also motivated the players and put a different challenge in front of them. The crowd has well and truly made a difference for the teams in crucial events. India's hockey captain Salima Tete who played in Rajgir admits to the same. "The international hockey tournament was happening in Bihar for the first time, and it was a great experience for us as a team. We didn't expect that much crowd, but they were there to support India. I think it gives you added

motivation, especially since these many Hockey admirers were on the ground to watch us play," she told this daily.

Other than the attendance at the ground, viewing numbers over TV and OTT platforms have skyrocketed over the years. The 39% increase in the Dedicated Global Audience views in the 2024 edition of WPL is one of the biggest indications of that. While there is no gender-specific data available, with over 17 crore viewers tuning in across digital and linear platforms, the 2024 Paris edition was the most-watched Olympic Games in India's history. That could be a watershed moment for many sports going forward. The trends we are currently witnessing in India are in line with the revolution many sports are witnessing all over the World. Almost two million fans attended the Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand - up by more than 600,000 from the previous record. Elsewhere in the USA, The average attendance for the 2024 Women's National Basketball League season was 9,807, the highest in 22 years - a 48% increase from the previous season. The league also witnessed 154 sellout games in 2024, which was a 242% increase from the 2023 season.

What has made this growth possible is the dedicated investments in the sport, giving players the facilities to show their talent and at the same time, making the sports-watching experiences spectator-friendly.

IND vs AUS: What is the highest successful run-chase in Melbourne Tests

The ongoing Boxing Day Test between India and Australia at the Melbourne Cricket Ground has been on a knife-edge. The game has ebbed and flowed throughout. Australia dominated in their first innings after Sam Konstas set the tone with a quick-fire 65. Usman Khawaja and Marnus Labuschagne carried the momentum with knocks of 57 and 72 respectively.

But it was Steve Smith's 140 that propelled Australia to 474. Later, Yashasvi Jaiswal's 82 laid the platform for India. Although India lost a few quick wickets, Washington Sundar and Nitish Reddy's 127-run stand for the eighth wicket kept India afloat. The 21-year-old Reddy carried on and scored 114 runs, bringing India's deficit down to 105 runs.

On Day 4, Jasprit Bumrah became the fastest Indian pacer to reach the landmark of 200 wickets in Tests. But Australia's lead is past the 200-run mark. With the target growing, how much can India chase down? Let's have a look at what history suggests.

Big challenge for India

England hold the record for the highest successful run-chase in the history of Test cricket at the MCG after they tracked down 332 back in 1928. Out of 34 successful chases in Melbourne, England (8) and Australia (21) have achieved it as many as 29 times. Back in February 1953, South Africa chased down 295 to win by six wickets. As far as teams



from the sub-continent are concerned, only India achieved the feat once, back in December 2020 when they tracked down 70 to win by eight wickets. In the 21st century, barring India, only the Proteas are in the list of successful chases at the MCG by a visiting team after they chased down 183 to win by nine wickets.

Not impossible for India

There have been 19 successful run-chases in the history of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, out of which India have featured 12 times. Nine out of the top 11 chases belong to India. In Australia, India have chased down a 200-plus target twice and a 300-plus target once.

The historic Brisbane Test in January 2021 where India tracked down 328 remains the all-time successful chase in the history of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Back in 2003, India chased 230 at the Adelaide Oval after Rahul David's double century in the first innings.

Jasprit Bumrah fastest Indian to take 200 Test wickets

MELBOURNE. Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Sunday became the second fastest Indian along with Ravindra Jadeja to complete 200 Test wickets and the first bowler ever to reach that milestone with a sub-20 average during the fourth day's play of the fourth Test against Australia here.

The milestone came after he took four wickets in Australia's first innings and then dismissed Travis Head for 1 in their second innings on Day 4, marking his 200th Test wicket in just his 44th Test match. The recently retired Indian spinner Ravichandran Ashwin was the quickest among Indians to have taken 200 wickets, a feat that he achieved in his 37th Test.

