

G RAM G Bill that will replace MNREGA clears Lok Sabha amid Opposition protests

The G RAM G Bill
guarantees 125 days of
rural employment per
household and mandates
state-level alignment
within six months, with
the Opposition accusing
Centre of mistreating
Mahatma Gandhi's
legacy.

New Delhi (Agency)
In a stormy session of Parliament, the Lok Sabha on Thursday passed the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill, 2025, triggering fierce protests from opposition MPs who accused the government of insulting the Father of Nation and diluting the provisions of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Union Rural Development Minister Shrikrishna Singh Chouhan defended the move, asserting that Mahatma Gandhi's name was added to NREGA "with an eye on the 2009 elections". "Initially it was NREGA and Mahatma Gandhi's name was not included in the bill. Later, when the 2009 general elections came, Bapu came to mind of Congress to get votes. I would want to say that MGNEGA was implemented properly and strongly by Prime

Minister Narendra Modi," Chouhan said while speaking in Lok Sabha. Responding to the eight-hour discussion on the G RAM G Bill, Chouhan asserted that the Modi government was ensuring that the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi were upheld through various initiatives taken by it. "The Congress killed ideals of Bapu, NDA ensured Bapu lives through pucca houses built under the PM Awas Yojana, Ujjwala yojana, Swachh Bharat Mission, Ayushman Bharat," Chouhan said. The senior BJP leader also countered Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi's criticism that the Modi government renames schemes on a whim, listing several welfare programmes named after Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi.



Opposition lawmakers stormed the well of the House, shouting slogans against the government over the removal of Mahatma Gandhi's name from the rural employment scheme, tearing copies of the bill, and hurling them toward the Speaker's chair.

Speaker Om Birla adjourned the proceedings for the day after the passage of the bill. Earlier in the day, opposition MPs had staged a protest march inside the Parliament complex demanding the bill's withdrawal. Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge called the legislation an insult to Gandhi and a blow to the right to work that had driven socio-economic transformation in rural India. Senior Congress leader Sonia Gandhi joined MPs in demonstrations at Makar Dwar. The G RAM G Bill provides a statutory guarantee of 125 days of wage employment per year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer for unskilled manual work. States are required to align their schemes with the provisions of the new law within six months of the Act's commencement.

While biggest economies struggle, India continues high growth rate: PM in Oman

PM in Oman: Prime Minister Modi, addressing the Indian diaspora in Oman, said India's growth rate remained above 8% despite global challenges.

New Delhi (Agency)
Highlighting India's strong economic performance, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that while the world's biggest economies were struggling, India continued to be the fastest-growing economy. Addressing the Indian diaspora in Muscat as part of the Maitri Parv program, PM Modi said India's growth rate remained above 8% despite global challenges. "A few days ago, economic growth data was released - India's growth has been above 8%. This means India remains the fastest-growing major economy, even as the world faces challenges," PM Modi said.

"While the biggest economies struggle for a few per cent growth, India continues at a high growth rate, showcasing the country's capabilities," he further underscored. The GDP of India, now the world's fourth-largest economy, grew 8.2% in the quarter ending September, picking up from the

strong 7.8% expansion in the preceding quarter. The growth appeared to defy the punitive 50% tariffs slapped by US President Donald Trump on the country's exports in August.

FLAGS MANUFACTURING



PROWESS

The Prime Minister also emphasised India's growing global footprint in innovation as well as talent. "India is not only finding solutions to its own problems but also working on how it can resolve the problems of crores of people around the world. Many global brands have benefited

from Indian talent," he said. He also highlighted India's manufacturing prowess, underlining that the country was now the second-largest mobile manufacturer in the world. "If you are carrying your phone, it must have 'Made in India' written on it," PM Modi said.

OMAN TRADE DEAL

PM Modi arrived in Oman on a two-day visit at the invitation of Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. He is slated to hold talks with the Gulf country's top leadership and sign an ambitious free trade agreement, which was approved by the Cabinet last week.

In his address, PM Modi said India and Oman were not just tied by geography, but also by generations. "This entire region is special for India, and Oman is even more special," he said, suggesting the importance of the Gulf region in India's strategic ties. In fact, Oman is the third-largest export destination for India among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. In 2024-25, the bilateral trade between the nations touched USD 10.5 billion.

Congress leader Ashok Gehlot on Thursday urged the Centre to reconsider its definition of the Aravallis, warning that any damage to the mountain range posed a serious threat to the ecological future of north India. Gehlot, a former Rajasthan chief minister, changed his social media profile picture in support of the nationwide 'SaveAravalli' campaign amid growing debate over mining and environmental safeguards in the Aravalli Range.

It was his symbolic protest against the new interpretation under which hills lower than 100 metres are no longer being recognised as part of the Aravalli system, he said. "The Aravalli cannot be judged by tape measures or height alone. It must be assessed by its ecological importance," Gehlot said, adding that the revised definition raised "a big question" over the future of north India. Appealing to the Centre and the Supreme Court, Gehlot said the issue must be reconsidered in the interest of future generations and environmental security. He also urged citizens to participate in the campaign by changing their display pictures online to draw attention to the issue.

He said the Aravalli range functioned as a natural green wall against the expansion of the Thar desert and extreme heatwaves, protecting

Delhi, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. Opening up smaller hills and so-called gap areas for mining would allow desertification to advance rapidly, he warned. Gehlot also flagged concerns over air pollution, saying the hills and forests of the Aravallis acted as the "lungs" of the National Capital Region by checking dust storms and absorbing pollutants.



"When pollution levels are so alarming even with the Aravalli standing, one can imagine how disastrous the situation will be without it," he said. Highlighting the water crisis, the former chief minister said the rocky terrain of the Aravallis played a crucial role in groundwater recharge by channelising rainwater underground.

DMK evil, TVK pure: Vijay's poll pitch at 1st Tamil Nadu rally after Karur stampede

Vijay attacked the DMK at a public meeting in Erode, calling it an "evil force." He projected TVK as a "clean and pure force" ahead of 2026. He flagged failures in governance, irrigation, jobs, safety and farmer welfare.

New Delhi (Agency)
Actor-politician Vijay on Thursday launched a sharp attack on the ruling DMK government at a public meeting in Erode, accusing it of failed governance, unfulfilled promises, and corruption. He described the DMK as an "evil force" while projecting his Tamilaga Vettai Kazhagam (TVK) as a "clean" and "pure force" ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections. This was Vijay's first public meeting in Tamil Nadu after the Karur stampede that killed 41 people.

Referring to cultural symbolism, Vijay said turmeric was traditionally used "when starting something good" and that manjal carried "a different vibe," adding that it was reflected in the Tamil flag. Calling Erode an auspicious land where turmeric grew, he linked the region's identity to agriculture.

Speaking about irrigation, Vijay highlighted the Kaalingarayan canal, saying it played "a very important role" in helping agriculture flourish. Recalling a local legend, he said Kaalingarayan's mother gave the money she earned from selling curd and milk to complete the canal. "You can achieve anything with a mother's support," Vijay said, adding that the confidence shown by people in Erode give him similar strength.

Vijay alleged that "many are thinking about how to destroy this using conspiracies," but said his relationship with the people was not new. "This is not a new relationship, it is 34 years old since I came to cinema," he said, adding, "No matter what you try, Vijay who has left everything will not be let down by people."

Uttarakhand Governor returns Uniform Civil Code, anti-conversion amendment bills

Dehradun (Agency)

Uttarakhand Governor Gurmit Singh has returned two significant legislative bills to the Chief Minister's office, the anti-conversion bill, which proposes stricter punishment for forced religious conversions, contained several clerical mistakes in its draft. The Raj Bhavan has sent the bill back to the relevant administrative department for correction.

There were some typographical errors in the draft of the bill related to the strict anti-conversion law already in force in Uttarakhand. To address these shortcomings, the Raj Bhavan has returned the bill to the

administrative department, i.e., the Department of Religious Affairs and Culture. The department will now correct these errors and send the bill back to the Raj Bhavan for approval, after which it will be implemented through an ordinance," the CMO sources told. Similarly, an amendment bill of the UCC - which is already in place in Uttarakhand.

According to sources from the Chief Minister's office, the anti-conversion bill, which proposes stricter punishment for forced religious conversions, contained several clerical mistakes in its draft. The Raj Bhavan has sent the bill back to the relevant administrative department for correction.

