



THE US FIJI TIMES

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When will Donald Trump take office as US president?

Republican Donald Trump will be the next US president, after he defeated Democrat Kamala Harris in November's election. Trump previously served as US president between 2017 and 2021.



A quick guide to Donald Trump

Donald Trump won the 2024 US presidential election

The Republican candidate received more than 270 electoral college votes, beating his rival Kamala Harris. He will be sworn in as president in January 2025 and serve four years in the Oval Office in his second term. He stunned the world when he first won the presidency in 2016. Many didn't take Trump's first bid for president seriously - he was, after all, best known as a businessman and reality TV star.

But, against all odds, he defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton, former US secretary of state and wife of former president Bill Clinton. He introduced major change while in the White House

Tightening immigration was

a key campaign promise. He cracked down on travel from several Muslim-majority countries and strengthened part of the southern border.

He made the top court in the US more conservative, withdrew the US from the Paris climate agreement and started a trade war with China. He was an unconventional - and sometimes controversial - president

Part of his appeal to voters was that he didn't speak or act like other politicians. And winning the White House the first time did not change that - he fired off tweets at all hours.

His final months in office were dominated by one story - the Covid-19 pandemic. His critics say he heightened divisions over masks, lockdowns and vaccines.

Families in shock begin to visit their charred homes in the Los Angeles area

LOS ANGELES — Many watched their homes burn on television in a state of shock.

Since the flames erupted in and around Los Angeles, scores of residents have returned to their still smoldering neighborhoods even as the threat of new fires persisted and the nation's second-largest city remained unsettled. For some, it was a first look at the staggering reality of what was lost as the region grapples with the gargantuan challenge of overcoming the disaster and rebuilding.

Metropolitan LA and its 13 million residents, who haven't seen rain in more than eight months, woke up Friday to another day of strong winds that later eased, enabling firefighters to start gaining some control of the biggest blazes.

Bridget Berg, who was at work when she saw on TV

her house in Altadena erupt in flames, came back for the first time with her family two days later "just to make it real."

Their feet crunched across the broken bits of what had been their home for 16 years.

Her kids sifted through debris on the sidewalk, finding a clay pot and a few keepsakes as they searched for Japanese wood prints they hoped to recover. Her husband pulled his hand out of rubble near the still-standing fireplace, holding up a piece of petrified wood handed down by his grandmother.

"It's OK. It's OK," Berg said as she took stock of the destruction, describing the deck and pool from which her family watched fireworks. "It's not like we just lost our house — everybody lost their house."

The fires have burned more than 12,000 homes and other

structures, when they first began popping up around a densely populated, 25-mile (40-kilometer) expanse north of downtown LA. No cause has been identified yet for the largest fires.

Allegations of leadership failures and political blame have started and so have investigations. Gov. Gavin Newsom on Friday ordered state officials to determine why a 117 million-gallon (440 million-liter) reservoir was out of service and some hydrants ran dry, calling it "deeply troubling." Meanwhile, Los Angeles Fire Chief Kristin Crowley said city leadership failed her department by not providing enough money for firefighting. She also criticized the lack of water. "When a firefighter comes up to a hydrant, we expect there's going to be water," she said.

Continued P08



Jan 24-26

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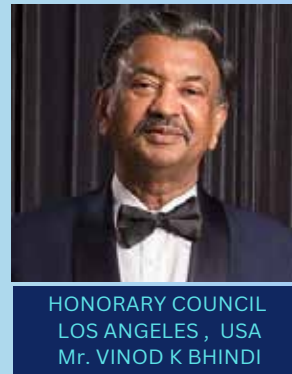
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THE US FIJI TIMES PROUD OF ITS SERVICE

The US Fiji Times is ranked as the top newspaper being published outside of Fiji for the Fiji American community and all over the world. The paper's popularity has grown immensely in recent years due to its critical approach in impressing the need for charitable organizations to rise up in all occasions to help Fiji and the people back home. Visitors from around the world have commended the paper on its stand to serve the community. The US Fiji Times understands that like in any other field, there is competition and competing with "The largest newspaper out of Fiji" has been a difficult task for newer publications. This is not because of its magnitude and coverage, but because of its stability and growth capabilities. The writers of the paper comprise some of Fiji's best. Even though they are not too visible in social functions, they are taking up their challenges very effectively. The marketing strategy handles by our CEO/Publisher Mr. Rocky Ali is the hallmark of the papers current strength. Despite lacking the front line journalist experience, he makes up for the deficiency with the sheer ability to jeep the media wagon rolling. His insatiable love to be involved with the community to cherish in this very noble cause is worthy of higher recommendation. We have a very vibrant community, so despite the paper being issued free, the expectation of the community is very high. The coverage of all the major events is a mist for the paper and we feel very proud to be associated with major organizations to see that their events are properly covered with pictures, stories and awareness via our social media platforms. The paper is being also sent to countries like Fiji, NZ, Australia, Canada, England and Sweden for Fijians abroad to also get the feel of the luxuries of USA. The feedback has been overwhelming in this regard and it has become a trend for many organizations to rely on US Fiji Times in reaching the desired success with adequate coverage. The paper will strive to serve the community with the best of its ability and assures the community that there will be quality reporting at all times.

Vinaka – Rocky Buksh



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As this occasion is such a blissful and a happier one, below are affectionate heartstouching messages, wishes and quotes which you can send to your brother with Rakhi online on Raksha Bandhan 2023.



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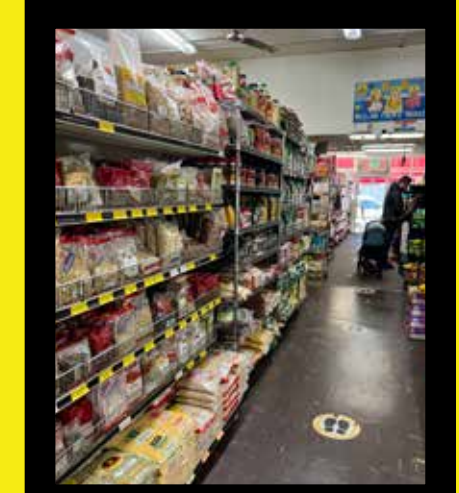
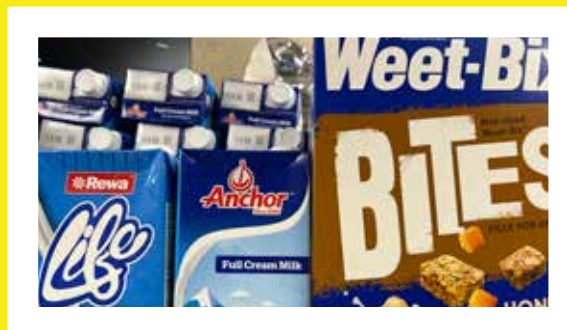
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Natasha Syed from San Bruno spots desserts as she shops at Neelam Pacific





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News

Families in shock begin to visit their charred homes in the Los Angeles area

At least 11 people have been killed, with five from the Palisades Fire and six from the Eaton Fire, according to the LA County medical examiner's office. Officials said they expected that number to rise as cadaver dogs go through leveled neighborhoods to assess the devastation to an area larger than San Francisco. Officials on Friday set up a center where people could report those missing. Roughly 150,000 people remained under evacuation orders, and the fires have consumed about 56 square miles (145 square kilometers).

The disaster took homes from everyone — from waiters to movie stars. The government has not yet released figures on the cost of the damage, but private firms have estimated it will climb into the tens of billions.

The flames hit schools, churches, a synagogue, libraries, boutiques, bars, restaurants, banks and local landmarks like the Will Rogers' Western Ranch House and a Queen Anne-style

mansion in Altadena that dated back to 1887 and was commissioned for wealthy map-maker Andrew McNally.

Neighbors wandered around ruins Friday with distant looks over the debris as they described now-vanished bedrooms, recently remodeled kitchens and outdoor living spaces. Some talked about the gorgeous views that drew them to their properties, their words contrasting sharply with the scene of soot and ash.

In the coastal community of Pacific Palisades, Greg Benton surveyed where he lived for 31 years, hoping to find his great-grandmother's wedding ring in the wreckage.

"We just had just had Christmas morning right over here, right in front of that chimney. And this is what's left," he said, pointing to the blackened rubble that was once his living room. "It's those small family heirlooms that are the ones that really hurt the most."

Elsewhere in the city, peo-

ple at collection sites picked through cardboard boxes of donated items to restart their lives.

Firefighters made progress for the first time since Tuesday containing the Eaton Fire north of Pasadena that has burned more than 7,000 structures, a term that includes homes, apartment buildings, businesses, outbuildings and vehicles.

LA Mayor Karen Bass, who faces a critical test of her leadership as her city endures its greatest crisis in decades, said several smaller fires also were stopped in the past 24 hours.

Crews were also gaining ground on the Palisades Fire that burned 5,300 structures and is the most destructive in LA's history.

California National Guard troops arrived on the streets of Altadena before dawn to help protect property in the fire evacuation zone and evening curfews were set to begin in those areas to prevent looting after several earlier arrests.

The level of devastation is jarring even in a state that regularly confronts massive wildfires.

Anna Yeager said she and her husband agonized over going back to their beloved Altadena neighborhood near Pasadena after fleeing with their 6-year-old daughter and 3-year-old son, their two dogs and a few extra clothes. A neighbor told them their house was gone.

Now she regrets not grabbing her children's artwork, her husband's treasured cookbooks, family photos, and jewelry from both her mom who died in 2012 and her husband's grandmother who survived Auschwitz.

When the couple returned, it was only "chimney after chimney."

"Power lines everywhere. Fires still going everywhere" she said, adding that when they walked up to their home "it was just dust."

Charred grapefruits littered their yard around a blackened tree, a few still hanging from its branches. Yeager's neigh-

borhood of Tudor homes was planning to celebrate its 100th anniversary in May.

"You build a world for yourself and your family, and you feel safe in that world and things like this happen that you cannot control," she said. "It's devastating." There were remnants of the front porch where Yeager had photographed her children nearly daily since 2020 and had planned to keep doing that until they reached high school. That gave her hope.

"The porch is still there and it's to me, it's a sign to rebuild and not leave," she said. "You know, it's like saying, 'Hey, I'm still here. You can still do this.'"

Seewer reported from Toledo, Ohio, Watson from San Diego, and Hollingsworth from Mission, Kansas. Associated Press journalists Eugene Garcia in Los Angeles, and Olga Rodriguez in San Francisco, contributed.



News





Dolphin Island, the Definition of Exclusivity, Fiji

Alex van Heeren, of Huka Lodge fame, designed Dolphin Island to be like no other. A concept of luxury in deliberate isolation, complemented by unspoiled natural beauty and true privacy, surrounded by gin clear waters. The large main bure enjoys an elevated position above the infinity pool, and the four guest bure suites featuring heart timber floors, plaster walls, stone tiles, wooden shutters, high ceilings and the latest in air-conditioned comfort. A hilltop honeymoon bure, private beach, jetty and substantial back-of-house facilities complete the picture. There is ample room to increase the accommodation inventory. Dolphin Island can be purchased in its entirety, by negotiation, OR Register interest to purchase one or more of only 12 shares in a yet to be formed NewZealand, company which will own the island outright, for US\$1 million per 1/12 th share and secure exclusive use of freehold Dolphin Island for a month each year of ownership. Dolphin Island, is just 20 minutes by boat from shore, on the tip of Viti Levu, Fiji, 2.5 hours by private car from Nadi International Airport. Float planes and helicopters offer an alternative connection.

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Fiji News

PREPAREDNESS MEASURES IN PLACE FOR NORTHERN DIVISION

The Office of the Divisional Commissioner North has confirmed that proactive steps are being taken to prepare for wet weather conditions over the next 48 hours. Earlier today, the Divisional Commissioner Northern Mr Uraia Rainima met with team leaders from essential services, including the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA), Police, and Fire Services, Ministry of Education, Fiji Red Cross and Fiji Meteorological Services, Land Transport Authority to finalise operational plans and ensure resources are ready to assist affected communities. The FRA has reported that connecting roads across the island remain clear, and accessibility is not currently impacted, despite heavy rain overnight. Updates from the Fiji Meteorological Service have provided a detailed forecast, enabling stakeholders to refine their preparedness strategies. The Ministry of Education has been informed to

prepare schools as evacuation centres should the need arise. Key Advisories for the Public: Residents in low-lying areas are urged to prepare now and move to higher ground during daylight hours to minimise risks. Avoid unnecessary movement at night to ensure safety and reduce risks for first responders. If unsure of evacuation centres or in need of assistance, contact the local authorities or police immediately. Mr Rainima is urging farmers to move their livestock to higher ground and take necessary precautions to secure their livelihoods.

“We urge everyone to prioritise their safety during this time. Listen carefully to weather advisories and updates on the radio, and take early action to prepare, especially those in low-lying areas. Avoid unnecessary movement at night, and remember, your safety is our top priority. Stay calm, and do not hesitate to reach out for as-



sistance if needed.” The Commissioner’s Office will continue to monitor the situation closely and provide timely updates. Residents are advised to stay

informed through official announcements and cooperate with emergency services. For assistance, please contact: Commissioner Northern’s Office:

8811322 or 8811005 Commissioner Northern’s Direct Line: 9994261 Nearest Police Station: Contact your local station for emergencies.

ADVERSE WEATHER ALERT: UPDATE FOR THE WESTERN DIVISION

Anticipated government-provided food rations are expected to commence as early as tomorrow in the Western Division. Currently, a total of four Evacuation Centres have been activated, accommodating 61 households and 234 individuals in the Western Division. The designated Evacuation Centres are Andrews Primary School, Saioni Church, Korovuto Secondary School, and the Vou Dance Group Office. These centres have been receiving donations of cooked meals and hygiene kits from various faith-based institutions, non-governmental organisations, and the Ministry of Health. Furthermore, the Fiji Red Cross is supplying dignity kits to the Saioni and Korovuto Secondary Evacuation Centres. Public advisories have been issued as part of precautionary measures, with an emphasis on the need for individuals to remain prepared and to avoid unnecessary risks. The National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC), along with the Western Divisional

Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), is currently active. The other three Divisional EOCs are closely monitoring the weather situation in their respective regions. Flood Warning Update A Flood Warning remains in effect for areas susceptible to flooding near and downstream of the Ba, Nasivi (Tavua), Nakauvadra (Rakiraki), and Nadi Rivers. Additionally, a Flood Alert is in place for flood-prone regions adjacent to and downstream of all major rivers across Fiji. As of this afternoon, flooded areas in Nadi include: - Nadi Back Road- Malolo Transmitter Road- Jack Navo Road- Nasau Tuberua Road- Qeleloa Bila Settlement- Nawaka Train Line - Nawajikuma Police officers are on standby to assist with the evacuation of residents in flood-prone areas, should it become necessary. The public is strongly urged to evacuate if required and to do so during daylight hours to ensure safety. Police will also restrict movement for the public tonight. For assistance, please contact:-

Commissioner Western’s Office: 8811322 or 8811005- Commis-

sioner Western’s Direct Line: 9994261- Nearest Police Sta-

tion: Contact your local station for emergencies.