Among all bowlers who have crossed the 200-wickets mark in Test cricket, Bumrah is the only bowler with an average of under 20 which includes some of the fearsome fast bowlers from the West Indies such as Malcolm Marshall (376 wickets at 20.94), Joel Garner (259 wickets at 20), Curtly Ambrose (405 wickets at 20.99) as well as England's James Anderson (704 wickets at 26.45) and even Glenn McGrath (563 wickets at 21.64).



Ashwin is ranked third in the overall list of bowlers who were fastest to take 200 Test wickets, behind two leg-spinners -- Pakistan's Yasir Shah (33 Tests) and Australia's Clarrie Grimmett (36 Tests). The dismissal of Head was followed by that of

Mitchell Marsh's (0), caught behind the wicket, as Bumrah took his wickets tally in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy to 28. He had earlier dismissed opener Sam Konstas (8) for his first wicket in Australia's second innings.

India's Koneru Humpy crowned World Rapid Chess Champion for historic second time

India's Koneru Humpy scored a decisive win over Irene Sukandar in the final round on Sunday to clinch the World Rapid Chess Championship title for the second time in her career.

New Delhi. Indian Grandmaster Koneru Humpy won a historic second title at the World Rapid Chess Championship, emerging victorious in the tournament in New York on Sunday, December 29. Humpy has become only the second chess player after Ju Wenjun of China to win the title in the women's section more than once. Koneru Humpy, 37, sealed the title when she defeated Irene Sukandar with the black pieces in the final round. It was a decisive win for the Indian Grandmaster, who needed nothing less than a win in the ultimate battle.

The Indian No. 1 finished on top of the standings with 8.5 out of 11 points in an incredible display in the World Rapid

Championship. This is her second title in the format after her victory in 2019 in Moscow. Later, the 18-year-old Volodar Murzin of Russia bagged the corresponding title in the men's section. Murzin is the the second-youngest



FIDE World Rapid Champion, after Nodirbek Abdusattorov, who claimed the title at 17. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and former Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju were among the ones to congratulate Koneru on her historic achievement. It's been a sensational year for

India as Koneru Humpy's rapid world title comes weeks after D Gukesh won the Chess World Championship in the classical format. Gukesh became only the second Indian man after Viswanathan Anand to win the prestigious crown. She first made a mark in the tournament in 2012 when she secured a bronze medal in Moscow. In 2019, she reached the pinnacle of success by clinching the championship in Batumi, Georgia, where she defeated China's Lei Tingjie in a nerve-wracking Armageddon game.

Her silver medal finish in 2023 at the championship in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. She narrowly missed the title in a tiebreak against Russia's Anastasia Bodnaruk.

Beyond her rapid chess accolades, Humpy has also excelled in other formats. She earned a silver medal at the 2022 Women's World Blitz Chess Championship and came close to winning the Women's Candidates Tournament in 2024, finishing with another silver.

Australia keeper ruled out of series due to injury, Starc provides fitness update

IND vs AUS: Australia wicketkeeper-batter Josh Inglis has been ruled out for the remainder of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Cricket Australia announced the development on Sunday, 29 December after Inglis suffered a calf strain.

Melbourne. Australia have been hit by a slight injury crisis in the Melbourne Test match of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Wicketkeeper-batter Josh Inglis has been ruled out of the series due to a calf strain and will not be taking further part in the series, Cricket Australia announced on Sunday, 29 December.

Inglis is the only keeper in the side, bar Alex Carey, and the injury comes as a big blow for

the Australian side, who will be left one short in that position going into the final Test match of the series in Sydney. Australia have not announced a replacement for the player, but are expected to draft in either Beau Webster or Nathan McSweeney as a specialist batter. Drafting either McSweeney or Webster will provide Australia choices in case they do not play Mitchell Marsh in the final Test of the series. Marsh has been a walking wicket throughout the 4 Tests so far against India and has not bowled a lot as well.

Apart from Inglis, there are concerns over Mitchell Starc's fitness as well. The pacer bowled through pain on Day 3 of the Boxing Day Test match. Starc did not take the ball on Day 4 of the game, with Pat Cummins, Scott Boland and Nathan Lyon finishing off the job of taking India's final wicket. Starc was quizzed about his fitness on Day 4 of the Test match and said that



everything was fine. The fast bowler had suffered a back issue while bowling on Day 3 of the MCG Test. Starc played down his injury concerns and said that everything was good as he was bowling at 140k throughout his spells. All good. My pace didn't drop so I'm all good," Starc said.