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15,000 Crores Loss, Production Cut: MK Stalin Writes To PM Modi On US Tariffs

Tamil Nadu (Agency)

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagging what he describes as an escalating crisis in the state's export-driven industries following the United States' decision to impose punitive 50 per cent tariffs on Indian goods. In a strongly worded letter, Stalin urged the Centre to urgently pursue a bilateral resolution, warning of severe economic and social consequences if the issue remains unresolved.

Highlighting Tamil Nadu's central role in India's manufacturing ecosystem, the Chief Minister noted that the state accounts for 28 per cent of the country's textile and apparel exports and nearly 40 per cent of leather and footwear exports. These sectors together employ close to 85 lakh workers, making them critical not just to the state's economy

but also to national employment. The impact, Stalin said, has been particularly acute in western Tamil Nadu, a region anchored by industrial hubs such as Coimbatore, Tiruppur, Erode and Karur. Coimbatore, often referred to as the "Manchester of Tamil Nadu", and its adjoining districts form the backbone of the state's textile and engineering industries.

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According to the Chief Minister, exporters in Tiruppur alone have seen confirmed orders worth Rs 15,000 crore wiped out, alongside production cuts of up to 30 per cent. He estimated a combined daily revenue loss of nearly Rs 60 crore across major clusters in the region. A similar downturn is being witnessed in leather and footwear hubs such as Vellore, Ranipet and Tirupathur, with small and medium enterprises facing the risk of closure. Stalin cautioned that shrinking margins, deep discounting and loss of competitiveness were already triggering layoffs and wage deferrals, threatening the livelihood of entire communities. He also warned that international buyers were diverting orders to countries such as Vietnam, Bangladesh and Cambodia, raising concerns about long-term erosion of India's market share.

Shashi Tharoor's 'Come To Kerala' Tip To Rajeev Shukla After Fog Hits Lucknow T20

New Delhi (Agency)
A day after an India-South Africa T20 match in Lucknow had to be cancelled due to dense fog, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor has said the Board of Cricket Control in India (BCCI) should organise cricket matches during the winter in Kerala to avoid disruptions due to fog. The fourth T20 match in the five-match series between India and South Africa was scheduled in Lucknow's Ekana cricket stadium last evening. Low visibility due to fog played spoilsport, and the match was called off at 9.30 pm. This upset fans, who shared their frustration in interactions with the media.

Tharoor, a four-time MP from Thiruvananthapuram, posted on X that the AQI in north Indian cities has crossed 411, and matches should be scheduled in the Kerala capital, where the AQI is 68. Outside the Parliament this morning, spoke to Tharoor about the cancelled match. "How will they play if they cannot see the ball? That's why I am saying, this pollution problem is not there in South India. The ball can then be seen, we can play well and cricket fans won't be heartbroken," he said.

Asked about party colleague and BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla's remark that the fog situation has affected the whole of north India, Tharoor replied, "So why schedule matches in north India at this time? Schedule them in south India. I will tell Rajeev ji," he said. At this point, Rajeev Shukla approached Tharoor.

The Thiruvananthapuram MP repeated his advice. "Instead of scheduling matches in north India in January, come to Kerala." The cricket administrator replied that matches are allotted to states, including Kerala, as per a rotation policy, but added that they will take a relook.

News box

Gurgaon woman files false rape case in extortion bid, arrested**Noida.(Agency)**

A woman has been arrested for allegedly filing a false rape case as part of a conspiracy to extort money and pressure another woman. The targeted woman had earlier accused one of the conspirators in a rape case. The accused, a Rajasthan resident currently living in Delhi, had approached the DLF Phase-2 police station on Dec 11, alleging that she was raped in a moving car after being called for a job interview through an online portal.

In her complaint, the woman, who earlier worked as a cabin crew member with a private airline, claimed she received a call asking her to reach MG Road Metro Station on Nov 15 for an interview. She alleged that two men made her sit in a car, claiming it was an office vehicle, took her to MGF Metropolitan Mall, and later raped her inside the vehicle. She further alleged that she was threatened with death if she disclosed the incident. Based on her complaint, a case was registered under sections 351(3) (criminal intimidation), 64(1) (punishment for rape) and 79 (insulting the modesty of a woman) of BNS. However, during the investigation, the police analysed CCTV footage, call detail records and technical evidence to reconstruct the timeline. "The allegations could not be substantiated. She claimed the entire incident occurred within a 15-minute window in a moving car, but CCTV footage and technical checks showed that the accused and the alleged perpetrators had never met and had no prior contact," said police spokesperson Sandeep Kumar. Police said the probe revealed that the complaint was fabricated and filed in conspiracy with a Faridabad resident, Jitendra alias Bittu. The objective, police said, was to extort money and pressure the wife of one of the alleged perpetrators, who had earlier lodged a rape case against Bittu at Sohna police station. Bittu was booked earlier this year in that

Gurgaon man dies by suicide after argument with family over drinking**Gurgaon.(Agency)**

A 43-year-old man died by suicide late Monday night in Sector 10 after allegedly after frequent arguments with his family over his drinking habits. Kanhai Bansal, a native of Madhya Pradesh, worked as a labourer at a local farmhouse. He is survived by his wife, three sons and two daughters. According to police, Bansal was in constant conflict with his family for two days due to his excessive alcohol consumption. On Sunday, after a heated argument, he walked out of the house and did not return until the next morning. "When he came back, another fight broke out with his wife, prompting him to leave again. Later in the afternoon, Bansal's wife and their elder son, who also works as a labourer, saw him in the nearby market and urged him to accompany them while they bought household groceries," an officer said. Police said he refused to speak to them and went his own way. Around 11pm, Bansal's body was discovered hanging from a tree on a deserted stretch near his home. A team from Sector 10A police station reached the spot and took the body into custody. Officers initiated inquest proceedings under Section 194 of BNSS. "After the formalities were completed, the body was handed over to the family," the officer added. Police said the preliminary inquiry pointed to emotional distress triggered by ongoing family discord. However, they are speaking to relatives and neighbours to ascertain if any additional factors may have contributed to the suicide. The statements of family members have been recorded. Police said the investigation ruled out any foul play.

Food department notice to varsity after worms found in hostel food**Noida.(Agency)**

Food safety department issued a show-cause notice to the hostel mess of a private institute in Knowledge Park 2 after students alleged that worms were found in the food served. The incident triggered protests at the institute and a brief clash with security guards.

On Monday, students residing at the hostel of Mangalmay Group of Institutions began sharing videos purportedly showing worms in the food. The clips also showed students creating a ruckus inside the hostel mess. On Tuesday, students gathered to protest at the institute gate as well. While no formal complaint has been received yet, food safety officials took cognizance of the issue after videos were shared on social media. Around 8pm on Tuesday, food safety department conducted an inspection of the mess kitchen. During the inspection, the maintenance of the storeroom where food items were kept was found to be unhygienic, and the overall cleanliness of the kitchen did not meet prescribed hygiene standards. "A notice has been issued under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, due to unhygienic conditions in the kitchen and improper maintenance of the storeroom. Further legal action will be initiated if the deficiencies are not rectified within the stipulated time mentioned in the notice," said assistant commissioner (Food) II Sarvesh Mishra.

The officials also collected samples. "One sample each of prepared vegetables, chickpeas, and split chickpeas (chana dal) has been collected on suspicion of being substandard and sent for laboratory testing," Mishra added. Videos from the incident on Tuesday evening showed students throwing plates inside the mess and later clashing with security guards at the main gate of the institute. Police said that the situation was brought under control after discussions between students and the institute authorities. No written complaint has been received from either side. The matter was resolved through mutual understanding, and alternative food arrangements were made for the students," said a senior police official. Further action will be taken depending on the lab laboratory test reports and compliance with the notice. Strict action would be taken if food safety norms were found to have been violated, officials added.

Commercial project stalled over expired licence, property registrations blocked**Gurgaon.(Agency)**

The district town planner (enforcement) has directed the sub-registrar, Manesar, to stop the property transactions related to Raheja Developers' commercial project in Sector 84, after the project's licence was found to have expired on May 16, 2019. The licence, granted for a 2.3-acre commercial colony, was not renewed within the prescribed time, according to an official communication issued by department of town and country planning (DTCP). Under rule 13 of Haryana Development and Regulation of Urban Areas Rules, 1976, the licence holder is required to apply for renewal at least one month before its expiry. The DTCP order states that the developer did not submit a renewal application even years after the licence expired and said a red entry be made in the relevant revenue records to prevent any registration of documents related to the land parcel.