Fiji News

PM RABUKA PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE LATE RT. ILISONI Q. RAVOKA

Prime Minister Hon. Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka today honoured the late 'Na Gone Turaga Na Ratu,' Na Taukei Burelevu o Naisanokonoko Ratu Ilisoni Qionibaravi Ravoka, with a cordial reguregu presentation at Ucunivanua Village, Verata, Tailevu.

While presenting his reguregu, Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka reflected on the enduring traditional ties between Verata and Navatu in Cakaudrove, emphasising the deep cultural connection that binds the two Vanua.

PM Rabuka shared that it was only fitting for his delegation from Navatu to present their respects ahead of the formal government tribute planned for tomorrow. "We grieve alongside Ratu's extended family, the Vanua vakaturaga of Verata, and everyone whose lives he touched through his remarkable journey and service," Prime Minister Rabuka expressed. The PM further added, "We find solace in knowing that Na Gone Turaga Na Ratu has entered eternal rest.

It has been a privilege to



have known him." The funeral service will be held at the Ucunivanua Methodist Church on Saturday, the 28th of December, before proceeding to the Chiefly

burial site, where the late chief will be laid to rest. Sa qai tabalesi na vesi Vakaturaga; ni qai lai vakacegu saka nai Taukei Burelevu o Naisanokonoko; sa lala

saka na i tikotiko Vakaturaga o Sobasoba ena nomuni Ucuna. Sa cagi donu saka tu na soko kina vuravura vakayalo ka me veitavaki saka na Turaga levu

o Jisu Karisito, ni sa oti saka nai tavi e ni lesi saka mai kina ena vuku ni vanua vakaturaga saka e Ucuna kei na veitikotiko vakaturaga'.

NEW CHIEF JUSTICE SWORN-IN BY THE PRESIDENT AT STATE HOUSE TODAY

Fiji's Judiciary has gained a distinguished leader with the swearing-in this morning of our new Chief Justice, His Lordship Justice Salesi Temo before the President of the Republic of Fiji, His Excellency Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, in a solemn ceremony conducted earlier today at State House. The newly appointed Chief Justice executed his Oath of Allegiance and Oath of due execution of Judicial Office before the President, in the presence of the Prime Minister Hon. Sitiveni Rabuka, the Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Filimone Jitoko, Cabinet Ministers, members of the Judiciary and Permanent Secretaries. The appointment underscores Fiji's dedication to upholding the rule of law and strengthening access to justice for the people of Fiji. Chief Justice Salesi Temo has served as Acting Chief Justice since January 2023. His extensive judicial experience over

the last thirty years includes his tenure as a Puisne Judge of the High Court since June 2009 with stints in the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court. He first joined the Judiciary in 1994 as a Resident Magistrate with a term as Chief Magistrate from 1997-2000. Chief Justice Temo attained his first undergraduate degree from the Victoria University of Wellington (NZ), graduating with a Bachelor of Arts (with Honors) majoring in Political Science in 1981. He then read law at Auckland University (NZ), graduating with his Bachelor of Laws Degree in 1986. After his admission to the New Zealand Bar in 1987, Chief Justice Temo practiced law in New Zealand as a Barrister and Solicitor from 1987 to 1994. His other qualifications include a Certificate in General Jurisdiction from the National Judicial College at the University of Nevada, USA.



Fiji News

THE PRESIDENT RT. NAIQAMA LALABALAVU'S 2024 CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR MESSAGE

Ni sa Bula Vina'a, Namaste, As-salamu alaikum, Ni Hao, Noa'ia e mauri, and warm festive greetings to you all. As the year 2024 draws to a close, we gather in the spirit of Christmas — a time of joy, reflection, and togetherness for families in Fiji and all over the world. For Christians we celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is a time of hope and renewal. For all faiths and traditions, the end of each year is a season that calls us to pause amidst our daily errands, duties and responsibilities to cherish the blessings of family, community, and faith. Christmas reminds us of the enduring values that unite us as a nation — love, compassion, reconciliation, resilience, hard work and the hope for a brighter tomorrow. These values have guided us through the challenges we have faced this year, and they remain the foundation of our shared identity as people of Fiji. Reflection on the Year Past The Year 2024 has been a year of resilience and renewal. Together, we have faced our collective and individual challenges with courage and celebrated our achievements to inspire hope for the future. From the quiet strength of farmers nurturing our land, teachers guiding our future generations, doctors and nurses tending to the sick, to the determination of tertiary students pursuing their dreams, each of us contributes to our communities and knit together

the fabric of our nation in our own unique way. We have seen acts of kindness that reflect the heart of Fiji — communities coming together to support those in need, neighbours lending a helping hand, and families sharing what little they have with those who have less. These moments remind us that the true spirit of Christmas is alive in our homes, our villages, and communities all year round. Gratitude for Civil Servants, First Responders and Members of the Disciplined Services To our hardworking civil servants, first responders, and members of the disciplined forces who ensure the safety and well-being of our people during the festive season, we thank you. Your dedication is a gift to our nation, and your service exemplifies the selflessness that Christmas inspires. To those who have left our shores but remain connected to our homeland, your love for Fiji and your contributions to your families and communities are deeply valued. Wherever you are in the world, you carry the light of Fiji with you. Vinaka vakalevu for always having the nation and her people in your thoughts and prayers. A Message of Unity and Hope As we gather with loved ones to celebrate this special time, let us also reflect on the importance of unity. Our diversity is our strength, and our shared traditions bind us together as one people, one nation. This Christmas, let us recommit ourselves to building



a Fiji where no one is left behind — a Fiji where every child can dream without limits, every family can live in dignity, and every community can thrive. Let us also remember the vulnerable in our midst: those without homes, those facing hardships, those who struggle with addiction and loneliness, families who struggle with loved ones who are lost to drug addiction or alcohol addiction, and those who grieve the loss of loved ones who passed away this year. In your moments of reflection, may you also remember loved ones who have passed on. We pray for their eternal peace, and may

you embrace the love and serenity that is enshrined in the true meaning of Christmas. Some may be alone this Christmas, each one of us can reach out and lend a hand and share the joy of Christmas to a neighbor in need this Christmas. In the different ways that we define ourselves, whether blended, extended or nuclear, let's all share our blessings with those who are struggling this Christmas. May we open our hearts and extend the hand of love and friendship to those in need, just as the Christmas story teaches us to care for one another. As the lights of Christmas brighten our

homes, villages, and communities, may they also illuminate our hearts with love and gratitude. May the peace and joy of this season guide us into the New Year with renewed purpose and a steadfast commitment to our nation and each other. On behalf of my family, the Office of the President, and the Government of the Republic of Fiji, I wish you all a blessed Christmas and a prosperous New Year. May your celebrations be filled with laughter, love, and the warmth of togetherness. Vina'a va'alevu, Dhanyavaad, Shukria, and thank you. May God Bless Fiji and all who call her home.

FIJI NIKUA TO KEEP STORYTELLING ALIVE: PM RABUKA

Fiji has always been a storytelling nation, and we encourage writers to put those stories to ink so that they may continue to be shared in Fiji and the world. This was highlighted by Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka during the official launch of the "Fiji NIKUA" magazine. "Fiji NIKUA is 150 years since becoming a colony in 1874; Fiji NIKUA is 54 years after independence; Fiji NIKUA is celebrating two years since the swearing in of the Coalition Government, and Fiji NIKUA means Fiji today." PM Rabuka added that the Fiji

Government believes in media freedom and that the Fiji NIKUA magazine should use it to the fullest. "We in politics are scared of media freedom because we are subjected to people pointing out our flaws, but that is Fiji today." "You have to be prepared to take the good and the bad, and I would like to encourage the Fiji NIKUA team to continue to do that." PM Rabuka added Fiji NIKUA has the ability to "show the world the way Fiji is, and hopefully Fiji will get back to being the way the world should be."



Fiji News

Heavy Rain Warning and Flash Flood Alert for whole of Fiji

A Heavy Rain Warning is now in force for the whole of Fiji Group while a Flash Flood Alert remains in force for all low lying, flash flood prone areas and small streams of Fiji. The Nadi Weather Office says an active trough of low pressure, with associated cloud and rain, continues to affect the entire Fiji Group. They say heavy rainfall may result in flash flooding in low-lying, flood-prone areas and small streams. The National Disaster Risk Management Office is urging the public to remain vigilant for possible flash flooding in low-lying areas, informal settlements, small streams, and Irish crossings, which could disrupt traffic flow. They advise drivers to exercise extra caution when driving, as roads have deteriorated due to the continuous rainfall experienced over the past few days.



UniFiji to pioneer AI and cultural studies with traditional chiefs as professors

The University of Fiji will focus on new and innovative teaching techniques and courses to be future-ready, including appointing traditional chiefs as adjunct professors and teaching AI. UniFiji Vice Chancellor, Professor Shaista Shameem, says they will not replicate what other institutions are doing, as they believe that to be future-ready, the University of Fiji must stay ahead of the game. She says in the fields of science and technology, the university is concentrating on topical areas such as robotics, artificial intelligence, and blockchain technology. Professor Shameem says it is extremely important to understand artificial intelligence, its limits as well as its function in society and its risks as well. She further highlights that their Centre for iTaukei Studies is unique, as it is the only one of its kind in Fiji. The Vice-Chancellor says part of the Centre's education programme is being moved to Levuka, where traditional chiefs will be appointed as adjunct professors to teach about traditional aspects of culture, language - if needed, performance and history. She also says their schools are small in size, allowing students to



receive individual attention. Professor Shameem adds the

university offers a good pastoral care and an excellent counsel-

ling service, ensuring students are looked after from the mo-

ment they enter their doors to the time they graduate.

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Fiji News

Fijian farmer dreams of a \$100M chilli industry by 2030

Balbir Singh plans to turn unused land in Fiji into chilli farms, helping local farmers grow and sell chilli products like sauces, powders, pickles and fresh exports. Singh is pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in Farm Tourism Management and wants to ensure that the majority of income stays within the local community. In an interview with fiji.village News, Singh says he plans to launch trial projects by next January in regions such as Tavua, Taveuni, Labasa and Sigatoka and begin online registration for farmers, gathering crucial data to identify potential farming sites.

He says his vision is to overcome challenges by focusing on the long-term benefits for farmers, enabling them to earn sustainable incomes and invest in better homes, vehicles, and education.

Singh says he wants to secure investment from farmers and



private sector partners and plans to seek government support as the project scales.

He further says his ambitious

vision is to position Fiji as a key player in the global chilli market, driving the nation toward agricultural prosperity. Singh

adds that through his outreach on the “Futuristic Farms International” Facebook page and TikTok, his videos have at-

tracted many people, generating widespread support from landowners who are eager to join the venture.

WAF advises about potential water disruption at the Tamavua Water Treatment Plant

People are urged to store water as the Water Authority of Fiji says that areas usually impacted by high turbidity at the Tamavua Water Treatment Plant may face water disruption due to heavy rain. They say the water quality in their source streams may be significantly affected, leading to challenges in water treatment and supply. The WAF says this may reduce water production at the Tamavua Treatment Plant. Areas that may be affected are as follows: Namadi Heights Mika Drue Place and Pathik Crescent. Bayview Heights Mead Road, including Volavola Road, Evetts Place, Top Shop Road, Sawau Road, Yohann Place, Vuibau Place, Sam Lal Road, Paul Sloan Street, Joyce Perks Street. Sakoca areas Elevated areas along Lakha Singh Road, including Sakoca Road, Wrong Turn, Delaiveiruka Place, Rai-kiwai Road, and Nagatugatu Road. Tacirua Elevated areas along Tacirua Road, including Raibevu Road, Tacirua Heights, Raisuluwaki Road, Nakoivalu Road, Dokanaisuva Road. Tamavua MH Superfresh, Upper Mead Road, Princes Road from Twomey Hospital

to Loa Street Junction, including Tamavua Koro, Niranji, Devoji, Upper Ragg Avenue, Upper Mead Road to Lovoni Road Junction, Goodrum, Kaba Place, Upper Nailuva, Upper Samabula area, Upper Raiwaqa. Dokanaisuva Princes Road from the Junction of Savutalele to the Junction of Khalsa Road, in-

cluding Jeremiah College, Savutalele Settlement Road, Karta Sen Feeder Road. Colo-i-Suva Along Princes Road from Joes Farm to Sawani Service Station including Vunikawai Road & Naisogo Road, Coloisuva Police Post, Coloisuva Forestry Quarters, Raintree Lodge, Coloisuva Koro, Crest Chicken

Feeder Road, Uluibeka, Vuinikawai, Joes Farm, Naisogo, Nilqiri Lami area Upper Delanivesi Areas, Upper Areas of Lami Village Road, including Rokodrawe Road, Nakurukuru Village Access Road, Upper Valenicina Road, Matata, Qauia Street, Upper Naimawi Street, Waivote, Upper Nasevou Street,

Kalekana Settlement Road, Panoramic Road, Muaivuso Village, Waiqanake Area, Beniveli. They say their teams are actively monitoring the situation and will work to manage production levels. The WAF urges people to limit non-essential water usage during this time and ensure water is kept clean and covered.



Fiji News

DPM PRASAD SIGNS CONDOLENCE BOOK FOR DR. MANMOHAN SINGH

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Hon. Biman Prasad, signed the condolence book at the High Commission of India today, honouring the late Dr. Manmohan Singh, former Prime Minister of India, who died on 26th December 2024. He acknowledged Dr. Singh's leadership and contributions to global economic reform. DPM Prasad expressed his heartfelt condolences and highlighted Dr. Singh's transformative role in shaping India's economic policies. Known for his academic brilliance and visionary leadership, Dr. Singh's

tenure as Prime Minister (2004-2014) was marked by significant economic reforms that steered India onto the global stage. Dr. Singh, a renowned economist, is credited with leading India through a period of remarkable growth and modernisation, having been instrumental in the 1991 economic liberalisation as Finance Minister. His leadership not only strengthened India's economy but also raised its global profile. Dr. Singh's legacy as a scholar, statesman, and a humble yet decisive leader continues to inspire generations worldwide.



FAREWELL TO A REVERED CHIEF: HONOURING THE LATE RT. ILISONI Q. RAVOKA

A Government delegation was at Ucunivanua Village, Verata, Tailevu, to present their reguregu (condolences) to the family and people of the late 'Na Gone Turaga Na Ratu,' Na Taukei Burelevu o Naisanokono Ratu Ilisoni Qionibaravi Ravoka. The late chief was not only a revered leader of his people but also a steadfast supporter of the reinstatement of the Great Council of Chiefs. The customary reguregu, by the Government delegation, led by Hon. Ro Filipe Tuisawau, the Minister for Public Works and Meteorological Services, conveyed the Government's heartfelt sympathies to a chief whose vision and commitment to the betterment of his people.