The seriousness of his injury had remained unclear at the end of Day 3. Scott Boland had spoken about the pacer and had said that the pacer would be fine in the near future.

"He's okay. I think he's just had a bit of a niggle in his back or rib, but he came out after the (tea) break and was bowling 140 (kph) so I think he'll be fine," Boland told reporters.

Speaking to the ABC, Boland added: "Playing a Test match is pretty hard on your body and he's played all four Tests so far. I think he's just a little bit stiff in his back."

"I think he's underrated for how tough he is. A couple of years ago here at the MCG he had a broken finger and we were planning for him not to bowl at all - and then he came out and bowled 140k swingers," Boland had said.



Keerthy Suresh

Shocked As Paparazzi Call Her 'Dosa'; Salman Khan Battles Masked Foes In Sikandar Teaser

Keerthy Suresh is a popular name in the Tamil and Telugu film industries. However, she recently made her Bollywood debut with Baby John. Recently, the actress was snapped by the paparazzi in Mumbai when she was left annoyed.

The highly anticipated teaser for Sikandar, starring Salman Khan and Rashmika Mandanna, has finally been unveiled. This action-packed film marks the reunion of Salman Khan with producer Sajid Nadiadwala, following their blockbuster collaboration in Kick (2014), Nadiadwala's directorial debut.

Anushka Sharma has been in Australia for over a month to support Virat Kohli and Team India during the 2024-25 Border-Gavaskar Trophy. A recent photo from the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) showed her posing with Indian cricketer Nitish Kumar Reddy's family. Fans also noticed Athiya Shetty, who is expecting, in the picture.

In September, Sean 'Diddy' Combs was arrested on the charges of sex trafficking, racketeering and transportation to engage in prostitution. He is currently being detained at the Metropolitan Detention Centre in Brooklyn. Despite being in jail and awaiting his trial, scheduled for May 2025, the 55-year-old rapper is nowhere close to being broke, at least for the time being. Tina Ahuja, daughter of Bollywood legend Govinda and Sunita Ahuja, recently opened up about various topics during a joint interview with her mother. Tina, an entrepreneur, stirred up a conversation about menstrual health with her unconventional views, claiming that period cramps are more common in cities like Mumbai and Delhi and suggesting that they might be psychological in nature.



Urfi Javed REACTS To Walking Out Of Samay Raina's Show, Reveals Being 'Slut Shamed, Compared To Mia Khalifa'



Samay Raina's show India's Got Latent has once again been shrouded in controversy. It was reported that social media sensation Urfi Javed, who appeared as a guest on the show, walked out mid-way after two contestants made derogatory remarks against her. Urfi has finally broken silence on the controversy, and addressed her walkout. Sharing what happened on the show, she slammed the two contestants for slut shaming her. She revealed that one contestant also compared her to adult film actress Mia Khalifa. Finally addressing the controversy, Urfi Javed wrote on her Instagram story, "I think I missed the memo, nowadays people think it's cool to abuse someone or just slut shame someone for some views. I'm sorry but I'm not ok with anyone abusing me, slut shaming me for my body counts (which they don't know but they just assumed it must be high). All this for what? For 2 mins of fame? The guy who abused me wasn't even joking, he got legit mad at me when I asked him why he was faking being handicapped! He just abused me on the stage in front of so many people."

Further, speaking about another contestant, she said that he slut shamed her and compared her to Mia Khalifa. She was disgusted by the derogatory remarks. While she didn't confront the individuals at the time, she said that she did not find such actions acceptable. She emphasized that such remarks should never be viewed as "cool" or acceptable under any circumstances. "The next one was just trying to be cool, slut shaming me comparing me to Mia Khalifa expressing his displeasure over my high body count. I was disgusted. I should've said something to these men but I didn't cause the place I was at, everyone thought this was cool. No it's not. It's not cool," Urfi concluded. The remarks left Urfi disgusted and disappointed, following which she walked out of the show. Reportedly, even the host of the show, Samay Raina did not intervene due to which the situation went out of hand.