The order also directs the builder to stop all work at the site with immediate effect. Copies of the cancellation order, along with the licence and land schedule, were

sent to the director general, town and country planning, Haryana, deputy commissioner, Gurgaon, and the senior town planner, Gurgaon circle.

Actions mirroring data Slew of orders in Delhi on pollution-linked curbs, lull in Gurgaon**Gurgaon.(Agency)**

While Delhi govt has issued a series of orders for pollution-linked curbs that are based on recommendations of Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), there's been a lull in Millennium City as far as proactive orders are concerned this pollution season. On Wednesday, Delhi, in fact, went beyond recommendations to make 50% work from home mandatory with graded response action plan (Grap) IV curbs in place. The only restriction announced by the Gurgaon district administration came on Nov 11, when hybrid classes were ordered for students from classes I-V. The order was reiterated on Dec 16, extending the hybrid arrangement. Data could have played a part in this. Though Delhi has seen one of the longest spells of pollution on record this year, Gurgaon has not

recorded a single 'severe' day (when AQI is above 400). The city has also recorded only one-third the number of 'very poor' AQI days as Delhi. On the other side of NCR, Noida and Ghaziabad have recorded almost the same number of 'very poor' days as Delhi. Both UP cities have seen more 'severe' AQI days than the national capital. The city's data anomaly with the rest of NCR has been pointed out by TOI multiple times over the last few weeks, but there has been no explanation from the pollution control board about reasons for the wide gap, raising questions about trustworthiness of data recording by monitoring stations in the city. Asked about the data mismatch, Dipankar Saha, former head of the air laboratory at Central Pollution Control Board, told TOI, "Findings from my two-year-long study show that Uttar Pradesh, followed by Punjab and Haryana,

experience significantly better wind speeds compared to Delhi, aiding dispersion and dilution of pollutants. Delhi is landlocked and once pollutants enter the city, they are not able to disperse due to low wind speed, reduced mixing height, and a low ventilation coefficient," he said, adding winter pollution is governed by temperature, wind speed, and mixing height, along with local and transported emissions. Manoj Kumar, senior analyst at Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), said city-wide averages depend on locations of monitoring stations. "If monitoring stations are located in relatively cleaner areas and pollution hotspots are missed, the average will appear better than actual exposure. With more representative, hyperlocal monitoring, parts of Gurgaon could well enter the 'severe' category," he said.

Gurgaon security officer flees with Rs 50L and company's car, goes**Gurgaon.(Agency)**

Jai Pratap Singh (35) worked as a security officer at a city-based company for the past 10 years. On Dec 10, when he was sent from the employer's office in Sector 57 with Rs 50 lakh and a car to deliver the money to an acquaintance in Delhi, he failed to reach the destination and his phone was later found switched off. The employer contacted the intended recipient and learnt that the cash was not delivered.

On Tuesday, police arrested Singh, a resident of Belhar village in Mainpuri district of Uttar Pradesh. Singh had allegedly fled with the cash entrusted to him by his employer at Discovery Wine Group. Police recovered the Maruti S-Presso car and Rs 49 lakh in cash from its trunk. Police said the accused intended to use the money to set up a fruit orchard in Himachal Pradesh and spent around Rs 50,000 from the stolen amount on travel and expenses. He visited Haridwar and

Rishikesh for sightseeing, where he destroyed his mobile phone. Earlier, based on a complaint, a case was registered

56. The accused said that after reaching Delhi, he switched off his mobile phone, parked the car at an MCD parking lot near Batra Hospital and hid the cash in the car's trunk. He was arrested when he returned to Gurgaon to collect his belongings.

A police officer said, "Initially, the accused left for his hometown after his visit to Rishikesh to pick up his wife and children but later dropped the idea fearing arrest there. He then returned to Gurgaon to collect the remaining cash but was arrested by the crime branch team with the help of human and technical intelligence." On the basis of his disclosure, police recovered the car HR51CA7416 from the MCD parking lot in Delhi along with the cash.

"We will interrogate him to check if anyone else helped him in the crime,"



under Section 316(4) (Criminal Breach of Trust by a clerk or servant) of BNS at Sector 56 police station on Dec 11.

A police team, led by inspector Narendra Kumar Sharma of the crime branch (Sector 43), arrested Singh from Sector

How manual collection, high toll are stalling travel between Delhi & NCR**Noida.(Agency)**

As the current toll system, especially on Delhi-Gurgaon border, burdens commuters and undermines the benefits of expressways, authorities in Delhi-NCR have been considering a review of the policy and collection methods. Now, Supreme Court's call for govt agencies to devise a plan to relocate nine toll plazas in Delhi-NCR, which cause severe traffic congestion and increased vehicle emissions, has come as a relief for commuters travelling between NCR cities and the capital.

"Snarls start from Cyber City at rush hours. The moment traffic slows there, you know you are already late. I spend nearly four hours every day travelling between Delhi and Gurgaon. It's the same story every evening, with no improvement," said GD Mathur, an IT professional who works in Cyber City. Although private vehicles are exempt, it offers little relief. With no segregation of lanes, cars are forced to queue behind trucks, locking all vehicles into the same choke point. The congestion has also begun to disrupt travel planning, especially for those catching flights. Anil Nanda, a resident of DLF 2, said reaching Delhi airport during evening hours has become tough. "If you have a late evening flight, you can't rely on normal travel time anymore. Earlier, it took 30 to 45 minutes to cross this stretch. Now, you have to keep at least one-and-a-half hours in hand. The problem is not just congestion, but rising vehicle emissions from traffic that barely moves," Nanda said. Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway sees nearly 4 lakh passenger car units (PCUs)

every day. While Dwarka Expressway was opened last year to divert traffic, a significant share — particularly commercial vehicles — has returned to the older route. High toll charges on Dwarka Expressway have made it less attractive, pushing vehicles back towards Sirhau. The tolling process further compounds the problem. Unlike national highways that rely on automated toll collection, operations at Sirhau toll plaza remain largely manual. Toll staff scan vehicle registration numbers using mobile phones, slowing down transactions across all lanes. Delays worsen when cab drivers attempt to evade toll payments and are stopped on the carriageway, or when trucks are held up over disputes related to charges or missing documentation. Each stoppage reduces effective road width and brings traffic to a standstill. Earlier this year, senior GMDA officials and traffic police flagged the problem in a meeting with the Union ministry of road transport and highways. Representatives from Delhi govt, MCD and NHA were also present.

Despite repeated discussions, commuters say conditions on the ground remain unchanged. Dhruv Bansal, a resident of DLF 1, said congestion at Sirhau is no longer limited to evening peak hours. "It took me more than two hours to reach a court in Delhi on Tuesday. Traffic crawls past the toll plaza even in the morning now. Earlier, weekends were manageable. Now it doesn't matter whether it's a weekday or a weekend. You are guaranteed to get stuck."

Delhi has 156 entry points, but RFID-based toll collection is operational at only 13 locations, including Sirhau. These entry points account for 80-85% of commercial vehicle inflow into the city. The system was introduced following an SC order in August 2016, when the erstwhile South Delhi Municipal Corporation was tasked with implementation.

Commuters, however, say the benefits of RFID are diluted by frequent tag failures and manual inspection to identify exempt and non-exempt vehicles, creating fresh bottlenecks at the toll plaza.

A GMDA official said the

discussion are being held with NHA to examine measures to decongest the Sirhau stretch. "The metropolitan authority has requested NHA to look.

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Editor-in-Chief

Gurcharan Singh Babbar

Mob: 9654077232, 9971359517

Website : www.thesikhtimes.in

Email: sikhtimesindia@gmail.com

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NEWS BOX

Hooded Pitohui: World's Only Toxic Bird That Causes Mild Paralysis, Numbness

world . (Agency)

In the rainforests of New Guinea lives a bird unlike any other - the Hooded Pitohui, known as the world's only toxic bird. While most birds are harmless to humans, this orange-and-black species carries harmful toxins found in poison dart frogs. Touching its feathers or ingesting its flesh can cause tingling, numbness, or even more severe neurological effects in humans, such as mild paralysis.

When was the toxic bird discovered?