Following the reguregu, a church service was held at the village church, where mourners gathered to pay their last respects. The funeral service was not only a farewell but was also a celebration of a life devoted to service and the preservation of tradition. The late chief was laid to rest at the Sautabu (chiefly burial site). Prime Minister Hon. Sitiveni Rabuka reflected on the late chief's enduring legacy, describing him as a pillar of strength for his people. The late chief's unwavering commitment to upholding traditional values.

The late 'Turaga na Ratu' strongly supported the reformation of the Great Council of Chiefs, which was a testament

to his vision for a unified Fiji. Also in attendance at the reguregu and the funeral service was the Vice Chairperson of the GCC, 'Na Momo na Taukei

Navo' Ratu Meli Saukuru. Government ministers present included Hon. Ifereimi Vasu, Minister for iTaukei Affairs, and Hon. Sakiasi Ditoka, the

Minister for Rural and Maritime Development.

Senior government officials were also present with representatives from statutory organisa-

tions. The passing of the late 'Turaga na Ratu' marks the end of an era for the Vanua o Verata, but his spirit and influence will forever remain.



News

The biography for President Trump and past presidents is courtesy of the White House Historical Association.



Donald John Trump was born in Queens, New York, on June 14, 1946. His father, Fred Trump was a successful real estate developer. Trump was educated at the New York Military Academy and the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce at the University of Pennsylvania.

In 1971, he took over his father's real estate company, renaming it the Trump Organization. The business soon became involved in variety of projects, including hotels, resorts, residential and commercial building, casinos, and golf courses. His first of many books was *The Art of the Deal*, published in 1987. In 2004, he launched the reality television show *The Apprentice*.

In 2005, Donald Trump married Melania Knauss. They have one son, Barron. Trump also has four adult children from previous marriages: Donald Jr., Ivanka, Eric, and Tiffany.

During the 2016 primary, Trump defeated more than a

dozen rivals to win the Republican nomination. While he lost the popular vote, Trump defeated former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the general election by winning a majority of Electoral College votes. His campaign slogan was "Make America Great Again."

Without previous elected political experience, President Trump used unconventional methods to communicate his priorities. Most notably, he used the social media platform Twitter as a primary mechanism for direct communication with the American public, other politicians, and the press corps.

As president, he signed a major tax reform bill into law and oversaw a reduction of federal regulations. His protectionist trade policies included tariffs in foreign aluminum, steel, and other products. The Trump administration also renegotiated trade agreements with Mexico, Canada, China, Japan, and South Korea. Other domestic priorities included Supreme

Court and federal judiciary appointments, increased military budgets, aggressive border and immigration control, criminal justice reform, and the reduction of prescription drug prices.

In foreign policy, the Trump administration moved the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and brokered normalization agreements between Israel and a number of countries. In 2018, President Trump attended a summit with Kim Jong Un, marking the first time a sitting president met with a North Korean leader.

In 2018, there was a partial government shutdown as Trump disagreed with Congress over funding for a border wall between the United States and Mexico. The funding lapse lasted thirty-five days before it was resolved.

In 2019, a federal whistleblower filed a complaint that Trump had pressured Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to investigate former Vice Presi-

dent Joe Biden's son Hunter, who had served on the board of Bursima Holdings, a natural gas company in Ukraine. Later that year, the House of Representatives impeached President Trump based upon allegations of obstruction of Congress and abuse of power. In 2020, the Senate acquitted Trump on both articles of impeachment.

The first confirmed case of COVID-19 was reported in the United States on January 20, 2020. The remainder of Trump's presidency was consumed with the coronavirus pandemic. Critics argued that Trump's response to the pandemic was delayed and did not sufficiently encourage public health practices to reduce the spread of the virus. However, the Trump administration's program "Operation Warp Speed" assisted in the private sector development of two approved vaccines. Nonetheless, by the time Trump left office, more than 400,000 Americans had died of COVID-19.

Trump lost reelection to Democratic candidate Joe Biden, but publicly claimed widespread voter fraud had affected the outcome. Supporters of President Trump traveled to Washington, D.C. for a "Save America" rally on January 6, 2021. Trump spoke to the large crowd on the Ellipse near the White House and encouraged attendees to protest the counting of the Electoral College votes in Congress. The rally turned violent when the president's supporters overwhelmed law enforcement, breaching the United States Capitol and disrupting the vote count. Five people died as a result of the violence, and the Capitol complex suffered millions of dollars in damage.

On January 13, 2021, Trump's actions resulted in the House of Representatives approving another article of impeachment: the incitement of insurrection. He is the only president in American history to be impeached twice by Congress.

News

Melania Trump

First Lady of the United States Melania Trump is the wife of President Donald J. Trump. She is the second First Lady born outside of the United States, and she is the only First Lady to become a naturalized U.S. citizen.

The biography for Mrs. Trump and past first families are courtesy of the White House Historical Association.

Melania Trump is the wife of President Donald J. Trump and the mother of Barron Trump. She was born on April 26, 1970, in Novo Mesto, Slovenia.

She is the second first lady born outside of the United States, and she is the only first lady to become a naturalized U.S. citizen. Like the first ladies before her, Mrs. Trump has made her mark on history.

As first lady, she continues to serve as an ardent advocate for children and devotes her time and efforts to helping young

people navigate the many issues they face in an ever-changing society. In 2018, she announced BE BEST, an awareness campaign that strives to promote a world for children based on healthy living, kindness, and respect. The initiative consists of three pillars representing key areas of concern for Mrs. Trump: well-being, including the social and emotional health of children; social media, focusing on understanding its positive as well as negative effects on children; and opioid abuse, striving to protect the most vulnerable from the effects of drug abuse while educating people of all ages about the detrimental effects of opioids. Since its launch, BE BEST has affected local communities across the

country and world, spreading its message of kindness and shining a spotlight on successful programs and services that help children and families with the support and tools they need to thrive. Mrs. Trump continues to evolve and expand her campaign based on research and information learned from her many visits to schools, hospitals, organizations, and companies, and from speaking to children directly about their ideas and concerns.

In all that she does, Mrs. Trump puts children at the forefront of her agenda. Whether in the United States or abroad, she has made a positive impact on the lives of children, especially those in vulnerable com-

munities around the world. She has traveled the United States from coast to coast meeting the nation's youth and families of all backgrounds. She has embarked on trips to more than nine countries, including Africa on her first major solo international trip. She has met with more than thirty foreign diplomats and heads of state or their spouses to exchange ideas on the challenges children are facing all over the world.

One of her most memorable visits was at the Bambino Gesù Pediatric Hospital in Vatican City, Italy, where she met a boy who had been waiting for a new heart. Upon arriving in Belgium the following day, Mrs. Trump learned that the hospital had

found a transplant for the boy. She celebrated this discovery in a press statement and said, "My own heart is filled with joy over the news."

In 2019, during a BE BEST anniversary celebration in the Rose Garden, Mrs. Trump reaffirmed her unwavering commitment to shaping a brighter future for children, declaring, "I am here with one goal, which is to help children reach their full potential so they can grow up happy, healthy and contribute positively to society and the world."



World News

Hamas lists 34 hostages it may free under ceasefire

A senior Hamas official has shared with the BBC a list of 34 hostages that the Palestinian group says it is willing to release in the first stage of a potential ceasefire agreement with Israel. It is unclear how many of those named remain alive. All but two were captured during Hamas's attack on Israel on 7 October 2023. The ages of those on the list range from just one year old to 86. It also includes children who Hamas previously said had been killed in an Israeli air strike. A number of hostages who Hamas says are sick are also on the list. The Israeli prime minister's office denied reports that Hamas had provided Israel with a list of hostages. "The list of hostages published in the media was not passed on to Israel by Hamas, but was originally passed from Israel to intermediaries as early as July 2024," it said. "To date, Israel has not received any confirmation or comment from Hamas regarding the status of the abductees on the list." British Israeli Emily Damari, who was shot and taken from kibbutz Kfar Azar on 7 October, is among the names on the list. The 28-year-old is one of five civilian women named alongside five female surveillance soldiers. They include 19-year-old Liri Albag, who appeared in a video posted by Hamas at the weekend, in which she was seen urging her government to make a deal. Also

on the list are two brothers - Kfir Bibas, a one-year-old approaching his second birthday, and 5-year-old Ariel - who were taken hostage along with their parents. Hamas has previously said the children were killed in an Israeli air strike. Two Israelis held in Gaza for around a decade are also among the 34 names. They are Hisham al-Sayed, a Bedouin Arab who was seized in 2015, and Ethiopian Israeli Avera Mengistu, who was reportedly suffering from mental health issues and was taken captive after crossing into Gaza a year earlier. Families of hostages said in a statement that they were "deeply shaken and distressed" by the list.

"The time has come for a comprehensive agreement that will bring back all hostages - we know more than half are still alive and need immediate rehabilitation, while those who were murdered must be returned for proper burial. We have no more time to waste. A hostage ceasefire agreement must be sealed now!" Hamas's decision to release the names of hostages will be seen by some as an attempt to increase public pressure on the Israeli government. Ceasefire negotiations resumed in Doha, Qatar, over the weekend, but the talks do not appear to have made significant progress yet. A Hamas official told the Reuters news agency any agreement to return Israeli hostages would

depend on a deal for Israel to withdraw from Gaza and a permanent ceasefire or end to the war. "However, until now, the occupation continues to be obstinate over an agreement over the issues of the ceasefire and withdrawal, and has made no step forward," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. Israel and Hamas have consistently accused each other of obstructing progress towards a ceasefire deal. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters in Seoul on Monday that he was "confident that [a deal] will get its completion at some point, hopefully sooner rather than later", though he conceded it might happen after Joe Biden leaves office on 20 January. About 1,200 people were killed and 251 others taken

hostage in the unprecedented attack, which triggered a massive Israeli military campaign in Gaza. A hundred and five of the hostages were freed in exchange for 240 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel in November 2023. Fifty other hostages have been released, rescued or their bodies recovered. At least 45,805 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's offensive, Gaza's health ministry says. Reports from the Hamas-run Gaza health ministry say Israeli air strikes killed more than 100 people there at the weekend. The Israeli military said on Sunday that its air force had attacked more than 100 "terrorist" sites across the Gaza Strip over the weekend, killing dozens of Hamas fighters. The names on the list of hostages provided by

Hamas: Romi Gonen (24); Emily Damari (28); Arbel Yehoud (29); Doron Steinbrecher (31); Ariel Bibas (5); Kfir Bibas (1); Shiri Silberman Bibas (33); Liri Albag (19); Karina Arielev (20); Agam Berger (20); Daniel Gilboa (20); Naama Levy (20); Ohad Ben-Ami (55); Gad Moshe Moses (80); Keith Shmuel Siegel (65); Offer Kaldaron (53); Elyahu Sharabi (52); Itzhak Elgaret (69); Shlomo Mansur (86); Ohad Yahalomi (50); Yousef Yousef Alziadna (54); Oded Lifshitz (84); Tsachi Idan (50); Hisham al-Sayed (36); Yarden Bibas (35); Sagi Dekel Chen (36); Iair Horn (46); Omer Wenkert (23); Alexandre Troufanov (28); Eliya Cohen (27); Or Levy (34); Avera Mengistu (38); Tal Shoham (39); Omer Shem Tov (21).



Iran's nuclear programme nearing point of no return, France's Macron says

Iran's disputed uranium enrichment drive is nearing a point of no return and European partners to a moribund 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran should consider reimposing sanctions if there is no progress with Tehran, France's president said on Monday. Addressing an annual conference with French ambassadors to outline foreign policy objectives in 2025, President Emmanuel Macron described Iran as the main "strategic and security challenge" for France and Europe. "The acceleration of the nuclear programme leads us nearly to the point of no return," Macron said. Iran says it

is enriching uranium for peaceful purposes and has stepped up the programme since U.S. President-elect Donald Trump pulled Washington out of the 2015 deal during his first term of office and restored tough U.S. sanctions on Tehran. European powers France, Germany and Britain said last month Iran's actions had further hollowed out the deal and would heighten its stockpile of high-enriched uranium without a "credible civilian justification". The head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog said in December that the Islamic Republic was "dramatically" accelerating enrichment close

to the roughly 90% level that is bomb-grade. The three European powers were co-signatories to the 2015 deal in which Iran agreed to curb enrichment, seen by the West as a disguised effort to develop nuclear-weapons capability, in return for a lifting of international sanctions. French, German and British diplomats are set to hold a follow-up meeting with Iranian counterparts on Jan. 13 after one last month held to discuss the possibility of serious negotiations in coming months to defuse tensions with Tehran with Trump due to return to the White House on Jan. 20. "In the coming months we will

have to ask ourselves whether to use ... the mechanism to restore sanctions," Macron said, referring to October 2025 when the 2015 accord formally expires. Macron said Iran's ballistic mis-

siles and support for Russia also posed threats to Europe and this would become one of the main dossiers to be addressed in diplomacy with Trump after he took office.



World News

Canadian PM Justin Trudeau expected to announce plan to resign

The Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, is expected to announce on Monday that he plans to step down, local media have reported, after a snowballing leadership crisis during which he lost support from within his own party. The prime minister's office said he would speak about his political future from Rideau Cottage, his temporary residence, at 10.45 am. The press conference marks the first time that he will have answered questions from reporters since November. On Sunday evening, the Globe and Mail newspaper cited three sources saying that Trudeau would quit as head of the ruling Liberal party, which in turn would bring to an end his nine years as prime minister at some point later this year. The 53-year-old became party leader in 2013 and has been prime minister since November 2015. The paper said one of the sources had recently spoken to the prime minister and believed he intended to step down before an emergency meeting of party members on Wednesday, "so it doesn't look like he was forced out by his own MPs". The Toronto Star said it had also confirmed that

Trudeau was "expected to signal his intentions to step aside as early as Monday", citing what it said was a senior source. Trudeau's popularity has plummeted amid record inflation, an acute housing crisis, high food prices and voter fatigue with incumbent politicians. Recent polling put the Liberals at 16% support, their worst pre-election standing in more than a century, with the opposition Conservatives coming out on top. At the end of October, almost two dozen backbench Liberal MPs signed a letter calling on Trudeau to step down, with the party fearing a seismic electoral defeat in the federal election scheduled for next year. His political horizons darkened in mid-December with the shock resignation of his deputy, Chrystia Freeland, who left with stern words for the prime minister, questioning his ability to guide Canada through Donald Trump's "America first" economic nationalism, including a threat of 25% tariffs on Canada. "We need to take that threat extremely seriously," she said in a departing letter, which questioned whether the government understood the "gravity of



the moment". Freeland, a former Financial Times reporter, had previously won praise for navigating the North American Free Trade Agreement renegotiation process during Trump's first term. The resignation of a key ally sent Ottawa into chaos and the fallout has resulted in the smaller New Democratic party, which had kept the Liberals in power, pulling its support for the prime minister. Trudeau had attempted to placate the incoming US president, with a visit to Florida, where they

posed for a smiling photo, and he told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation that he had promised Trump that Canada would shore up border security. Still, days later Trump publicly mocked Trudeau, belittling him as the "governor" of Canada, as if his country were merely a US state rather than an independent nation, and musing that it could become part of the US. Many Canadian observers now expect an election to be called for spring. It is unclear whether Trudeau would stay on

as prime minister until a new Liberal leader is selected. The former high school teacher and the eldest son of Pierre Trudeau, one of Canada's best-known prime ministers, became Liberal leader in 2013 when the party was also faring badly, and his leadership was seen abroad as an example of stable, progressive power. The Conservative leader, Pierre Poilievre, has repeated his calls for an immediate election, saying: "The government of Canada is itself spiralling out of control."