This is not the first time that Samay Raina or his show has landed in a controversy for initiating a debate about the limits of comedy. Previously, Samay made headlines for brutally roasting Kusha Kapila over her divorce from Zoravar Ahluwalia.

Nikkita Ghag's Film Courage To Represent India At Festival De Cine Global Santo Domingo



Actress Nikkita Ghag's drama film Courage is set to represent the country at the Festival De Cine Global Santo Domingo. The Ankur Arun Kakatkar directorial will be screened under the Country of Honour section during the event. Sharing the exciting news with her fans and admirers, Nikkita dropped a post on Instagram that reads, "Our English Film COURAGE is representing India in the COUNTRY OF HONOUR section at Festival De Cine Santo Domingo. A heartfelt thanks to the cast and crew for making this possible." The actress added in the caption, "Proud to be a part of this film."

Courage is based on a true story and follows Rani, a young woman trapped in an abusive marriage. Her life takes a turn when she reconnects with her college crush, Jaydeep, and old feelings resurface. However, their love story faces an unexpected challenge when Jaydeep is diagnosed with a serious illness.

In the film, Nikkita plays Prabha, a friend of Rani. The 2025 Festival de Cine Global Santo Domingo will be held in Westpark and Caribbean Cinemas in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, from January 31 to February 6. The festival will showcase a diverse range of films, including documentaries, short films and feature films, as well as opportunities for learning and inspiration. It will be dedicated to the Dominican filmmaker and photographer Rubén Darío Abud, who passed away after a long battle with cancer earlier this year. Notably, India will be the country of honour at the festival. Earlier this month, Dominican Cinema shared the news on Instagram and wrote, "This year, India, as the guest country of honour, will take us on a fascinating journey through its rich cinematic and cultural history."

Talking about Nikkita, the actress has appeared in shows like Bekaboo 3, Fuh Se Fantasy and Pyarr Ka Bazaar Karobaar. Recently, during an interview, Nikkita shared her career plans for 2025 and said, "Next year, I hope to embark on more acting jobs and make it to the Bigg Boss house anyhow. I want to grow politically and personally-physically, psychologically and emotionally in a positive way. My ultimate goal is to continue learning, improving, and excelling in both my political and professional lives," quoted Filmibeat. The actress was also seen showing her vocal support for Digvijay Rathee, during his stint inside the Bigg Boss 18 house.

Twinkle Khanna

On Moving To London: 'Even Without Akshay's Support, I Would Have Done It'

Twinkle Khanna, who first graced Bollywood with her debut in Barsaat (1995), enjoyed a brief stint in the film industry, starring in notable movies such as Mela, Joru Ka Ghulam, and Baadshah. Though she has stepped away from the silver screen, Twinkle has carved out a new identity as a successful author and film producer. Recently, she revealed her gratitude for her husband, Akshay Kumar, supporting her decision to relocate to London



with their daughter, Nitara. She candidly admitted that while she was determined to make the move regardless, his approval made the transition much smoother. Speaking at an event hosted by FICCI FLO, Twinkle reflected on her upbringing in an unconventional household where seeking permission wasn't a norm. Recalling Akshay's understanding nature, she expressed relief that he was on board with the relocation. "Even if he wasn't fine with it, I would have done it anyway," she said, adding that it would have been a far more challenging

process. Twinkle's journey has been anything but conventional. Although she initially aspired to become a chartered accountant after completing her 12th grade, her parents, legendary actors Rajesh Khanna and Dimple Kapadia, encouraged her to pursue a career in films. However, after stepping away from acting, Twinkle found her passion in writing and academia. In 2024, at the age of 49, Twinkle made headlines for returning to education full-time. Having dabbled in online courses during the pandemic, she went on to earn a master's degree from Goldsmiths, University of London, graduating in January this year. Following her achievement, Akshay Kumar celebrated her dedication with a heartfelt Instagram post, praising her ability to balance studies, career, and family life. Twinkle Khanna, who last appeared on-screen in Love Ke Liye Kuch Bhi Karega (2001), has since made a name for herself beyond acting. As a producer, her last project was the critically acclaimed Pad Man (2018), and as an author, she has penned bestsellers like Mrs Funnybones, The Legend.