Scientist Jack Dumbacher discovered the first-ever toxic bird in the late 1980s while doing fieldwork in New Guinea. When he handled the birds, he noticed that after touching his mouth or eyes, he felt tingling, numbness, and a burning sensation, according to Discover Wildlife. Later, he realised the bird's feathers and skin were poisonous, and even a little contact caused these uncomfortable effects.

In 1992, Dumbacher and his team published a study showing that the Hooded Pitohui's skin and feathers contain a powerful poison called batrachotoxin, along with similar toxic compounds. This was the first confirmed case of a bird being poisonous to humans. These toxins help the bird protect itself from predators and parasites.

Pitohuis don't make their own poison

One of the most interesting aspects about Hooded Pitohuis is that they don't produce poison. Instead, they get it from their diet through a process called sequestration, which means they store the toxins from what they eat in their bodies.

Scientists, including Jack Dumbacher, discovered that the Hooded Pitohui gets its poison from melyrid beetles, which contain batrachotoxins. The birds eat these beetles regularly, and the toxins build up in their skin and feathers, according to Forbes.

Japan Citizens To Sue Government Over 'Unconstitutional' Climate Inaction

Japan.(Agency)

Hundreds of people across Japan will sue the central government Thursday seeking damages for "unconstitutional" inaction on climate change, the country's first such litigation. The landmark lawsuit criticises Japan's "grossly inadequate" fight against the climate crisis, saying it jeopardises the health and livelihoods of the approximately 450 plaintiffs.

Plaintiff Kiichi Akiyama, a construction worker, told AFP that relentless heat forced his team to work slower, causing "huge losses" to his business. There have also been cases where "people collapse out in the field, or have dropped dead after they return home", the 57-year-old said. In the past, five climate-related lawsuits have been filed with Japanese courts, including against coal-fired power plants, said Kyoto University assistant professor Masako Ichihara, who has followed climate lawsuits in the country. But Ichihara -- as well as lawyers working on the suit -- say this is the first compensation claim against the state over climate change. "The defendant's climate change measures are grossly inadequate, and as a result, the plaintiffs' rights to a peaceful life and to the enjoyment of a stable climate are being violated," said the complaint summary, which was obtained by AFP ahead of the filing. This year, Japan sweltered through its hottest summer since records began in 1898, and the plaintiffs argue such heatwaves cause economic losses, ruin crops and put many at risk of crippling heatstroke.

Akiyama, who frequently works outside in the searing heat, said it now takes his team triple the estimated time to finish their projects.

Wordle Result, Then Questions: Charlie Kirk Murder Suspect's Texts To Friends

world . (Agency)

The man accused of killing conservative activist Charlie Kirk allegedly texted his friends about the attack less than two hours after it happened. On the morning of September 10, Tyler Robinson, 22, was messaging a friend on Discord, sharing results of the online word game Wordle. Under an hour before the shooting, he guessed the answer "pouty" on his third try and sent a celebratory meme, to which his friend responded with one of their own, as per The Washington Post. Prosecutors say that by then, Robinson had already been driving three hours from southern Utah to Utah Valley University in Orem, where Kirk was speaking at an outdoor Turning Point USA event. During the speech, Kirk was shot and later died from his injuries.

About 80 minutes after the shooting, Robinson reportedly messaged his friend, "You see this news?????" Other texts read, "Utah gets a national headline for the first time in a while and it's someone sliming charlie kirk", "no like an hour ago" "he's reported dead, and the footage looks BAD." According to charging documents, Robinson told his roommate shortly after the shooting, "I had enough of his hatred. Some hate can't be negotiated out." Friends described Robinson as someone who followed current events closely but showed no clear partisan bias. During the 2020 presidential election, he wrote on Discord, "[Joe] Biden is in the lead electoral votes wise, but there are still some swing states that haven't finished voting, as well as most of the west coast. raw votes donald is in the lead by a little over 1 million votes." They said he disliked bullies and "hateful people" and generally avoided confrontations.

US approves \$11 billion arms sales to Taiwan despite Trump casting doubt on defence commitment

TAIPEI . (Agency)

Washington has approved \$11 billion-worth of arms to Taiwan, Taipei said Thursday, announcing one of the largest weapons packages for the island as it seeks to deter a potential Chinese invasion. While Washington is traditionally Taiwan's biggest arms supplier, remarks by US President Donald Trump raised doubts about his willingness to defend the democratic island. Taiwan has ramped up its defence spending in the past decade as China has intensified military pressure, but Trump's administration has pushed the island to do more to protect itself.

The arms sale announced on Thursday, which still needs US Congressional approval, would be the second since Trump returned to office in January, after the \$330 million sale of parts and components in November. The latest, much bigger cache features HIMARS rocket systems, howitzers, anti-tank missiles, drones and other equipment, according to Taipei's foreign ministry. "This is the second arms sale to Taiwan announced during the Trump administration's second term, once



again demonstrating the US's firm commitment to Taiwan's security," Taipei's foreign ministry said. The potential size of the sale rivals the \$18 billion authorised under former US president George W. Bush in 2001, although that was ultimately downsized after commercial negotiations. Bush ended up selling \$15.6 billion-worth of weapons to Taiwan over his eight years in office.

During Trump's first term, the United States approved \$10 billion in arms sales to Taiwan, including \$8 billion for fighter jets. The latest package is expected to soon receive a Congressional rubber stamp, given the cross-party consensus on Taiwan's defence. Taiwan maintains its own defence industry but the island would be massively outgunned in a conflict with China, and so remains heavily reliant on

US arms. The latest arms sale shows Washington has continued to assist Taipei in "rapidly building robust deterrence capabilities", Taiwan's defence ministry said in a statement.

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te's government has vowed to ramp up defence spending to more than three percent of the GDP next year and five percent by 2030, following US pressure. It is also plans to seek up to NT\$1 trillion in special funding to upgrade the island's air defence systems and increase capacity to produce and store ammunition. The defence spending proposals need backing from the island's opposition-controlled parliament before they can take effect.

China deploys military aircraft and warships around Taiwan on a near-daily basis, which analysts describe as "grey-zone" operations -- coercive tactics that fall short of an act of war. Taipei's defence ministry said 40 Chinese military aircraft, including fighters, choppers and drones, as well as eight naval vessels, were detected around Taiwan in a 24-hour period ending early Thursday.

'Jumped on top, grabbed his arms': Indian-origin man who helped restrain Australia's Bondi Beach shooter

BROOKLINE, Mass . (Agency)

Amandeep Singh-Bola, a 34-year-old man of Indian origin, said he helped restrain one of the alleged gunmen in Australia's Bondi Beach mass shooting because he wanted to bring the assailant down and help a n y o n e w h o n e e d e d assistance. Fifteen people were killed and 40 others -- including three Indian students -- were injured after a father-son duo launched a gun attack on the occasion of a Jewish festival celebrations at the beach on December 14. One of the attackers, Sydney resident Sajid Akram, 50, was shot dead. His 24-year-old Australia-born son, Naveed Akram, was injured.

Singh-Bola, a personal trainer born in New Zealand to Indian and Kiwi parents, helped tackle the suspect Sajid Akram, SBS News reported. He ran onto the bridge where the alleged shooter was firing at people, pinning

him down with the help of a police officer. "I jumped on top of [the shooter] and grabbed his arms. The police officer helped me and said not to let him go," the report quoted him as saying. "I wanted to help get one of [the



alleged shooters] down, or just help anybody that needed help," he said.

Singh-Bola, who initially dismissed the gunshots as fireworks, was eating a kebab and watching the sunset over the beach when the shooting occurred. "It

was almost like tunnel vision -- just trying to hide behind things and not be seen, just trying to find out where he was. Once I saw where he was, nothing else really mattered," he said. Singh-Bola said police had shot the alleged gunman, and while he lay on top of him, he could feel the shooter dying. Asserting that he was not sick from the blood when he got up, Singh-Bola said, "I had just smashed back a kebab with spicy sauce on it, so I was actually sick from the run down." Australia's federal police commissioner Crissy Barrett has described the shooting as "a terrorist attack inspired by

Islamic State. Sajid Akram has been identified as an Indian citizen hailing from Hyderabad, who migrated to Australia 27 years ago. The other suspect Naveed Akram is an Australian citizen.

Abducted By Mother At 3, US Woman Reunites With Father After 42 Years

DEHRADUN .(Agency)

A US girl, who was abducted as a toddler at the age of three, has been found after 42 years. Michelle Marie Newton went missing in 1983 and was living under a new identity of "Sharon Nealy", completely unaware that she was once abducted. The video obtained by Wesh TV shows Marion County deputies finding a woman accused of abducting her own daughter decades ago. In November 2025, police got a tip that led them to Debra Newton, Michelle's mother, in The Villages, Florida.