Biden bans offshore drilling across vast area of US

US President Joe Biden has announced a sweeping ban on new offshore oil and gas drilling along most of America's coastline, including the Atlantic, Pacific, eastern Gulf of Mexico, and parts of the Bering Sea. This last-minute climate action, ahead of Donald Trump's return to office, aims to protect over 625 million acres of waters from potential environmental damage. Trump has vowed to revoke the ban, calling it "ridiculous," but legal hurdles under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act may make reversal challenging without Congress. The law prevents presidents from overturning prior bans or revoking leased drilling areas. Environmental groups have celebrated the move, while the oil industry and Trump's team have criticized it as harmful to energy security. Biden justified the decision, stating, "Drilling off these coasts could cause ir-



reversible damage... It is not worth the risks." This action

underscores the ongoing clash between Biden's climate goals

and Trump's push for expanded fossil fuel production. Legal

battles over the ban are likely to follow.

Tech News

'Aliens will make fun of us': Elon Musk issues 'alien warning', highlights urgency of Mars colonisation

Tesla and Starlink CEO Elon Musk has once again emphasised the importance of colonising Mars, issuing a humorous yet thought-provoking "alien warning" about humanity's self-imposed limitations. Speaking to an audience that erupted in laughter, Musk quipped, "If future aliens see us, they will say; there they had rockets and everything, still they regulated themselves." The moment was shared online by Twitter user DogeDesigner, who captioned it, "Future aliens will make fun of us if we are unable to go on Mars because of regulations." Musk replied with a resounding "Yes." Musk's ambitions for Mars extend far beyond exploration. He envisions it as humanity's "New World," akin to the historical discovery and naming of the Americas. Sharing a NASA image of Mars' Gale Crater on X (formerly Twitter), Musk reinforced his belief in the Red Planet's potential as a self-sustaining human colony. "Earth is great, but it's fragile. We need a backup," Musk said, reiterating his conviction that colonising Mars is



essential for the long-term survival of human consciousness. By establishing a civilisation on Mars, Musk aims to safeguard humanity from existential threats, including natural disasters and extinction events. Central to Musk's Mars mission is

SpaceX's Starship, a fully reusable rocket designed to transport 100 passengers and vital cargo. Starship's affordability and reusability are key to Musk's goal of making interplanetary travel accessible. The ambitious plan includes five uncrewed missions

to Mars over the next two years. These missions will focus on delivering essential supplies such as water, oxygen, fuel, and construction equipment to prepare for human settlement. "Starship will make life multi-planetary, preserving life as we

know it from extinction events on Earth," Musk explained. The first crewed mission to Mars could launch in the early 2030s, with subsequent efforts aimed at using Martian resources to build infrastructure, reducing dependence on Earth for resupply.

SpaceX May Provide Starlink Internet for Italian Government in \$1.6B Deal

Italy's Defense Ministry and Intelligence Services approve a five-year contract to get encrypted internet and telephone services through Starlink, but the deal hasn't been finalized just yet. SpaceX and the Italian government have been discussing a special Starlink service and could be near finalizing a five-year contract for it in a deal worth an estimated \$1.6 billion, according to a new report. If finalized, SpaceX would provide encrypted internet and communications services via Starlink for the nation's government. Starlink more broadly is already available in Italy, so this new service would be more customized. Italy's Defense Ministry and Intelligence Services have authorized the potential service, Bloomberg reports on Monday, citing sources familiar with the situation. The Italian government confirmed to the outlet that discussions over the potential

deal were ongoing, adding that the conversations are "a part of normal government business." Italy has reportedly considered Starlink alternatives like the European Union's IRIS² or launching its own satellites. But such options would be substantially more expensive, with each of those options costing \$10.4 billion, Bloomberg says. The IRIS² constellation will make the EU less reliant on SpaceX, but will be smaller and won't be fully available until the early 2030s. Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni has spent time with SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, and the two seemingly get along quite well. Meloni recently called Musk "a gifted man" and an "extraordinary innovator." "It makes me laugh a bit that there are people who used to praise him as a genius but today depict him as a monster, just because he has chosen the 'wrong' political camp, as they



see it," Meloni said in an interview with Italian news outlet Corriere Della Sera this month, referring to Musk's support for the US Republican party and President-elect Donald Trump.

Musk has also shared his support for Meloni, previously stating Meloni is "even more beautiful inside than outside." Speculation around their relationship lead Musk to publicly

deny any sort of "romantic relationship" between them last year. Meloni met with Trump on Saturday but the two did not discuss the possible Starlink deal, the Italian government said.

Health News

Share Covid data, World Health Organization tells China

The World Health Organization has urged China to share data on the origins of the Covid pandemic, five years on from its start in the city of Wuhan. "This is a moral and scientific imperative," the WHO said in a statement to mark what it called the "milestone" anniversary. "Without transparency, sharing, and co-operation among countries, the world cannot adequately prevent and prepare for future epidemics and pandemics," it added. Many scientists think the virus transferred naturally from animals to humans, but some suspicions persist that it escaped from a laboratory in Wuhan.

China has not responded to Monday's WHO statement. In the past it has strongly rejected the lab leak theory. In September, a team of scientists said it was "beyond reasonable doubt" that the Covid pandemic started with infected animals sold at a market, rather than a laboratory leak. They came to this conclusion after analysing hundreds of samples collected from Wuhan in January 2020. In its statement, the WHO went back to the early days of Covid and traced its evolution from a local phenomenon to a global scourge, leading to lockdowns around the world and the ulti-



mately successful race to develop vaccines. "Five years ago on 31 December 2019, WHO's Country Office in China picked up a media statement by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission from their website on cases of 'viral pneumonia' in Wuhan, China," the organisation said.

"In the weeks, months and years that unfolded after that, Covid-19 came to shape our lives and our world," it went on.

The WHO said it "went to work immediately" as 2020 dawned.

It recalled how its employees activated emergency systems on 1 January and informed the world three days later. "By 9-12 January, WHO had published its first set of comprehensive guidance for countries, and on 13 January, we brought together partners to publish the blueprint of the first Sars-CoV-2 laboratory test," it added. The WHO said it wanted to "honour the

lives changed and lost, recognise those who are suffering from Covid-19 and long Covid, express gratitude to the health workers who sacrificed so much to care for us, and commit to learning from Covid-19 to build a healthier tomorrow".

In May 2023, the WHO declared that Covid-19 no longer represented a "global health emergency". Its director general, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said at the time that

at least seven million people had died in the pandemic. But he added that the true figure was "likely" closer to 20 million deaths - nearly three times the official estimate. Since then, the WHO has repeatedly warned against complacency about the possible emergence of future Covid-like illnesses. Dr Ghebreyesus has said the next pandemic "can come at any moment" and has urged the world to be prepared.

Bird flu kills 20 big cats at US animal sanctuary

Twenty big cats - including a Bengal tiger and four cougars - have died of bird flu over the past several weeks at an animal sanctuary in the state of Washington. "This tragedy has deeply affected our team, and we are all grieving the loss of these incredible animals," the Wild Felid Advocacy Center of Washington wrote in a post on Facebook. The devastating viral infection, carried by wild birds, spreads primarily through respiratory secretions and bird-to-bird contact and can also be contracted by mammals that ingest birds or other products. The sanctuary is under quarantine and is closed to the public to prevent the spread of the virus, the statement said. The animals died between late November and mid-December,

the sanctuary's director, Mark Mathews, told the New York Times. "We've never had anything like it; they usually die basically of old age," he said. "Not something like this, it's a pretty wicked virus." The news comes as bird flu continues to spread among cattle and poultry in the US, while also severely infecting at least one human. The sanctuary said it had lost five African serval cats, four bobcats, two Canada lynx and a Bengal tiger, among others. Only 17 cats now remain at the Center. "Cats are particularly vulnerable to this virus, which can cause subtle initial symptoms but progress rapidly, often resulting in death within 24 hours due to pneumonia-like conditions," the sanctuary said in its Facebook statement

on Friday. Bird flu has long infected poultry flocks in the US. But the virus began to infect cattle in the US for the first time in March. And since April 2024, there have been a total of 61 human cases of bird flu reported in the US, according to the Centers for Disease Con-

trol and Prevention. The CDC says that the risk to the general public remains low, and there has been no sustained human-to-human transmission. Most have reported mild symptoms, though one person was taken to the hospital with a severe case of bird flu in Louisiana

this month. Last week, California Governor Gavin Newsom declared an emergency over the outbreak among the state's dairy cows to help the government have the "resources and flexibility they need to respond quickly to this outbreak".





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Health News

Share Covid data, World Health Organization tells China

The World Health Organization has urged China to share data on the origins of the Covid pandemic, five years on from its start in the city of Wuhan. "This is a moral and scientific imperative," the WHO said in a statement to mark what it called the "milestone" anniversary. "Without transparency, sharing, and co-operation among countries, the world cannot adequately prevent and prepare for future epidemics and pandemics," it added. Many scientists think the virus transferred naturally from animals to humans, but some suspicions persist that it escaped from a laboratory in Wuhan.

China has not responded to Monday's WHO statement. In the past it has strongly rejected the lab leak theory. In September, a team of scientists said it was "beyond reasonable doubt" that the Covid pandemic started with infected animals sold at a market, rather than a laboratory leak. They came to this conclusion after analysing hundreds of samples collected from Wuhan in January 2020. In its statement, the WHO went back to the early days of Covid and traced its evolution from a local phenomenon to a global scourge, leading to lockdowns around the world and the ulti-



mately successful race to develop vaccines. "Five years ago on 31 December 2019, WHO's Country Office in China picked up a media statement by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission from their website on cases of 'viral pneumonia' in Wuhan, China," the organisation said.

"In the weeks, months and years that unfolded after that, Covid-19 came to shape our lives and our world," it went on.

The WHO said it "went to work immediately" as 2020 dawned.

It recalled how its employees activated emergency systems on 1 January and informed the world three days later. "By 9-12 January, WHO had published its first set of comprehensive guidance for countries, and on 13 January, we brought together partners to publish the blueprint of the first Sars-CoV-2 laboratory test," it added. The WHO said it wanted to "honour the

lives changed and lost, recognise those who are suffering from Covid-19 and long Covid, express gratitude to the health workers who sacrificed so much to care for us, and commit to learning from Covid-19 to build a healthier tomorrow".

In May 2023, the WHO declared that Covid-19 no longer represented a "global health emergency". Its director general, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said at the time that

at least seven million people had died in the pandemic. But he added that the true figure was "likely" closer to 20 million deaths - nearly three times the official estimate. Since then, the WHO has repeatedly warned against complacency about the possible emergence of future Covid-like illnesses. Dr Ghebreyesus has said the next pandemic "can come at any moment" and has urged the world to be prepared.

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Health News

Insufficient sleep and high blood pressure may raise risk of brain aging

While some studies have shown a link between insufficient sleep and the risk of cognitive impairment and dementia, other studies have failed to find a similar association between sleep duration and cognitive function. A new study published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association* Trusted Source shows that individuals with high blood pressure who also slept for a shorter duration were more likely to show poor cognitive function and increased levels of markers of brain aging and injury. Individuals who slept for a shorter duration but had normal blood pressure did not show these deficits in cognitive function or increased levels of brain injury markers. The role of high blood pressure in influencing the impact of sleep duration on cognitive health could explain the mixed results found in previous studies. The study also paves the way for early identification of individuals at risk of cognitive decline and randomized trials investigating treatments for normalizing sleep patterns and high blood pressure to prevent or delay cognitive decline. The study's author, Matthew Pase, PhD, associate professor at Monash University, told *Medical News Today*: "The results underscore the importance of having healthy blood pressure levels and prioritizing adequate sleep to maintain a healthy brain into old age. Doctors should be reminded to check patients' blood pressure levels regularly and manage high blood pressure appropriately. Similarly, the medical world is now starting to appreciate the importance of good sleep, and getting good sleep should be considered part of a healthy lifestyle." Role of high blood pressure in cognitive decline Shorter sleep duration, besides its association with cognitive decline, is also linked to an increased risk of high blood pressure. Moreover, studies show that high blood pressure in midlife is independently associated with cognitive impairment and dementia later in life. High blood pressure can cause cerebral small vessel disease, which is associated with

an increased risk of stroke and cognitive decline. Cerebral small vessel disease is a heterogeneous condition involving damage to the small blood vessels in the brain, leading to brain tissue damage and atrophy of the brain structures. The tissue in the brain can be classified into white matter and gray matter. Trusted Source Gray matter contains the cell bodies of the nerve cells, whereas white matter consists of nerve fibers that transmit information between nerve cells. Cerebral small vessel disease can cause lesions in the white matter and a decrease in gray or white matter volume. Gray matter forms the brain's outermost layer and is involved in several important functions, including cognition, whereas white matter is essential to maintain connectivity between regions of grey matter. White matter damage and a decrease in the volume of gray matter are observed in old age and are associated with cognitive decline. In the present study, the researchers examined whether hypertension influenced the relationship between sleep duration and cognition. In addition, the researchers also examined the impact of hypertension on the association between sleep duration and imaging markers of white matter damage and brain aging. Linking less sleep with cognitive deficits The study consisted of 682 individuals over 40 years of age enrolled in the Fram-

ingham Health Study Trusted Source, a multi-generational longitudinal study designed to examine the risk factors for cardiovascular conditions. The study only included participants who did not have dementia or a history of stroke. The researchers collected sleep data using a questionnaire and a home-based sleep study (polysomnographic evaluation). In addition, the researchers measured the daytime blood pressure of the participants at the time of the sleep assessment. Around 3.3 years after the sleep assessment, the participants underwent cognitive assessments and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans to assess changes in brain structure. The researchers did not find an association between sleep duration and cognitive function or brain imaging markers, except gray matter volume. In the latter case, self-reported short sleep duration was associated with larger gray matter volume. The researchers then analyzed the impact of sleep duration on cognitive health after segregating the participants into groups with normal and high blood pressure. They found that sleep duration influenced cognitive function and the levels of brain imaging biomarkers only in individuals with high blood pressure. Increased brain age, tissue injury with shorter sleep Specifically, among individuals with high blood pressure, a shorter sleep duration was associated with deficits in execu-

tive function, which includes higher-level mental processes involved in planning, reasoning, and decision-making. Moreover, individuals with high blood pressure and shorter sleep durations also showed higher levels of brain imaging markers for aging and tissue injury. Among individuals with high blood pressure, those with self-reported shorter sleep durations showed higher levels of white matter lesions, whereas those with shorter sleep durations, as measured by the sleep study, showed lower gray matter volumes. The association between sleep duration and cognitive function or brain imaging markers was absent in individuals with normal blood pressure. In other words, these results suggest that shorter sleep duration interacts with high blood pressure to increase the risk of poor cognitive function and greater brain injury. How much sleep a person needs will vary One of the study's strengths was its large sample size. However, due to its observational nature, the study does not establish a causal relationship between sleep duration and cognitive health. The sleep study was only conducted over a single night, so the data on sleep duration may not represent long-term sleep patterns. Blood pressure decreases by 10% at the time of sleep onset, and shorter sleep duration can eliminate this drop in blood pressure. Blood pressure was collected during the daytime,

and it is possible that the impact of sleep patterns on the drop in blood pressure at sleep onset was missed. Furthermore, Christopher Berg, MD, a board certified cardiologist at MemorialCare Heart and Vascular Institute at Orange Coast Medical Center in Fountain Valley, CA, noted, "The strength of their findings was unimpressive. For instance, they evaluated cognitive function via six tests, only 1 of which showed a significant relationship with sleep duration in those with hypertension." "They also evaluated six MRI-based parameters, and again, only one of the six showed an association with sleep duration in those with hypertension. How much those particular parameters meaningfully correlate with their actual cognitive performance or, say, risk of dementia is uncertain as is what extrapolation can be made from these findings," said Berg. Lastly, he added that individuals show considerable variation in the daily amount of sleep needed. "A blanket rule of 'each person needs x hours of sleep,' I'm not sure, is supported by the literature and doesn't seem to be the case in practice. However, this study would support the general recommendation that it is important for each person to get adequate sleep (whatever is the adequate amount) is important for mental and physical health, and potentially more so in patients with hypertension," he said.