The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office stated that Debra relocated from Louisville, Kentucky, to Georgia, claiming it was for a new job and to set up a new home, leaving her husband, Joseph Newton, behind. Bodycam footage shows police arriving at her home, with a friend joking, "They're coming for you, Sharon!" Debra laughed, but the deputies clearly stated, "We're here for you, ma'am," before arresting her. She had previously been

on the FBI's Top 8 Most Wanted list for parental kidnappings. You're not who you think you are. You're a missing



person. You're Michelle Marie Newton," the police told her. After discovering her true identity, Michelle immediately contacted the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, which helped her reconnect with her father. Joseph described the reunion as an emotional and almost surreal experience. "She's always been in our hearts. I can't explain that moment of walking in and getting to put my arms

back around my daughter," he said. He further said, "I wouldn't trade that moment for anything. It was just like seeing her when she was first born. It was like an angel." Joseph said he last spoke to his wife between 1984 and 1985, and after that, she disappeared completely. The search continued until 2000, but was dismissed because prosecutors couldn't contact Joseph. In 2005, Michelle's name was removed from the national missing children databases, according to the NY Post. However, the case was reopened in 2016 after a family member requested it, but there were no major leads for years. Finally, in 2025, the police got a tip through Crime Stoppers that provided a solid lead to find Michelle. According to the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office in Jefferson County, Debra was arraigned on a felony charge of custodial interference. Michelle and Joseph both attended Debra's arraignment. During the court proceedings, she said.

Pulitzer Prize-winning correspondent Peter Arnett, who reported on Vietnam and Gulf wars, has died

LOS ANGELES. (Agency)

Peter Arnett, the Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter who spent decades dodging bullets and bombs to bring the world eyewitness accounts of war from the rice paddies of Vietnam to the deserts of Iraq, has died. He was 91. Arnett, who won the 1966 Pulitzer Prize for international reporting for his Vietnam War coverage for The Associated Press, died Wednesday in Newport Beach and was surrounded by friends and family, said his son Andrew Arnett. He had been suffering from prostate cancer. "Peter Arnett was one of the greatest war correspondents of his generation -- intrepid, fearless, and a beautiful writer and storyteller. His reporting in print and on camera will remain a legacy for aspiring journalists and historians for generations to come," said Edith Lederer, who was a fellow AP war correspondent in Vietnam in 1972-73 and is now AP's chief correspondent at the United Nations. As a wire-service correspondent, Arnett was known mostly to fellow journalists when he reported in Vietnam from 1962 until the war's end in 1975. He became something of

a household name in 1991, however, after he broadcast live updates for CNN from Iraq during the first Gulf War. While almost all Western reporters had fled Baghdad in the days before the US-led attack, Arnett stayed. As missiles began raining on the city, he broadcast a live account by cellphone from his hotel room. "There was an explosion right near me, you may have heard," he said in a calm, New Zealand-accented voice moments after the loud boom of a missile strike rattled across the airwaves. As he continued to speak air-raid sirens blared in the background. "I think that took out the telecommunications center," he said of another explosion. "They are hitting the center of the city."

Reporting from Vietnam It was not the first time Arnett had gotten dangerously close to the action. In January 1966, he joined a battalion of US soldiers seeking to rout North Vietnamese snipers and was standing next to the battalion commander when an officer paused to read a map. "As the colonel peered at it, I heard four loud shots as bullets tore through the map and into his chest, a few inches from my face,"

Arnett recalled during a talk to the American Library Association in 2013.



"He sank to the ground at my feet." He would begin the fallen soldier's obituary like this: "He was the son of a general, a West Pointer and a battalion commander. But Lt. Colonel George Eyster was to die like a rifleman. It may have been the colonel's leaves of rank on his collar, or the map he held in his hand, or just a wayward chance that the Viet Cong sniper chose Eyster from the five of us standing in that dusty jungle

path." Arnett had arrived in Vietnam just a year after joining AP as its Indonesia correspondent. That job would be short-lived after he reported Indonesia's economy was in shambles and the country's enraged leadership threw him out. His expulsion marked only the first of several controversies in which he would find himself embroiled, while also forging an historic career. At the AP's Saigon bureau in 1962, Arnett found himself surrounded by a formidable roster of journalists, including bureau chief Malcolm Browne and photo editor Horst Faas, who between them would win three Pulitzer Prizes. He credited Browne in particular with teaching him many of the survival tricks that would keep him alive in war zones over the next 40 years. Among them: Never stand near a medic or radio operator because they're among the first the enemy will shoot at. And if you hear a gunshot coming from the other side, don't look around to see who fired it because the next one will likely hit you.



Bank has warned that if Europeans appear willing to grab other countries' money, it could undermine confidence in the euro. Some member nations are also concerned about inviting retaliation from Russia.

Belgium, where most of the frozen assets are held at a financial clearing house, is the main opponent of the plan. It fears that Russia will strike back and would prefer that the bloc borrow the money on international markets. Last week, the Russian Central Bank sued the Belgian clearing house Euronext in Moscow court, raising pressure on Belgium and its European partners ahead of the summit.

Hungary and Slovakia oppose von der Leyen's plan for a "reparations loan." Some 90 billion euros (\$105 billion) would be lent to Ukraine until Russia ends its war and pays for the damage it has caused over almost four years. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky says that totals more than 600 billion euros (\$700 billion). The UK, Canada and Norway would fill the gap beyond the 90 billion euros (\$105 billion). Bulgaria, Italy and Malta also remain to be convinced.

NEWS BOX

Traffic restrictions in Dehra-Jwalamukhi on Dec 20 for SSB Foundation Day

Dharamshala. (Agency)

Traffic restrictions will be enforced on several routes in the Dehra and Jwalamukhi areas on December 20 in view of the Seema Suraksha Bal (SSB) Foundation Day celebrations at the SSB Training Centre in Sapdi, where the union Home Minister will attend as the chief guest.

Dehra Superintendent of Police Mayank Choudhary said vehicular movement on key routes will remain completely restricted from 11:15 am until the arrival of the chief guest, and again from 2 pm until his departure after the event.

According to the police, vehicles will be diverted or stopped at multiple points, with traffic from Dehra towards Jwalamukhi being halted at Kathog, vehicles travelling from Nadaun towards Jwalamukhi, Kangra and Dehra stopped at the Ganju Da Bagh bypass, traffic from Kangra and Ranital towards Jwalamukhi restricted at the Sapdi bypass, and vehicles moving from Jwalamukhi towards Khaula, Sapdi, Khundiyian and Ranital stopped at the Khidki bridge.

Police have advised commuters to plan their travel in advance and use alternative routes, particularly in case of emergencies. The public has been urged to cooperate with the police administration to ensure smooth conduct of the event and avoid inconvenience.

Pathankot-Jogindernagar Broad Gauge survey completed, DPR underway

Dharamshala. (Agency)

Kangra Lok Sabha MP Dr Rajiv Bhardwaj on Thursday said that the union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav has informed in reply to his question in the Lok Sabha that the survey for converting the 200-km-long Pathankot-Jogindernagar narrow gauge railway line into a broad gauge line has been completed, and a Detailed Project Report (DPR) is being prepared.

Dr Bhardwaj said that the union Minister stated that the survey of the 57-km Jogindernagar railway line has also been conducted, but traffic projections on this section have been assessed as low.

Replying to another query, Vaishnav said the Bilaspur-Manali-Leh railway line has been identified by the Ministry of Defence as a project of strategic importance. He informed that the survey for the rail line has been completed and the DPR has already been prepared.

The Minister further added that the project, estimated to cost Rs 1.31 lakh crore, envisages construction of a 489-km-long railway line, of which about 270 km will pass through tunnels.

Polls announced in 3 local body wards after candidates' death in Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram. (Agency)

The Kerala State Election Commission has issued a notification for conducting special elections to three local body wards where polling had earlier been deferred following the death of candidates.

The polling will be held on January 12, 2026 between 7 am and 6 pm, while the counting of votes is scheduled for January 13 from 10 am. The last date for filing nominations is December 24. Scrutiny of nomination papers will take place on December 26, and December 29 is the final date for withdrawal of candidature. Special elections will be conducted in Payimpadam ward of Moothedam Grama Panchayat in Malappuram district, Onakkur ward of Pampakuda Grama Panchayat in Ernakulam district, and Vizhinjam ward of the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation.

Candidates who were in the contest when polling was cancelled on December 9 and 11 are not required to submit fresh nomination papers. However, those who had withdrawn their candidature before the cancellation will not be considered valid candidates and must file fresh nominations if they wish to contest again.

Lamborghini Urus seized after speeding at 250 kmph on Sea Link

Mumbai. The Mumbai Police have seized a multi-crore Lamborghini Urus and registered a case against its driver for allegedly speeding at nearly 250 kmph on the Bandra-Worli Sea Link, where the maximum permitted speed is 80 kmph.

The action was taken on Wednesday after a video of the luxury car being driven at high speed was widely shared on Instagram. The clip shows the Lamborghini overtaking several vehicles on the sea link. The incident is said to have occurred on December 12 after which a complaint was registered.

The seized vehicle, bearing Haryana registration number, has been taken into custody by the Worli Police Station in connection with a case of rash and dangerous driving, police officials said. Police identified the driver as Faiz Adenwala (36), a resident of Khar West in Mumbai.

Karnataka Assembly in turmoil after Laxmi Hebbalkar admits 'mistake' on Gruha Lakshmi scheme payouts

LoP Ashoka charged that Hebbalkar had twice stated on the floor of the House that instalments from January 2025 to August 2025 had been fully paid.

BELAGAVI. (Agency)

The Assembly on Wednesday witnessed unprecedented turmoil after Karnataka Women and Child Welfare Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar admitted that her statement claiming Gruha Lakshmi scheme installments had been cleared up to August 2025 was a "mistake," triggering a fierce Opposition protest, adjournment of the House and a dramatic walkout.

The controversy erupted during the Question Hour when Leader of the Opposition R Ashoka accused Hebbalkar of misleading the House while replying to a question raised by Hubballi BJP MLA Mahesh Tenginkai on December 9. The question pertained to the payment status of Rs 2,000 monthly assistance under the Gruha Lakshmi scheme, which benefits nearly 1.25 crore women of the state.

Ashoka charged that Hebbalkar had twice stated on the floor of the House that instalments from January 2025 to August 2025 had been fully paid. "This is a serious matter concerning 1.25 crore beneficiaries. Payments for April, May,

June, and July have been released, but what about February and March? If the money has not been paid, where has it gone?" Ashoka questioned. As Hebbalkar was not present in the House at the time, Opposition members



demanded that she be summoned immediately. "Is the minister on the moon?" Ashoka asked sarcastically, escalating tensions in the House.

Despite Speaker UT Khader urging patience and assuring a reply, BJP and JDS members stormed into the well of the House, raising slogans against the government and alleging financial mismanagement. The Speaker was

forced to adjourn the proceedings briefly. When the House reconvened, Hebbalkar appeared and admitted that there had been an error in her reply. "There was a mistake during my response. I regret it and I am sorry if anyone has been hurt by my action," she said.

The admission, however, failed to placate the Opposition. BJP members continued to taunt the State Government, alleging that the state's finances had "collapsed" under the weight of populist schemes. Congress legislators rallied behind the minister, countering claims that she had not apologised. Defending the government's flagship welfare programme, Hebbalkar said Rs 52,416 crore had been disbursed so far under the Gruha Lakshmi scheme.

Reiterating her apology, she added, "I regret the mistake. I am sorry about it. But you stoop low and target a woman."

That remark sparked another flashpoint, with Opposition members demanding that the Speaker expunge it from the records. When Khader refused, BJP and JDS legislators staged a walkout.

No police nod, study centre to hold protest over shutting down of Marathi schools

Mumbai. (Agency)

Alleging that Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is deliberately shutting down Marathi medium schools, Marathi Abhyas Kendra (Marathi Study Centre) along with several other supporters have decided to continue its scheduled protest march on Thursday, even as police have denied permission for the same.

Protesters have complained that citing purposes of redevelopment, Marathi medium civic schools with low student enrolment are being shut down by BMC without any assurance that they will reopen at the same location.

"There is no assurance that these schools will reopen at those particular locations," said Anand Bhandare, general secretary of Marathi Abhyas Kendra.

As reported by The Indian Express in February 2025, a comparison of the number of Marathi medium schools run by the BMC over the last decade shows a steep drop – from 368 schools in academic year 2014-15 to only 262 schools in academic year 2023-34.

medium schools run by the BMC over the last decade shows a steep drop – from 368 schools in academic year 2014-15 to only 262 schools in academic year 2023-34.



But protesters said that this is only a gradual decline in the number of Marathi medium schools of BMC over the years due to low enrolment. Whereas in the past two years alone, 28 BMC schools have been shut down citing redevelopment, out of which 17 are Marathi medium schools.

Following a meeting with supporters on Sunday, Marathi Abhyas Kendra had announced a protest march to the BMC office seeking resolution. Even though the police have denied permission for the march, the Marathi Abhyas

Kendra has announced that it remains firm on carrying it out and will continue staging protest until the BMC chief meets their delegation.

The protesters allegation that the shutting down of these schools are "systematic dismantling" of the city's Marathi ecosystem may lead to the Marathi language issue taking the centre-stage ahead of the civic polls, as the organisers have sought support from various political parties.

Among the demands by the Marathi Abhyas Kendra are assurance from BMC that no school will be closed down citing redevelopment, preparation of Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for really dangerous structures to ensure that upon redevelopment the school reopens, detailed structural audit of all schools which should be made available in public domain.

Sekhon's wife, relative won from Bajidpur, Ferozeshah Zila Parishad seats

In the Zila Parishad polls, Sekhon had fielded his wife Mandeep Kaur from Bajidpur seat and a close relative, Kuljeet Kaur, from Ferozeshah seat.

Chandigarh. (Agency)

The Block Samiti and Zila Parishad elections in Punjab, which was held on December 14, saw candidates backed by gangster-turned politician Gurpreet Singh Sekhon putting up a strong performance. In the Zila Parishad polls, Sekhon had fielded his wife Mandeep Kaur from Bajidpur seat and a close relative, Kuljeet Kaur, from Ferozeshah seat.

Mandeep Kaur won the Bajidpur Zila Parishad seat by a margin of over 3,000 votes, while Kuljeet won the Ferozeshah seat by over 8,500 votes. Mandeep said, "The results show the support of the masses and how AAP tried to corner us..."

Ferozepur district has a total of four Zila Parishad seats. In the Ghall Khurd block of Ferozepur, Sekhon had fielded 23 candidates for the Block Samiti polls. Of these, fourteen had won till the time of filing the report. The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) did not field candidates against those backed by Sekhon, extending its support.



Joginder Singh Jindu said, "We did not field candidates against Sekhon's family members and other candidates supported by him. Despite alleged misuse of power by the administration and attempts by AAP MLA Rajnish Dahiya to derail the campaign, the results are before everyone." Jindu is the SAD president of the Ferozepur unit and former MLA from Ferozepur Rural.

Gurpreet Singh Sekhon said, "I am thankful to Shiromani Akali Dal for supporting me wholeheartedly... they helped us throughout the campaign."

Sekhon, a resident of Ferozepur's Mudki village, is one of the masterminds of the sensational Nabha jail break incident of 2016. He was in the news recently after his preventive detention by Ferozepur police on December 11 following a complaint by AAP sarpanch Mandeep Singh, who alleged threat from him. However, Sekhon was released on December 12 after directions from the Punjab and Haryana High Court after his mother had filed a petition.

Kerala Cabinet sanctions Rs 643.88cr for Institute of Organ Transplantation

Thiruvananthapuram. (Agency)

The first phase of the proposed Institute of Organ Transplantation in Kozhikode is set to become operational shortly, following the Kerala Cabinet's approval of an outlay of Rs 643.88 crore for establishing the comprehensive facility.

Envisioned as a single-window institution, the institute will integrate all aspects of organ donation and transplantation, supported by advanced medical infrastructure and state-of-the-art technology. It will be staffed by specialised doctors, scientists, and trained healthcare professionals. The institute will cater to clinical care, academic teaching, professional training, research, and organ donation activities, providing end-to-end services—from the treatment of organ failure to transplant surgery and long-term rehabilitation.