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Health News

Deaths from alcohol at record high in England



There has been "a catastrophic rise" in deaths caused solely by alcohol in England over the past four years, government figures suggest. More than 8,200 people died because of alcohol in 2023 - a 42% rise on 2019 - with the North East having the highest rates. The Alcohol Health Alliance UK says alcohol consumption could be reduced if a minimum price for each unit was introduced, as in Scotland. The government says it's unacceptable that alcohol deaths are at record high levels and it will prioritise public health in its 10-year plan for the NHS in England. During the pandemic, deaths caused by alcohol rose sharply across the UK. Heavier drinkers were drinking more while others, including more moderate drinkers, cut down or gave up entirely. And when pubs were shut, many people started buying alcohol in shops and drinking at home. Since then, deaths have continued to go up in England - although more slowly than in previous years. Most deaths are among men, who are dying early - before the age of 75 - from alcohol-related liver disease. Analysis by the Institute of Alcohol Studies suggests 55-74-year-olds "are now the heaviest-drinking age group", which it says could be driving current trends. Another factor could be the cost-of-living crisis which may have triggered heavier drinking among people

faced with higher bills. "Economic hardship can lead to people cutting down on their drinking, to save money, but it can also lead to an increase in drinking as a response to stress," says Colin Angus, addictions expert from the University of Sheffield. The Alcohol Health Alliance, which represents 60 organisations working to reduce the harm it causes, says deaths from alcohol sends ripples through society, "putting growing pressure on our economy and health services". Heavy drinking cuts lives short, shatters families and leaves children to cope with grief and trauma, it says. The alliance predicts

further rises in deaths from alcohol "and an ever greater burden on our healthcare system and society". Its chairman, Prof Sir Ian Gilmore, said: "Without bold, decisive action, these preventable deaths will continue to climb. Addressing alcohol harm must be a top public-health priority in 2025, and it requires a cross-government effort to turn the tide on this public-health crisis." In Scotland, where alcohol-specific death rates have always been higher, there were 1,277 deaths from alcohol in 2023 - the same as the previous year. The Alliance says minimum unit pricing of alcohol in Scotland, introduced

in 2018, "has proven effective in reducing alcohol-related harm". The minimum cost of a unit of alcohol there has risen from 50p to 65p in recent months. This means no alcoholic drink can be sold for anything below this price. Critics of minimum pricing say that serious drinkers will continue to buy alcohol and simply cut back on other things. They say it's unfair on those who drink responsibly, particularly those on low incomes. A spokesperson from the Department of Health and Social Care said there had been an unwillingness to lead on issues such as alcohol harm, smoking and obesity "for too long". "It is

unacceptable that alcohol deaths are now at record high levels. "Our 10-year health plan will shift the focus of the NHS from sickness to prevention. This means prioritising public-health measures to support people to live longer, healthier lives." Amy Dickson, 46, from Reigate in Surrey, lost her dad Steve in September 2020. She said he had been an alcoholic "her entire life" but as his addiction worsened, his health rapidly declined. "He kind of just kept tracking along and then it was lockdown," said Ms Dickson, a trustee for Nacoa, a charity for the children of alcoholics. "The wheels came off for a lot of people during that time. There was nothing else to do." He died age 68, but Ms Dickson said the fact he survived until then was "a miracle" due to his extensive range of alcohol-related conditions. She said she's had to lobby for alcoholism to be included as a contributing factor on his death certificate, alongside internal haemorrhaging and heart disease. She believes that with "more and more people" talking about addiction and mental health issues, alcoholism may be more regularly recorded as a cause of death. Ms Dickson called for greater access to support for those struggling with alcoholism to prevent future deaths. "It's really hard to get help," she said. "Rehabilitation services have been cut, mental health services are on their knees."



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Health News

Antioxidant-rich diet may reduce risk of iron buildup, cognitive issues with age

Iron is one of the many minerals the body needs to function properly. The body mainly uses iron to create a protein found in red blood cells called hemoglobin, which is tasked with carrying oxygen from the lungs to other areas of the body. Additionally, iron helps muscles store oxygen, is important for hormone and bone marrow production, and keeps the immune system working correctly. Iron also plays an important role in brain health. As we age, too much iron can sometimes accumulate in the brain. Past studies have correlated high levels of iron in the brain with neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Now, researchers from the University of Kentucky have found that including certain nutrients in a person's usual diet may help lower the amount of iron buildup in the brain, potentially lowering a person's risk for cognitive issues. The study was recently published in the journal *Neurobiology of Aging*. How aging disrupts regulation of non-heme iron in the brain For this study, researchers focused specifically on non-heme iron, which is found in both plant and animal products and makes up about 90% of iron a person consumes through food. "Iron is a vital element for brain health, playing a key role in essential cellular functions," Valentinos Zachariou, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Behavioral Science at the College of Medicine at the University of Kentucky and the first author of this study, told *Medical News Today*. "However, iron is also a potent oxidizing agent that, when unregulated, can disrupt cellular processes and damage neurons, glial cells Trusted Source, and myelin Trusted Source. To mitigate this risk, brain cells typically store iron in protective complexes such as ferritin. When stored in these complexes, iron remains safe and non-toxic to the cell," he explained. "However, for iron to fulfill its role in cellular functions, it must first be released from these protective complexes," Zachariou continued. Brain iron accumulation worsens memory, executive func-

tion This current study builds on findings from a previous study conducted by Zachariou and his team that was published in October 2021. In that study, researchers found that a higher intake of antioxidants, vitamins, iron-chelating nutrients, and polyunsaturated fatty acids Trusted Source was linked to lower brain iron levels, as well as better working memory performance. In this new research, scientists followed up about three years later with the same 72 older adults from their original study. Participants had their brain iron levels measured through an MRI technique called quantitative susceptibility mapping Trusted Source. Researchers also examined study participants' diets and their current cognitive performance, including memory. The scientists found participants experienced iron accumulation in both cortical Trusted Source and subcortical brain regions over the three-year period, which was associated with worsened episodic memory — the ability to recall past events — and executive function — such as attention and problem-solving — during the follow-up. "This finding is significant because it demonstrates two key points: (1) the MRI modality we used to non-invasively measure non-heme iron in the brain is sensi-

tive enough to detect increases in brain iron over a relatively short three-year period, and (2) these increases are cognitively significant," Zachariou said. "Specifically, the brain regions where we observed iron accumulation subserve and are associated with episodic memory and executive function, and iron accumulation in these regions was linked to declines in these particular cognitive functions," he continued. Certain nutrients help lessen iron accumulation in the brain However, researchers also found that study participants who had higher baseline consumption of antioxidants, vitamins, iron-chelating nutrients, and polyunsaturated fatty acids presented significantly less brain iron accumulation during the three-year period. "The immediate next step is to identify and refine the list of specific nutrients that may mitigate the effects of age-related brain iron accumulation on cognition. This includes examining how these nutrients interact with overall dietary habits. For instance, are these nutrients effective only when consumed as part of a balanced, healthy diet, or do they provide benefits regardless of overall dietary patterns?" Zachariou continued. "The subsequent step would involve designing a randomized clinical trial to

test the impact of these nutrients on brain iron accumulation and cognitive function in older individuals, in the form of targeted nutritional interventions," he added. Improving brain health with diet is a worthwhile pursuit We spoke with Clifford Segil, DO, neurologist at Providence Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica, CA, about this study. "As a clinical neurologist, I have never seen a test to determine brain iron levels and am curious how iron enters the central nervous system through the blood-brain barrier Trusted Source. Brain health is an ever-changing field and studies looking to improve brain health with diet are worthwhile pursuing," Segil said. "I would like to see the same MRI-based iron detecting technique aimed at the spines of people to determine how iron comes in and out of the central nervous system. I would like to see the same study repeat in patients receiving iron supplementation for anemia to see if this has associated brain iron level detectable changes," he added. How can I reduce brain iron accumulation due to aging? We also spoke with Monique Richard, MS, RDN, LDN, FAND, IFNCP, RYT, a registered dietitian nutritionist and owner of Nutrition-In-Sight for tips on how readers can incorporate more of the antioxi-

dants, vitamins, iron-chelating nutrients, and polyunsaturated fatty acids the study spoke about into their own diets. Richard said if access and ability are not barriers, it is essential to incorporate fresh produce as often as possible on a daily basis. "For the average adult, three servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit a day from a variety of sources (a reminder that 1/2 cup cooked = a serving and 1 cup raw = a serving) will be beneficial to provide the nutrients and antioxidants that would be helpful," she detailed. "Further dietary pattern considerations would be to monitor heme (primarily found in animal products) and non-heme (primarily from plants) sources of iron intake per individual to make sure that the animal sources are not in excess and appropriate as well as a wide variety of non-heme sources are provided." "Adequate and optimal nutrition is essential to neuroplasticity and cognitive health but it is also important to remember that brain-stimulating activities — brain teasers, crossword puzzles, learning a new language — body movement, adequate restful sleep, fresh air, proper hydration, calm, peaceful environments, and social interaction also help everything fire on all cylinders," she added.





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Bollywood News

Sonam Kapoor becomes the new global brand ambassador of Dior

It was only weeks ago that Sonam Kapoor made a dazzling appearance at the Dior Spring Summer 2025 show at Paris Fashion Week. Now, in a move that comes as no surprise to those familiar with Kapoor's longstanding relationship with the French couture house, Dior has officially named her as the brand ambassador. The French couture maison has always looked to India for inspiration, drawing frequently from its heritage and artistry, as can be seen from the intricate embroidery work historically outsourced to Indian artisans to the fabrics, motifs, and craftsmanship on display in several collections. However, this collaboration signals a shift in the perception of India itself—an acknowledgement of Dior's deepening connection to the country, not just as inspiration but as a pivotal growing luxury market. And who better than Kapoor to partner with in this journey? The actor's formal induction as the brand ambassador for creative director Maria Grazia Chiuri's collections for Dior is fitting. Having religiously attended several shows by the monumental fashion house, at Dior's spectacular pre-fall collection 2023 show at the Gateway of India held to spotlight

Indian craftsmanship, Kapoor reportedly teared up in the front row. According to reports, in its statement making the announcement, Dior said, "A multitasking personality, the actress, producer and fashion icon henceforth embodies the audacity, grace and elegance of Dior style, a femininity constantly reinvented. More than ever, this unique alliance celebrates the powerful cultural ties that have united Dior and India since the very beginning of the house". Over the years, Kapoor has made an indelible mark on Indian fashion, both internationally and closer to home—with her many magazine covers, runway walks, and public appearances, all cementing her reputation as a fashion icon. This, then, is more than an endorsement. In her own words, "It's an honour to be a part of Dior's story as they continue to push the boundaries and redefine creativity and elegance in the world of fashion. Each of their collections present a truly unique vision with intricate craftsmanship, celebrating heritage in a way that deeply resonates with my own sense of style." She went on to add, "This partnership is another step in the beautiful cultural synergy that has connected Dior and



India over the years, and I'm excited to see where we take it next." For India, this has been a remarkable year in fashion, with Indian designers showing their work on the global stage

during fashion weeks, and the rising influence of Bollywood in global fashion, not just in India but also with the diaspora. As Kapoor takes on her prestigious role at Dior, she joins the grow-

ing list of Indian ambassadors of global luxury fashion houses, like Priyanka Chopra for Bulgari, Deepika Padukone for Louis Vuitton, and Alia Bhatt for Gucci among others.



Bollywood News

Kiara Advani hospitalised? Actor's team issues clarification after she misses Game Changer event in Mumbai

The actor was scheduled to appear at the trailer launch press meet of her film Game Changer in Mumbai. However, she did not turn up. After reports emerged that actor Kiara Advani had been hospitalised on Saturday morning, her team issued a clarification. The actor was scheduled to appear at the trailer launch and press meet of her upcoming film Game Changer in Mumbai. However, she did not attend the event. As per her team, Kiara has not been hospitalised. The actor has been advised to rest due to exertion, as she has been working non-stop, shared her team. Earlier, at the event, the emcee had announced that the actor could not be present as she was hospitalised. No other details about the reason behind Kiara's illness

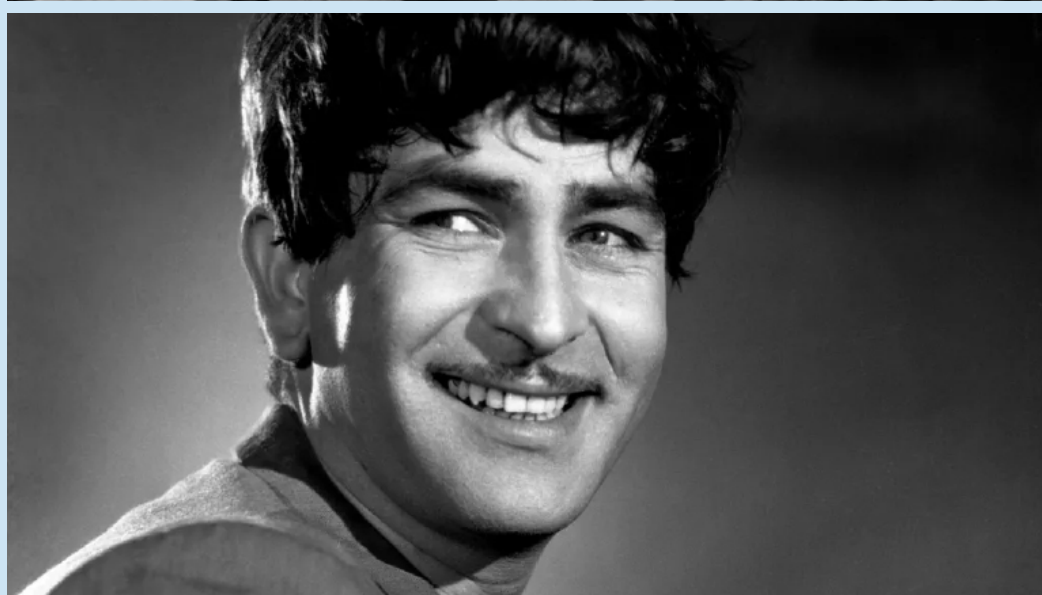
were shared. About Kiara's upcoming film Kiara will be seen with Ram Charan in Game Changer. Recently, the film's team unveiled the film's teaser in Lucknow. The over one-minute-long teaser showed Ram going from academia to action. In the clip, he fought goons and even romanced Kiara. Reportedly, the film is set in the world of politics and centres around the story of an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer who takes on corrupt politicians and fights for fair elections. The film, directed by S Shankar, will release in cinemas on January 10. About Kiara's personal life Kiara is married to actor Sidharth Malhotra. They tied the knot on February 7, 2023, in Rajasthan. The couple fell in love during the shoot of their film Shershaah.