As part of the initial rollout, the Cabinet also sanctioned the creation of 60 teaching posts, including 14 Professors, seven Associate Professors, and 39 Assistant Professors. Until the completion of its permanent campus, the institute

will function from the Kozhikode Medical College, Kerala. Health Minister Veena George said. The institute will be established on a 20-acre site at Chevayur in Kozhikode and will comprise four six-storey blocks. Once fully operational, it will have a total capacity of 510 beds, including 219 general beds, 42 special ward beds, 58 ICU beds and 83 HDU beds. Facilities will include 16 operation theatres, a dialysis centre and a dedicated transplantation research unit.

In the first phase, 330 beds and 10 operation theatres will be commissioned, while the second phase will add 180 beds and six operation theatres. Fourteen specialty departments will function initially, with seven more planned in the next phase. The institute also aims to launch 31 academic courses.

Transplant services for cornea, kidney, liver, intestine, pancreas, heart, lungs, bone marrow, soft tissue, hands and bones will be available at the centre. At present, organ transplant surgeries in Kerala are carried out at medical colleges in Thiruvananthapuram, Kottayam and Kozhikode, and at the Ernakulam General Hospital.

The easy money trail | Kabaddi, music, hawala: What connects gangsters and extortion in Punjab

Mohali SSP Harmandeep Singh Hans stated that the primary motive appears to be gang rivalry over control and dominance in organizing lucrative kabaddi tournaments in Punjab, rather than a direct link to the Moose Wala case.

Chandigarh. (Agency)

"Tu bade paise kamaye hai. Hun tax bharan da time aa gaya," (you have earned a lot of money, now it's time to pay tax) a caller claiming to be gangster Goldy Brar is heard saying in an extortion call to a man involved in hawala racket. It is just one of the many legitimate and illegitimate businesses which the Punjabi gangsters based abroad are targeting for extortion.

The killing of a Kabaddi promoter, Kanwar Digvijay Singh, popularly known as Rana Balachauria, on December 15, during the ongoing Kabaddi Cup in Sector 82, Mohali is one in the chain of many shootings and killings related to extortion and gang rivalry in Punjab.

Rana Balachauria was shot dead in a brazen daylight attack when two to three assailants on a motorcycle approached him under the pretext of taking a selfie before firing multiple shots at point-blank range. Hours after the killing, a rival gang including

operatives like Doni Bal, Shaganpreet, and others claimed responsibility on social media. The post alleged that Rana was linked to rival gangsters Lawrence Bishnoi and Jaggu Bhagwanpuria, and had provided shelter to individuals involved in the 2022 murder of Punjabi singer Sidhu Moose Wala, framing the attack as revenge.

However, Mohali SSP Harmandeep Singh Hans stated that the primary motive appears to be gang rivalry over control and dominance in organizing lucrative kabaddi tournaments in Punjab, rather than a direct link to the Moose Wala case. Police have identified some shooters and are investigating it as a planned murder tied to underworld turf wars in the kabaddi circuit. "It are all for easy money. It is all related to finances. Kabaddi is also a shortcut to make easy money through advertising, match fixing, betting etc. It is also a fact that the gang leaders are involved in sensational crime for appreciating their brand value in

order to get popular and create fear among their targets," says a senior Punjab Police officer working with Anti Gangster Task



Force.

Punjab Police officials say the entry of gangsters into fields of a sport like Kabaddi was preceded by their 'interest' in Punjabi music industry. "The gangsters' interest in music industry is not related to extortion

alone. That is their last resort. They also try to get legitimate money through it. They float a company and take the rights of a song from the popular singer. If it is a hit then it gets them perpetual income," says a DIG ranked officer probing gangsters' commercial links. The influence of gangsters even extends to the choice of male and female artists which figure in the music videos. "These artists are promoted and are used by these gangsters to increase their influence among youngsters. Mooh nu khoon lag gaya hai (they have tasted blood). Liquor trade, bookies, hawala traders, donkey route travel agents (those who send youth abroad on some legitimate Visa but then the youth vanish in the country) all get a call to cough up a hefty sum. Most cannot even complain to the police because they are involved in illicit trade," says the DIG.

Vizhinjam Port next phase construction to begin in Jan 2026

Thiruvananthapuram. (Agency) The next phase of construction at Vizhinjam International Seaport is set to begin in January 2026, following a stellar first year of commercial operations that far exceeded expectations.

Since commencing operations on December 3, 2024, the port has handled nearly four lakh containers above than the projected target, receiving 636 vessels and managing close to 14 lakh containers, well over the projected 10 lakh for the first year.

Some of the world's largest container vessels, including MSC Turkey, MSC Irina and MSC Verona, which had not previously called at ports along the Asian coastline, have berthed at Vizhinjam, Kerala Ports Minister VN Vasavan said.

The Minister said preparations have been completed to launch the second, third and fourth phases of construction. As part of the second phase, the existing 800-metre berth will be extended by 1,200 metres to a total length of 2,000 metres, enabling the simultaneous berthing of large container vessels. The breakwater will also be extended from the present 2.96 km by another 920 metres to over 3.9 km. The inauguration of the next phase of construction is planned for the second week of January, with the final date to be announced after consultations with the Chief Minister and representatives of the Adani Group.

According to the revised agreement, the second, third and fourth phases of the port will be completed by 2028. Once fully operational, Vizhinjam is expected to emerge as a major global transhipment hub.

The Minister said the temporary approach road connecting the port will soon be completed and inaugurated, facilitating road-based cargo transport. Land acquisition for the proposed 10.7-km railway connectivity is progressing.

Following the grant of Integrated Check Post (ICP) status to the port, steps will be initiated in coordination with the Tourism Department to develop tourism-related facilities.

Crucial bites for toothless city administrators

Quality of urban life is a subject of eternal relevance. Sadly, it has also become a holy cow. No one dares to slaughter it, but no one seriously feeds it either. Parliamentary committee reports indicate that the 'hardware' of urban India—metros, housing complexes, sewage plants—is being built at an unprecedented pace. Yet the use of this infrastructure and ultimately the quality of citizens' lives, depends on the 'software' of governance. As city dwellers in Maharashtra prepare to vote in several municipal corporation elections, it is pertinent to reflect on a long list of issues crying out for attention. Here are six fundamental concerns that merit wider public discourse, consensus-building and—most importantly—honest political will. Ideally, these issues should dominate discussions as competing parties seek a popular mandate. The list begins with linking all state and central grants to the performance of municipal bodies. Urban local bodies spend substantial funds received from higher governments, but owing to corruption and mismanagement, overall improvements in the quality of urban life remain elusive. The 15th Finance Commission made a significant attempt to reform municipal finance by tying grants more closely to performance outcomes than in the past.

One critical new metric proposed is the maintenance of 'squatter-free public areas'. Expanding this to include the proportion of encroachment-free pavements would help create a quantifiable index. Equally important is penalising non-performing corporations that allow slums or illegal shops to mushroom on streets. Such disincentives would push urban bodies to perform better. A major reason for pervasive corruption in urban bodies is that mayors and elected representatives are left with little real decision-making power. Despite the 74th Constitutional Amendment of 1992, devolution of authority to urban local bodies has remained incomplete and largely cosmetic. Ironically, the official with power—the municipal commissioner—is not directly accountable to citizens, while the official with accountability—the mayor—lacks authority. Consequently, constitutionally mandated institutions of local self-government continue to be weakened. Excessive concentration of power in state governments has made local governance fragile and unresponsive. The prevailing 'strong commissioner-weak mayor' model reduces the mayor to a ceremonial figurehead. This imbalance cascades downward: councillors, left without authority, often resort to exploiting their nuisance value, leading to the accumulation of ill-gotten wealth and emboldening black-money operators in politics. Land is the most finite and fiercely contested resource in urban India. The existence of so-called 'vacant land' in urban agglomerations presents a dual challenge—it is both a wasted asset that could host public infrastructure and highly vulnerable to encroachment, eventually spawning unserviceable squatter settlements. Addressing this requires a dedicated institutional mechanism: a commissionerate for vacant lands. While the impact of the Maharashtra Vacant Lands (Prohibition of Unauthorised Occupation and Summary Eviction) Act, 1975 needs reassessment, the July 2024 establishment of the Hyderabad Disaster Response and Asset Protection Agency (HYDRAA) deserves close study. It could serve as a robust prototype. HYDRAA links asset protection with disaster management and, unlike conventional municipal enforcement—which is often toothless—operates with a dedicated force and police coordination, ensuring enforcement without political interference. Failure to prevent illegal hutments has also facilitated cross-border infiltration, with the potential to significantly alter urban demography. Unlike in villages, illegal migrants can seamlessly blend into megacities. Spaces beneath flyovers, near traffic signals and along railway tracks have become safe havens. A demographic audit is therefore a necessary governance tool to ensure urban planning is grounded in reality rather than outdated census data.