In pictures: Celebrating 100 years of the 'greatest showman of Indian cinema'

Raj Kapoor, fondly called the "greatest showman of Indian cinema", was a leading filmmaker, producer and actor whose work continues to shape and inspire Indian films. Today, almost four decades after his death in 1988, he remains one of India's most-loved stars. Kapoor began his film career in India's post-independence era. His early work often carried a socialistic undertone, mirroring the country's mood and aspirations of the time. "Kapoor brought romance, sexuality, song and soul to Indian socialism," said historian Sunil Khilnani, in Incarnations: India in 50 Lives, a 2015 BBC Radio 4 series on the men and women who made India. So perhaps it isn't surprising that celebrations to mark what would have been his 100th birthday on Saturday are taking place across the country, honouring his enduring legacy. Among them is a retrospective showcasing 10 of his iconic films that will screen across 40 cities and 135 cinemas in India at the weekend. Born as Shrishti Nath Kapoor to actors Prithviraj Kapoor and Ramsarni Kapoor, he later took the name of Ranbir Raj Kapoor and debuted as a

child actor in Inquilab (1935). Before making waves on screen, Kapoor honed his craft behind the scenes - assisting filmmaker Kidar Sharma, working as an art director at his father's Prithvi Theatre, and appearing in smaller roles. His breakout came with Neel Kamal (1947), launching a storied career that combined artistic ambition with mass appeal. In 1948, Kapoor founded the iconic RK Films studio, synonymous with blockbuster films and international acclaim. He debuted as a director with Aag (1948) and showcased his versatility as an actor and filmmaker in landmark films like Barsaat (1949), Awaara (1951), Shree 420 (1955), and Sangam (1964). Other popular works include Mera Naam Joker (1970), Bobby (1973), Satyam Shivam Sundaram (1978), and Ram Teri Ganga Maili (1985). Raj Kapoor's legacy is not just cinematic but cultural, representing the aspirations and dreams of a nation finding its identity. His films remain evergreen, and his name continues to evoke admiration and respect, ensuring his place as an icon of Indian and world cinema.



Food

Spinach and Feta Crepes Recipe

Spinach and Feta Crepes

Total Time: 30 min

Prep Time : 10 min

Cook Time : 20 min

Serves: 2 Servings

Ingredients

For crepes:

- 1/4 cup milk (whole fat or skimmed)
- 1/2 cup flour
- 1/3 cup water
- 1/8 cup butter, melted
- 1 tsp honey
- A pinch of salt
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- Extra butter (for crisping the crepe)

For the filling:

- 200 gms spinach, chopped
- 150 gms feta cheese (crumbled)

- 100 gms greek yogurt (whisked)
- 2 tbsp honey

How to

- Mix in the dry and the wet ingredients separately and then combine. Gently whisk till no lumps remain. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours.
- Warm a flat pan over medium heat and grease with oil. Pour about 2 table spoons of crepe batter and twirl around pan to coat the pan. Make sure the batter spreads out evenly.
- Flip the crepe and begin layering the filling with spinach and feta. Cover



half the crepe with filling and flip over the other half of the crepe to the filled

side. Flip the crepe- greasing it with butter and crisping it to your liking.

4. Serve with a dollop of greek style yogurt on the side and a drizzle of honey.

Coq Au Vin (Chicken Braised in Wine) Recipe

Coq Au Vin (Chicken Braised in Wine) Recipe

Total Time: 50 min

Prep Time : 10 min

Cook Time : 40 min

Serves: 4 Servings

Ingredients

For marination:

- 1500 ml red wine (full body)
- 100 gms onion, sliced
- 30 gms celery stalks, sliced
- 100 gms carrot (sliced), peeled
- 20 garlic cloves (flattened), peeled
- 1 tsp whole black peppercorns
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 4 Chicken halves (with bone and skin on)

Cooking chicken:

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 150 gms bacon slices (thick)
- 3 tbsp all purpose flour
- 60 gms onion, chopped
- 10 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 tsp thyme sprigs, chopped
- 2 tsp parsley sprigs
- 2 small bay leaves
- 200 ml chicken stock
- 50 gms butter
- 150 gms button mushrooms

How to

For marinating chicken:

- Combine wine, onion, celery, carrot, garlic, and peppercorns in large pot and bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium and simmer 5 minutes. Cool completely; mix in oil.
- Place the chicken pieces



in a large bowl and pour the wine mixture over it. Cover and refrigerate for at least 12 hours and up to 24 hours, turning the chicken occasionally.

Prepare chicken:

- Using tongs, transfer chicken pieces from marinade to paper towels to drain; pat dry.
- Strain the marinade and reserve the vegetables and liquid separately.
- Heat oil in heavy large pot over medium-high heat. Add bacon and saute until crisp and brown. Using slotted spoon, transfer bacon to small bowl. Add

chicken, skin side down, to drippings in pot. Saute until brown, about 3 minutes per side.

- Transfer chicken to large bowl and add vegetables reserved from marinade to the pot. Saute until brown, for about 6 minutes. Mix in flour and stir for about 2 minutes. Gradually whisk in reserved marinade liquid. Bring to boil, whisking frequently. Cook until sauce thickens, whisking occasionally, for about 2 minutes.
- Mix in the shallots, garlic, parsley, and bay leaves, stock. Add chicken and

bring to simmer; reduce heat to medium-low. Cover pot and simmer chicken 20 minutes. Using tongs, turn chicken over. Cover and simmer until tender, about 10 minutes longer.

- Melt butter in heavy large skillet over medium heat. Add mushrooms and saute until tender, for about 8 minutes. Transfer mushrooms to plate.
- Melt butter in the same skillet. Add onions and saute until beginning to brown, about 3 minutes. Transfer onions to plate alongside mushrooms.
- Using tongs, transfer chick-

en to plate. Strain sauce from pot into reserved skillet, pressing on solids in strainer to extract all sauce; discard solids. Bring sauce to simmer, scraping up browned bits. Return sauce to pot.

- Add mushrooms and bacon. Simmer uncovered until sauce is slightly reduced, about 8 minutes. Tilt pot and spoon off excess fat from top of sauce. Season sauce with salt and pepper. Return chicken to sauce.
- Cook for another 2 minutes and arrange chicken on plate and sprinkle with parsley. Serve hot.

Food

Aloo Pyaaz Pakora Recipe

Aloo Pyaaz Pakora Recipe

Total Time: 25 min

Prep Time : 10 min

Cook Time : 15 min

Serves: 4 Servings

Ingredients

1. 2 big potatoes
2. 2 big onions, sliced
3. 5-6 green chillies, finely chopped
4. 1/2 cup coriander leaves, finely chopped
5. 4 garlic cloves, smashed
6. 2 cups besan
7. 1/2 cup rice flour
8. 1/2 tsp haldi
9. 1 tbsp chilli powder
10. 1/2 tsp ajwain
11. 1 tsp coriander powder
12. 1/2 tsp sugar
13. Salt to taste
14. Oil for deep frying

How to

1. Peel and wash the potatoes.

Grate them using the side of the grater with the larger holes.

2. Soak the grated potatoes in 2 cups of water. Add ½ tsp haldi and 1 tsp salt to the water. Soak for 5 minutes.
3. In a large mixing bowl, add the onions and green chillies. Gently crush them with your hands.
4. Squeeze the water out of the grated potatoes. Take care not to mash it while doing so. Add them to the onion mixture.
5. Add chilli powder, coriander powder, ajwain seeds, garlic, sugar, coriander leaves and rice flour to the bowl.
6. Lastly, add the besan little by little. Continue mixing the ingredients as you do



so.

7. Add 1 tbsp oil to this mixture and combine well.

Keep aside for 5 minutes.

8. Deep fry small portions of the mixture until golden

brown and crisp. Serve the pakoras hot with green chutney and/or ketchup.

Grilled Vegetable Capachio Recipe

Grilled Vegetable Capachio

Total Time: 25 min

Prep Time : 05 min

Cook Time : 20 min

Serves: 4 Servings

Ingredients

1. 50 Gram Lettuce (cleaned, washed & broken)
2. 15 Gram Onion rings, grilled
3. 25 Gram Tomatoes (sliced), grilled
4. 15 Gram Green Capsicum rings, grilled
5. 15 Gram Yellow Capsicum rings, grilled
6. 15 Gram Red Capsicum rings, grilled
7. 30 Gram Aubergine (sliced), grilled

8. 30 Gram Cheddar Cheese, sliced
9. 25 ML Olive oil
10. 15 Gram Basil leaves
11. 2 Gram Milled Pepper powder
12. To taste Salt
13. 1 1/2 Juice of Lemons
14. 20 Gram Walnuts (crushed), roasted

How to

1. In a bowl, add olive oil, lemon juice, salt, pepper and roasted walnut.
2. Mix well, season to taste. On a platter, pile crisp lettuce in the center.
3. Layer the grilled vegetables around it.



4. Place cheese slices next.

5. Drizzle the dressing over

the top of the grilled vegetables.

6. Serve the vegetables garnished with milled pepper.

Chicken Steak Recipe

Chicken Steak Recipe

Total Time: 40 min

Prep Time : 10 min

Cook Time : 30 min

Serves: 8 Servings

Ingredients

1. 4 Large chicken breasts (boneless)
2. 2 Eggs (slightly whisked)
3. 1 tsp ginger paste
4. 1 tsp garlic paste
5. 1 cup onions, finely chopped
6. 2 tbsp coriander leaves, chopped
7. 2 green chillies, finely

chopped

8. 1 tsp black pepper powder
9. flour (enough to make a thin coating)
10. 1 tbsp vinegar
11. to taste salt
12. Oil (to pan fry)

How to

1. Wipe the chicken breasts and beat with a mallet or a knife to flatten. Cut each into two pieces.
2. Mix the chicken with the other ingredients, except oil.

3. Put aside to marinate for 2 hours or so.

4. Heat a non-stick pan or grill with a thin layer of oil.

5. When hot, place as many pieces of chicken without them touching each other, turning over at once.

6. If your dish is not big enough to take in all the pieces together, you may have to do them in two lots.

7. Lower the heat and cook till tender and brown on both sides, turning when one side is done. Serve hot.



Fiji News

Fiji breaks tourism records with over 1M visitors in 2024

Fiji welcomed more than 1.06 million tourists into the country last year, breaking the one million mark for the first time. This has been confirmed by Tourism Fiji CEO Brent Hill, who says over 80,000 tourists arrived into Fiji via cruise ships in 2024. He says this is in addition to the more than 980,000 counted and announced each month who arrive via the airport. Hill says 2025 is off to a great start as we hit peak cruising season. He says this week Fiji welcomed the Crown Princess and MS Europa to Fiji and significantly, MS Europa visited Taveuni. The CEO says there were over

5,000 passenger on these vessels. Hill says the significant koro that springs up around the ships, and the work that goes into shore excursions does not happen by chance. He says a large team of hard working people across various organisations in Fiji ensures guests have a safe and wonderful time in Fiji, and as much spend as possible comes into Fiji from these shore excursions, tours, shopping and visits. Hill adds its a significant industry for Fiji, and it is great to see the benefits flowing out to more of Fiji's beautiful islands and villages, and tourism businesses.



Nadi Chamber of Commerce urges for better Police resources following rising crime concerns and tourism safety fears

We are ready to stand with the Fiji Police in making sure Nadi is safe for everyone but Nadi Police is under-resourced in terms of manpower and vehicles. Nadi Chamber of Commerce and Industry President, Dr Ram Raju highlighted this after the recent calls by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism Viliame Gavoka on beefing up security in Nadi, particularly the Martintar and Namaka corridor following the alleged sexual attack and theft incidents involving foreign airline workers. Dr Raju says they will be closely working with Police and all relevant stakeholders to ensure that tourists and residents feel safe in their homes and in public places at all times. He says they have been meeting the senior officers of Nadi and Namaka Police Stations regularly and adds the recent incident is a wake up call to take stronger action and work towards preventing such incidents by equipping our security forces with the necessary tools and manpower. The Chamber of Commerce President says as the Deputy Prime Minister highlighted, the recent case involving foreign airline staff was truly a one-off case as there had been no such cases in the past. He says it is time for us to make sure such things never happen again as it tarnishes Fiji's image particularly that of Nadi as the tourism hub of the South Pacific.



ic. Dr Raju has confirmed that they and relevant stakeholders will be meeting with senior officials of the Police Force later this week.

He says during an interaction with the officer-in-charge of Nadi during the festive season, he was told that the Police seriously lacks manpower and there are only two vehicles at

the Nadi Police Station. The Chamber President says he is urging the government to fully equip the force with relevant manpower and vehicles because Nadi is making a significant contribution towards national development yet they do not see that reflected on the public security services offered at the moment. He says there is an

overall lack of confidence in the business community and people are refraining from making investments because of safety and security issues which are now running out of control in the greater Nadi area.

Dr Raju says one prominent member of Nadi Chamber has just held back his \$10 million building investment plans after

seeing the current situation in Nadi. He says this recent update by one of their concerned members is itself a testimony on how economic development and security issues are closely related. Dr Raju adds touting and the continued harassment of tourists by certain rogue retailers is another major concern for Nadi Town.

Fiji News

Fiji's education system needs transformation

Professor Shameem

Education in Fiji needs to be planned holistically from early childhood to tertiary instead of piecemeal. This has been highlighted by the University of Fiji Vice-Chancellor Professor Shaista Shameem in her New Year's address to the staff and students. Professor Shameem says she agrees with the statement made by Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka that the Fijian government has made a strong effort to provide access to free and quality education as well as a broader scope in the educational landscape. She says UniFiji is now focused on educational renaissance, by moving beyond mere resilience. Professor Shameem adds UniFiji sees education as being available to all from early childhood to whenever without any barriers. She says the sky is the limit as far as UniFiji's educational development strategy is concerned. Professor Shameem also highlighted that she told their staff that they need to respect

everyone in Fiji as knowledge holders of society, whether or not they had formal qualifications. Professor Shameem says the notion of education should undergo a fundamental revision to ensure that every citizen can

proudly feel like a valued member of society. She says UniFiji would grasp the educational bull by the horns and transform it for the public good from 2025 and it will employ four main strategies in this plan. The Vice-Chancel-

lor says the university would promote holistic, inclusive and broad-based educational policy review which, if organised and implemented well under innovative and honest leadership at all levels - traditional as well as

modern would transform Fiji for all, not just a select few. She adds it would also restore confidence in the nation and encourage everyone to remain in Fiji to put their collective shoulders to the wheel for the benefit of all.



Labasa couple charged for allegedly dishonestly obtaining \$730 through deception

A Labasa couple has been arrested and charged by the Fiji Police Force M-PAiSA Taskforce for allegedly dishonestly obtaining \$730 through deception. Police say it is alleged that the 30-year-old businessman of Delailabasa and his 27-year-old wife dishonestly obtained \$730 from four victims through the M-PAiSA platform. They say the alleged incidents occurred between September 2023 and December 2024. Police say the couple have been charged with four counts of unauthorised access, four counts of identity theft, four counts of obtaining financial advantage by deception and one count of proceeds of crime. Police investigations reveal that the couple were calling prominent individuals, intentionally logging into their Viber accounts, and pretending to be police officers. They informed the victims that their numbers were being monitored and requested the international phone number that had called



them. The couple allegedly requested the Viber activation code linked to an international

number, accessed the Viber accounts of prominent individuals, and called vulnerable people

in their contact lists to ask for money. The matter was subsequently reported at the Totogo

Police Station. They will appear in the Labasa Magistrates Court today.

Fiji News

New Fiji Corrections HQ to serve as pivotal hub for correctional

The new Fiji Corrections Service Northern Division Headquarters located in Vaturekuka Labasa has been opened and is expected to serve as a pivotal hub for correctional operations in the North. The Fiji Corrections Service says their new headquarters will provide improved facilities for staff and better resources for managing rehabilitation programs aimed at reducing recidivism rates among offenders. The ceremony was attended by the Tui Bua, Ra Makutu Nagagavoka, alongside the Commissioner of Fiji Corrections Service, Dr. Jalesi Nakarawa. The event was attended by senior officers and staff of the Fiji Corrections Service, as well as other dis-

tinguished guests. The Corrections Service says the project to establish this headquarters was initiated in 2018 with the aim of enhancing operational efficiency and service delivery within the Northern Division. They say however, progress faced delays due to unforeseen circumstances, particularly the global COVID-19 pandemic which impacted construction timelines and resource availability.

The FCS says in recognition of its importance, the government approved the continuation of this project during the financial budget for 2022-2023, allocating a total funding of approximately \$1.5 million. They say this investment underscores



the government's commitment to strengthening correctional services across Fiji and ensuring that facilities meet modern

standards. The Fiji Corrections Service remains dedicated to fostering a safe and rehabilitative environment for all in-

dividuals under its care while enhancing community safety through effective corrections management.

British American Tobacco Fiji opens 4th Greenhouse in Savusavu

British American Tobacco has opened its fourth Grow+ Remote Greenhouse in Bia-i-Cake Settlement, Nagigi Village in Savusavu to support the farmers through promoting good agricultural practices and fostering sustainability. Through its flagship of Corporate Social Investment program, BAT Fiji has created significant social and economic impacts, distributing vegetable seedlings and empowering rural and remote communities.

Speaking at the opening Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade, Manoa Kamikamica says the partnership with Bia-i-Cake Women's Cooperative

enhances food security, biodiversity conservation, and income generation. Kamikamica says this greenhouse represents an investment of over \$42,000, equipped with automated irrigation systems, a water tank, and a pressure pump and has the capacity to produce 5,000 vegetable seedlings monthly, or 50,000 annually, supporting local agricultural productivity and economic resilience. He says cooperatives like Bia-i-Cake empower individuals, particularly women, to actively participate in economic activities, reducing inequality and enhancing community resilience.



93 teams for 49th Fiji Bitter Marist 7s

The 49th Fiji Bitter Marist 7s will have a total of 93 teams competing this year. Marist 7s President Lawrence Tikaram confirmed this during the launch at Paradise Beverages, saying there will be 48 men's teams, 9 women's teams, U18-21 will have 24 teams, U18 boys 6 and U18 girls 6 teams. Tikaram says there are some changes to the tournament format this year whereas on Thursday, all pool games for the U18 to U21 divi-

sions will be completed, along with the women's pool games and eliminations. He adds the first round of eliminations for the U18 to U21 divisions would also take place on the same day. The President also highlighted that the women's rugby finals will be held on Day 2. The total prize money for the competition is \$45,000. The games will be held from the 20th to the 22nd of March at the HFC Bank Stadium.



Fiji News

53-year-old Chand appeals for support to undergo life-saving heart surgery

53-year-old Harish Chand of Nukuloa, Ba is urgently appealing for financial assistance as he battles a severe heart condition. While speaking to fjiivillage News, Chand says he is diagnosed with a valve disorder and requires open-heart surgery in India, which costs about \$40,000. He says it is a sum beyond his family's financial means. Chand is reaching out to family, friends and the wider community, hoping for support in his time of need. He says any contribution, big or small, will help him move closer to the treatment. Donations can be made through MPiSA 9719680 or BSP Bank Account 86791659. Chand and his family say they express heartfelt gratitude to all who offer their support during this difficult time.



Constitutional processes to address issues with Corrections Commissioner – PM

Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka says the Government will exhaust all processes provided under the Constitution in addressing issues relating to the Commissioner of Fiji Corrections Service Doctor Jalesi Nakarawa.

This comes as the Minister for Justice Siromi Turaga in

an earlier statement had said that Dr Nakarawa was sent on leave after the Ministry of Justice received reports of serious incidents and potential breaches within the Corrections under his leadership.

While responding to questions by fjiivillage News, Rabuka says the Government

notes that Dr Nakarawa has completed his annual leave and has resumed his duties in office. Turaga had earlier said that allegations against Dr Nakarawa raise significant concerns regarding the governance, security, conduct, management and administration of the Corrections Service and warrants

immediate investigation. Section 130(4) of the Constitution states the Commissioner of the Fiji Corrections Service is appointed by the President, on the advice of the Constitutional Offices Commission, following consultation with the Minister responsible for the Fiji Corrections Service. According

to Section 130(6) the Minister responsible for the Fiji Corrections Service may from time to time issue general policy directions with respect to the Fiji Corrections Service and, if such a direction has been issued, the Commissioner of the Fiji Corrections Service must act in accordance with it.



World News

Israeli strikes kill dozens in Gaza Strip as new ceasefire talks begin

Israeli military strikes in the Gaza Strip have killed at least 70 people over the last day, Palestinian medics said on Saturday, as mediators launched a new ceasefire push to end the 15-month-old war. At least 17 of those who died were killed in airstrikes on two houses in Gaza City, the first of which destroyed the home of the Al-Ghoula family in the early hours, medics and residents said. "At about 2 a.m. we were woken up by the sound of a huge explosion," said Ahmed Ayyan, a neighbour, adding that 14 or 15 people had been staying in the house. "Most of them are women and children, they are all civilians, there is no one there who shot missiles, or is from the resistance," Ayyan told Reuters. People scoured the rubble for any survivors trapped under the debris and medics said several children were among those killed. A few flames and trails of smoke still rose from burning furniture in the ruins hours after the attack. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military on the incident. Another strike on a house in Gaza City killed five people later on Saturday, the Palestinian Civil Emergency Service said, adding that at least 10 others were feared trapped under the rubble. The Israeli military said earlier its forces had continued their operations this week in Beit Hanoun town in the northern edge of the enclave, where the army has been operating for three months, and has destroyed a military complex that had been used by Hamas. At least six other Palestinians were killed in Israeli strikes in Jabalia in the north and near the central town of Deir Al-Balah, medics said. Saturday's deaths brought the toll to 70 since Friday, Palestinian health officials said. A renewed push is under way to reach a ceasefire in the war between Israel and Hamas and return Israeli hostages before U.S. President-elect Donald Trump takes office on Jan. 20. Israeli mediators were dispatched to resume talks in Doha brokered by Qatari and Egyptian mediators, and U.S. President Joe Biden's administration, which is helping broker the talks, urged Hamas on Friday to agree to a deal. Hamas said



it was committed to reaching an agreement as soon as possible, but it was unclear how close the two sides were. The armed group released a video on Saturday showing Israeli hostage Liri Albag - who local media said was a soldier - urging Israel to do more to secure the hostages' release. She said their lives were in danger because of

Israel's military action in Gaza. Albag's family said the video had "torn our hearts to pieces". "This is not the daughter and sister we know. Her severe psychological distress is evident," a family statement said, calling on Israel's government and world leaders not to miss the opportunity to bring all remaining hostages back alive. Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in response to the video that Israel continued to work tirelessly to bring the hostages home. "Anyone who dares to harm our hostages will bear full responsibility for their actions," he said. Israel launched its assault on Gaza in response to the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, 2023, in which militants stormed border

communities from Gaza, killing about 1,200 people and seizing around 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies. Its military campaign, with the stated goal of eradicating Hamas, has leveled swathes of the enclave, driving most people from their homes, and has killed 45,717 Palestinians, according to the Gaza health ministry.



World News

US releases one of longest-held Guantánamo Bay detainees to Tunisia

A Tunisian national who had become one of Guantánamo Bay's longest-held detainees has been released from the US military compound, the Pentagon announced on Monday night. Ridah Bin Saleh al-Yazidi was transferred to his home country after being held without charge since the detention facility opened in January 2002. The 59-year-old appeared in one of the detention centre's most iconic photographs, showing detainees kneeling in the open-air compound of Camp X-Ray. His release comes amid a flurry of transfers this month, including three other people sent to Kenya and Malaysia. The prison's population has dropped marginally during Joe Biden's presidency, falling from 40 people when he took office to the current 26. More than half are now eligible for transfer. A leaked military assessment from

2007 indicated that Pakistani authorities captured Yazidi in December 2001 near the Afghanistan border. US officials claimed he was part of a group fleeing the battle of Tora Bora and alleged ties to al-Qaida, though human rights organizations have long challenged the credibility of such claims. A complex series of diplomatic hurdles kept Yazidi detained long after he was cleared for transfer in 2007 under both the Bush and Obama administrations.

The former state department official Ian Moss attributed the delay to diplomatic challenges with Tunisia and Yazidi's reported unwillingness to consider alternative countries for resettlement, according to the New York Times.

The facility, constructed on a US naval base in south-eastern Cuba following the "war on ter-



ror", has drawn international condemnation throughout its existence since becoming a symbol of post-9/11 human rights abuses. Its critics have

long highlighted concerns over indefinite detention without trial and controversial interrogation methods. Throughout its 22-year history, an estimated

780 people have passed through Guantánamo's cells. The Pentagon offered no details about arrangements for Yazidi's return to Tunisia.

Venezuela announces \$100,000 reward for capture of opposition candidate

Venezuelan authorities have announced a \$100,000 reward for information leading to the capture of exiled opposition candidate Edmundo González Urrutia, who insists he beat President Nicolás Maduro at the polls. Police published on social media a photo of the previously little-known ex-diplomat with the word "wanted" under the image. He fled to Spain in September after Maduro claimed victory in the 28 July election and cracked down hard on dissent. González, 75, vowed to return to his troubled, economically distressed country to be sworn in as president on 10 January instead of Maduro, who is due to take the oath of office that day. Judicial officials told AFP that the wanted poster with González's face would be displayed at airports and police checkpoints around the country. Spain granted González asylum on 20 December after Venezuela announced charges of conspiracy and racketeering against him. Venezuela declared Maduro the winner of a third six-year term in the July vote but the opposition cried foul, saying it has

detailed polling station numbers that show González won handily.

The government has resisted intense pressure at home and abroad to release vote results that prove its claim of victory. Street protests erupted after

the election and devolved into clashes with police, with 28 people dead, 200 injured and more than 2,400 arrested.

Three detainees died in prison, and nearly 1,400 of those originally arrested have been released. Maduro was handpicked

by the late socialist icon Hugo Chávez to succeed him upon his death in 2013. Maduro has overseen the oil-rich country's decline into economic ruin and been accused of acting like a harsh leftwing dictator as he cracks down on dissent and

clings to power. Only a handful of countries, including Venezuelan ally Russia, have recognized Maduro as the winner of the July election. The United States and the European parliament have recognized González as "president-elect".



Fiji News

Dialogue Fiji criticises Cabinet expansion as fiscally irresponsible and morally indefensible

Dialogue Fiji says they are deeply concerned by the Prime Minister's decision to expand the Cabinet to an unprecedented size of 36 Ministers and Assistant Ministers. Dialogue Fiji Executive Director Nilesh Lal says never before in Fiji's history has such a high proportion of MPs been Ministers. He says such a bloated Cabinet is neither justified by the size of Fiji's population nor the size of its legislature. Lal says a more appropriate Cabinet size for Fiji would be 12 to 15 Ministers. He says the Cabinet expansion comes on the heels of significant salary increases that the MPs approved for themselves last year, where each Minister now earns a minimum of \$200,000 annually and each Assistant Minister earns \$120,000.

Lal says these salary hikes, combined with the expanded size of the Cabinet, have created the biggest ministerial salary bill in Fiji's history. The Executive Director says what makes it difficult to accept is that this is happening at a time when ordinary Fijians have been subject to severe austerity measures, including increase in VAT by 6 percent. Lal says this is being done when the taxpayers have been told to tighten their belts and the government is living it up. He says the rationale for such a large Cabinet is unclear, and the roles of Assistant Ministers remain particularly ambiguous. The Executive Director further says it is not evident what specific functions Assistant Ministers



perform or how their positions add value to governance. He says this raises questions about the government's priorities and whether this expansion is truly in the public interest. Lal says at a time when critical issues such as poverty, the high cost of living, escalating crime, deteriorating infrastructure, and inadequate healthcare services demand urgent attention and financial resources, the government's focus on expanding

its Cabinet appears misguided. He says this move appears to be a political strategy by the Prime Minister to consolidate his power at the expense of democracy and Fijian taxpayers. Lal says this move means that the executive is further strengthened against the people, while taxpayers are left footing the bill. He also says Home Affairs Minister, Pio Tikoduadua has become the biggest loser in this Cabinet reshuffle where he had

tried to set a high standard for ministerial accountability by offering to step down temporarily from the Immigration Ministry after an issue arose in the Ministry. Lal says instead of being recognised for his integrity and high standards, Tikoduadua has been permanently stripped of his portfolios, which have now been handed to political allies of the Prime Minister. He says this decision undermines the principles of accountability and

sends a disheartening message that integrity is not valued in Fiji's political leadership. Lal further says the expansion of the Cabinet is not only fiscally irresponsible but also morally indefensible, given the pressing needs of ordinary Fijians. Dialogue Fiji is urging the government to prioritise these critical issues over political expediency and to adopt a more rational and responsible approach to governance.

Power disruption affecting CWM, FSM, Private Hospital and other parts of Toorak

A fault has caused power disruption to Extension Street, the CWM Hospital, the Fiji School of Medicine Complex, Bayview hospital, FSM Library, Oceania Hospital, Namosi House, Dinem House, Toorak and areas nearby. Energy Fiji Limited says an undetermined fault that they are still trying to identify caused the disruption. They say their team is working on the fault and will restore power to the affected areas at the earliest.



Fiji News

34 Northern Division officers awarded Fiji Police Medals for service and dedication

34 Northern Division Police officers have been honoured today with the prestigious Fiji Police Medal, while 38 others received the Fiji Police Long Service and Good Conduct Medal for their outstanding dedication and service. Acting Commissioner of Police Juki Fong Chew extended his appreciation to the recipients' families for their support and has urged the officers that their medals should rightfully be shared with them. Chew says their success is not theirs alone and they must utilise every opportunity possible to acknowledge those who have contributed to their success. He urges all Police Officers in the Northern Division to continue to serve with honour, integrity and do justice by their oath to serve.



Dr Chanan decides not to seek another term as WAF CEO

Water Authority of Fiji's CEO, Doctor Amit Chanan has decided not to seek another term as his contract ends in March this year. Dr Chanan has informed the Board of his decision and Board Chairman, Ratu Savenaca Seniloli has acknowledged Dr Chanan's dedicated service to the organisation, its customers and the wider Fijian community since his appointment in 2022. Ratu Savenaca says Dr Chanan had a focus on WAF's people and advanced a positive much improved organisational culture and expressed his heartfelt gratitude to his exceptional leadership and dedication. He says under his leadership, they have completed the Viria Water Treatment Plant project, which is one of the biggest water infrastructure projects successfully delivered in the South Pacific. He says the Viria Plant now provides clean water to around 360,000 Fijians in the Suva to Nausori corridor, reducing intermittent supply areas. The Chair says Dr Chanan has also been instrumental in developing and launching the Water Sector 2050 Strategy which outlines \$8.5 billion investment program for en-



sureing sustainable and resilient water and sanitation services for all Fijians over the next three decades.

Sports News

Netball Fiji starts Fiji Pearls head coach recruitment process, Fiji Men's Netball coach Jioweli Vakamoce to oversee Fiji Pearls

Fiji Netball Men's Head Coach Jioweli Vakamoce will oversee the Fiji Pearls as the Netball Fiji gets underway with their recruit process to select a new Fiji Pearls Head Coach to lead the team for the next 3 years. Vakamoce will also continue overseeing the Fiji Men's Netball team as they prepare for the upcoming PacAusSports Series in Brisbane next month. Netball Fiji President RubyAnn Sorovaki says the decision to re-advertise the post reflects Netball Fiji's commitment to finding the ideal candidate to

lead the national team over the next three years, ensuring they achieve the desired results in line with Netball Fiji's Strategic Plan. She emphasizes that the Head Coach plays a pivotal role not only in enhancing the performance of the Pearls but also in fostering talent and creating clear pathways for players and coaches in the high-performance arena. The Netball Fiji President says they will explore all available avenues to recruit the most suitable candidate for this crucial role.



Usyk could be ordered to face Zhang who is aiming to secure a WBC title fight this year

Chinese heavyweight boxer Zhilei Zhang could be Oleksandr Usyk's next challenger for the WBC world heavyweight title. According to SkySports, the Chinese contender will fight Agit Kabayel for the WBC interim title, with the winner lining up a shot at the full WBC world belt, which is currently held by Usyk. Usyk retained his WBC, WBO and WBA belts after a unanimous decision win over Tyson Fury in their rematch last month, and is yet to reveal plans for his next fight. Zhang's co-manager, Terry Lane, says the 41-year-old fighter is the world's

second-best heavyweight behind Usyk and should earn a fight with the Ukrainian this year. Zhang propelled himself back into title contention with a stunning knockout victory over Deontay Wilder, the former WBC champion, in June. The Germany-based Kabayel stands in the way of Zhang's plans after extending his unbeaten record with impressive stoppage wins over Arslanbek Makhmudov and Frank Sanchez. Lane says being World Champion has been Zhang's aim from day one, and they will work to make that happen this year.



Defeating the Hurricanes at home was an unforgettable memory - Matawalu

Defeating the Hurricanes at the HFC Bank Stadium in Suva is a moment that will never be forgotten by Swire Shipping Fijian Drua halfback Peni Matawalu who hopes they can continue to give fans what they deserve in this year's Shop N Save Super Rugby Pacific season. Matawalu says the Hurricanes were in top form during that season, but the Drua held together and defeated them at home. The 27-year-old, who has been with the Fijian Drua since the National Rugby Championship, says he has seen a lot of changes within the team and now, professionalism is seen in

most players. He also jokingly said that he hopes for more players from the province of Ra to join the club as he stands alone when meeting with his Tauvus from Kadavu and Nadroga. Matawalu is urging children who wish to pursue rugby as a career to keep listening to their parents and continue to work hard. He says people should know their purpose as this will direct them to reaching their goals. The Fijian Drua's opening match will be at the HFC Bank Stadium in Suva, where they will host the Brumbies at 3.35pm on the 15th of February, 2025.



Sports News

Djokovic and Kyrgios beaten in doubles in Brisbane

Novak Djokovic and Nick Kyrgios were knocked out of the men's doubles in the second round at the Brisbane International after a narrow defeat by top-seeded pairing Nikola Pietrangeli and Michael Venus. Kyrgios lost a gruelling three-set match to Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard on Sunday on his return to singles competition after 18 months out through injury. The Australian said the defeat left him in "throbbing" pain and suggested he was a doubt for this month's Australian Open. But he fulfilled his promise to play alongside Djokovic in the doubles and appeared comfort-

able, only occasionally grabbing his right arm between serves. The pair lost the first set 6-2 but responded well to win the second 6-3 to take the match to a deciding first-to-10-points tie-break. With Djokovic and Kyrgios two points from victory, a double fault from the Serbian proved costly at 8-6. It shifted the momentum of the tie-break back towards Pietrangeli and Venus, who won the next three points to seal the win 6-2 3-6 10-8. Djokovic, pursuing his 100th career ATP title, is through to the quarter-finals of the singles, where he will play France's Gael Monfils.



Multiple host cities could become a feature for future Commonwealth Games

Multiple host cities and indoor ceremonies could become features of a more affordable and attractive Commonwealth Games in the future. The Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) President, Chris Jenkins, says the new streamlined model taken by Glasgow in 2026 will ensure the Games live on well past its 100-year anniversary in 2030. Jenkins says the Commonwealth Games model has been changed for good and hopes it will encourage more hosts going forward. He says future hosts are being told not to build or redevelop venues but to co-host with other cities or countries that have existing facilities. Jenkins adds athletes will stay in hotels and ceremonies could take place indoors at future Games. Jenkins is about to invite bids to host the next



three Games to give nations, sports, and athletes certainty

over the event's future. The Games could become bigger

again after Glasgow with up to 17 sports, rather than the 10 selected for 2026.

Habosi delivers man-of-the-match performance for Racing in 25-all draw with Lyon

Fiji Water Flying Fijians winger Vinaya Habosi was in top form for Racing 92 this morning as he delivered a man-of-the-match performance to help his side hold Lyon 25-all in their round 13 clash of the French Top 14 competition. Habosi started on the left wing and was explosive off the mark every-time he got a hold of the

ball. The 24-year-old ran a total of 151 metres with 15 carries, made 2 linebreaks and beat 5 defenders.

Fellow Flying Fijian and Racing 92 teammate Josua Tuisova started at inside centre. Meanwhile, Semi Radradra started on the right wing for Lyon and scored a try in the 74th minute to help his side

come from behind and hold Racing 92. In other round 13 matches of the Top 14 competition, Pau defeated Vannes 48-24, Bayonne beat Castres 33-12, Montpellier overcame Clermont 22-18, Bordeaux defeated Toulon 21-17, Perpignan beat La Rochelle 21-13 and Toulouse beat Stade Francais 38-23.



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Sports News

Top 14: Tuicuvu vs Habosi in battle of the wingers

Former Fiji Water Flying Fijians fullback Seta Tuicuvu will have the support of Leicester Fainga'anuku when his Toulon side plays fellow countrymen Josua Tuisova and Vinaya Habosi's Racing 92 tomorrow. Tuicuvu and his Toulon team are currently third on the Top 14 standings while Racing 92 are ninth. Tuisova will be taking on his former side where he made 122 appearances for from 2013 to 2019, and won the Top 14, Heineken Cup and the European Rugby Champions Cup. Fainga'anuku who will be leaving Toulon at the end of the season for the Crusaders, says while he likes playing in New Zealand, for rugby, he prefers the Top 14. Recently suspended Racing bad boy hooker Janick Tarrit has also forced his way into the starting lineup after being dropped last month. Toulon will host Racing 92 at 1.30 tomorrow morning.



Victoria set to be snubbed completely from 2027 Rugby World Cup with Sydney to host final

Victoria is set to be snubbed from the 2027 Rugby World Cup, with Sydney's Accor Stadium reportedly chosen to host the final. While no formal announcements have been made, News Corp are reporting Sydney's 82,000-seat venue will host the showpiece event, as well as both semi-finals. The MCG has a capacity of 100,000, but the iconic venue won't host any matches during the six-week tournament. The venue has hosted rugby matches in the past and will host the Wallabies' clash against the British and Irish Lions in July. Melbourne also has Marvel Stadium, which hosted matches in the 2003 edition, and AAMI Park as potential venues, but neither will be used. The report states that Victoria has been shut out completely after the state government withdrew its bid in a protest over the decision to remove the Rebels from Super Rugby, which had nothing to do with World Rugby. It means Accor Stadium will host the final, 24 years after the famous 2003 showpiece, which saw England beat Australia in a thrilling final. The report also states that Perth's Optus Stadium is



looming as the front-runner to host the opening match of the tournament, which is certain to involve the Wallabies

Sports News

Karawalevu excited about new Super Rugby Pacific season

Swire Shipping Fijian Drua player Vuate Karawalevu is excited about the new Shop N Save Super Rugby Pacific season and says he is looking at improving his game as it will be a big season for the club. While

speaking to fivillage Sports, the former Waratahs player says they have new coaches and a new system to follow, which the players need to be familiar with before the season starts next month.

While speaking on his rugby journey, Karawalevu says he started playing rugby union during his high school days at Marist Brothers High School before securing a contract with the Silktales, playing in Aus-

tralia. He says after making it to the Sydney Roosters senior team, he managed to switch back to rugby union, joining the Waratahs. The 23-year-old urges young rugby fans to continue listening to their parents and be

disciplined if they hope to succeed in their rugby careers. The Fijian Drua's opening match will be at the HFC Bank Stadium in Suva, where they will host the Brumbies at 3.35pm on the 15th of next month.



Ravouvou extends his contract with Bristol Bears after impressive performance

Former Swire Shipping Fijian Drua Centre Kalaveti Ravouvou has extended his contract with the Bristol Bears following a very impressive season with league doubles against Northampton Saints and Leicester Tigers and shortlisted for Premiership Player of the Month. Ravouvou is one of the Gallagher Premiership's hottest properties. The 26-year-old midfielder, who joined the Bears from Fijian Drua in the summer of 2023, has scored seven tries for Pat Lam's side. Director of Rugby, Pat Lam says in the Bears' record-breaking victory over the Tigers last month, Ravouvou made 230 metres with ball in hand, the second most ever recorded in a Premiership game – beating 10 defenders and making 18 carries in a blockbuster performance. Ra-

vouvou has four caps for Fiji having made his debut against Ireland in the 2022 Autumn Nations Series. Pat Lam, says it is great to see Kala fully settled in the club and the city, which has seen him go from strength to strength since arriving at the Bears and he believes they are all seeing his world class ability come to the fore with some outstanding performances this season.

He says Ravouvou is one of the most devastating backs in the competition and his ability to play across the back line is huge for them with a smaller squad. Ravouvou says he really enjoyed his time at Bristol because of the culture, environment and his team mates have been amazing. He is excited to see what his team can achieve over the next few years.



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Sports News

4 Fijian Drua Women's players involved in accident in Sigatoka yesterday

Four Fijian Drua Women's players were involved in an accident and it is a relief that they do not have any significant injuries. Police confirm the accident occurred at around 2pm in Sigatoka yesterday. Fijian Drua General Manager Commercial, Shane Hussein says they have been under the diligent care of medical professionals at Sigatoka and Lautoka Hospitals. He says their focus at this time is providing the players and their families with any support they require. When asked by fiji village News if this could affect their call up into the squad, Hussein says at this point it is not expected to affect their selection chances. In a repeat of the Super W final, Fijiana Drua take on the NSW Waratahs on the 28th of February at Allianz Stadium in Sydney.



Fiji 7s extended squad members named in Mike Friday Select 7s team

The final 8 players who will feature in the McDonald's Mike Friday Select 7s team have been picked from the Fiji Airways 7s extended squad. Friday reached out to fellow coaching colleague and 2025 McDonald's Fiji's Coral Coast Sevens Ambassador and current Fiji Airways National 7s coach Osea Kolinisau to identify 8 suitable candidates to join the squad. The players selected to line

up beside Jerry Tuwai, Rosko Specman, Harry McNulty, Luke Treharne, Alexandre Odinga and Matai Leuta are Viliame Naitaka, Rubeni Kabu, Suliano Volivoli, Jope Tikomailepanoni, Iliavi Masori, Sakiusa Siqila, Rauto Vakadrano, and Alipate Biu. The 8 players will get a chance able to showcase their skills and of course let Kolinisau know why they should be on a plane to Perth, Australia.



Drua working with FSAA on date clash with Coke Games



With the Shop N Save Super Rugby Pacific season to kickoff next month it seems the Coca-Cola Games which usually starts at the end of the first school term is clashing with a Swire Shipping Fijian Drua home game.

The May 2nd date for the first term school break which is usually day two of the games clashes with the Fijian Drua vs Reds game at the HFC Bank Stadium on Saturday.

The following week clashes as well as the Drua host the Blues on that Friday 9th May.

Fijian Drua General Manager Commercial, Shane Hussein says they are working actively with the Fiji Secondary School Athletics Association and the Fiji Sports Council on a solution that works for everyone. Hussein says they have had a number of good meetings and discussions and the FSSAA has options on the table for their consideration. Fiji Secondary School's Athletics Association Acting General Secretary, Biu Colati has confirmed that they are in talks with the Drua and the Fiji Sports Council.



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