IndiGo fiasco must spur course correction

Aviation sector's rapid expansion has not been matched by strengthening of regulatory oversight

THE Indian aviation industry has experienced turbulence this year. The Air India crash in Ahmedabad on June 12 shocked the nation; its cause continues to be under investigation. Early this month, mass flight cancellation by the country's leading carrier, IndiGo Airlines, paralysed air travel. Both incidents caused deep concern about the health of an industry that now accounts for 1.3 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). At the time of the Ahmedabad crash, questions were asked about the revival of Air India after being acquired by the Tatas from the government. Admittedly, it had become a loss-making leviathan over the past few decades, but the Tatas and their partner, Singapore Airlines, had exuded confidence that the airline would make a full recovery. The crash, however, raised doubts over the viability and safety of its ageing fleet. Yet it was notable that the top brass of the Tatas were not only visibly present throughout the disaster's aftermath but also a compensation fund was announced immediately. Though complaints from families and legal teams persist, Air India has been viewed as broadly compassionate and helpful in this dire situation.

This is in marked contrast to the latest crisis for which IndiGo is being reviled and severely trolled. Apart from harassment to passengers over the cancellations that continued for several days, there was initially a deafening silence from the top management. It was the frontline staff which bore the brunt of the air passengers' ire over having to wait cluelessly for hours on end, and then to be told that flights were cancelled, leaving them in the lurch. This included those travelling for medical emergencies, jobs, exams, weddings or funerals. The apology by the IndiGo CEO came too late in the day to provide any solace to those who faced major disruptions.

At this point, one must pause and recall that there is a reason IndiGo became the country's most popular airline and garnered such a huge market share. Despite being a no-frills budget carrier, it initially combined punctuality, efficiency and predictability in a way that brought comfort to air passengers. It was even preferred over full-service carriers simply because its systems ran like clockwork. The problem began when market dominance

turned into disregard for stakeholders such as consumers and regulatory agencies.

As for the aviation sector having become a duopoly, it is actually more of a monopoly with IndiGo commanding two-thirds share of the market. Its expansion to this level has been aided by developments such as the sudden closure of Jet Airways as well as technical and financial problems faced by smaller carriers like SpiceJet.

Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu has said that more entities are being encouraged to enter the aviation space in a bid to ensure competition. But new entrants like Akasa Air will take a while to stabilise and the dominance of a single carrier is set to continue for the time being. The Competition Commission of India is

between flights. Under the Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL) rules, it was raised from 36 to 48 hours. In other words, airlines would have to hire more pilots to meet the demands of expanded rest hours. Since the decision was taken in January 2024, there was ample time for airlines to enhance staff accordingly. IndiGo reportedly failed to do so. So, when the new norms were implemented in November this year, the result was mass cancellations and mayhem, affecting nearly two-thirds of the travelling public around the country. The big question now is about the role of the regulator in ensuring that airlines follow guidelines that have a critical impact on safety. It is evident that the DGCA was taken unawares by these developments. The reason for this is that the aviation sector's rapid expansion has not been matched by a strengthening of regulatory oversight.

On the contrary, the DGCA is hamstrung by staff shortage. As much as 49 per cent of sanctioned posts are currently vacant. Similarly, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Safety has 203 vacancies out of 598 sanctioned posts, according to replies to parliamentary questions. This shortfall in technical expertise is alarming at a time when the aviation industry is growing at a fast pace. India has become the world's fifth biggest aviation market, growing at the rate of 11 per cent annually, with demand for air travel rising exponentially. It is at this juncture that there is the greatest need to accord high priority to safety and maintenance issues. It is also high time airlines paid for their misdeeds. IndiGo may have been an efficient and consumer-friendly airline in the past, but sadly, it has now transformed into a corporate with a laser-sharp focus on profits rather than consumer interests. It has sought to leverage its predominant market share in a manner

that has caused immense hardship to the travelling public. There is a need to take a cue from airlines of other countries, notably the US, where harried consumers got compensation running into hundreds of millions of dollars. The Civil Aviation Ministry and the DGCA are now bound to ensure that comparable penalties are paid by any carrier that assumes it is too big to be hurt by the authorities. The action must be taken sooner rather than later so that such a crisis does not recur.

Greater accountability must follow MLAs' raise

The Bills for a three-fold hike passed unanimously in the House as, unsurprisingly, the raise found resonance among all parties. But outside, a debate was raging on the rationale behind the move

Year-end celebrations arrived early for Odisha legislators as the proposal for a three-fold hike in their salary was approved by the state assembly on the last day of the winter session. Ratifying four Bills, the legislature cleared the raise for the members, the speaker, the deputy speaker, and ministers. With a paycheque of ₹3.45 lakh a month, Odisha's MLAs will now be among the highest paid in the country. The chief minister will draw ₹3.74 lakh in salary and allowances. An MLA's fixed salary will go up from ₹35,000 to ₹90,000, and allowances will rise from ₹65,000 to ₹2.55 lakh. Former legislators will be entitled to a larger pension. The last raise in the assembly was in 2017; the latest revision comes with retrospective effect from June 2024. The Bills passed unanimously in the House as, unsurprisingly, the raise found resonance among all parties. But outside, a debate was raging on the rationale behind the move. Amid this, BJD chief and opposition leader Naveen Patnaik went on to announce he would forgo the increased salary and



allowances, and wrote to Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi to spend it on the poor. That gesture was called out by his political opponents, who pointed out that neither he nor his party opposed the Bills on the floor of the House. The hike in Odisha has again triggered an old

question: should lawmakers not be paid handsomely to keep politics clean? Truth be told, the salaries of most MLAs were well below senior public servants'. Now consider that an MLA represents about 3 lakh people on an average. Such is the nature of politics that lawmakers have to dig into their pockets to meet the expenses of attending to constituents on a regular basis. Insulation from the lures of corruption requires that elected representatives are paid well, as Singapore ensured years ago. On the other hand, a raise in salary and allowances must entail more accountability, responsibility, and transparency on part of the legislators. It comes at a time when thousands of government teachers and contracted government employees are agitating over job regularisation and fair pay. While the legislators have revised their own remunerations, they should also look at the legitimate demands of others with the same empathy and seriousness.

A gap between life and loudspeaker

In Kerala, the CPM permeates most civic institutions. As the party has become inseparable from Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's persona, local failings are also read as the state government's failure. This transference partly caused the LDF's loss of the state capital's municipality

A few months ago, the Election Commission issued me my first voter identity card. I had never voted before. I gave my Thrissur address because in old age I did not think breathing Delhi's air was sustainable, though I am not at home in Kerala either. That estrangement is my problem alone: I am never at home anywhere. For the first time, I thought I would honour my political relevance in the local elections whose results were announced Sunday. When the people came for the special intensive revision, I was away. At the village office, I filled out the form, and they told me the SIR slip would reach me through local party workers. 'The party' in Kerala usually means the CPI(M). In the last decade, little has moved in the state without the party as a middleman. The idea is to make you feel indebted. To flourish in Kerala, you need to belong to a party or organisation, preferably the CPI(M), which has infiltrated civic structures—exactly the "institutional takeover" Rahul Gandhi recently accused the BJP of at the national level. On Friday, I went to the booth. Everyone was polite and helpful in telling me I did not exist as a voter—despite the EC-issued card and several other documents. It has always been clear to me that official Indian identity can never be proved categorically. It is because we don't truly exist that we must hoard PAN, passport, ration card, and Aadhaar to prove that we do. Indian citizenship is an abstract concept. Though I could not vote, close to three-quarters of Keralites did, and many voted against the CPI(M) in favour of the Congress-led UDF, which did a very good job of presenting itself as a viable alternative, helped among other things by the Sabarimala gold theft under the CPI(M)'s watch. They were likely voting out the middlemen.

At the heart of this churn lies a convergence of leadership style, governance fatigue, and shifting social coalitions—especially among women and historically loyal communities. A hitherto-bipolar politics is now slowly gravitating towards a third alternative, the BJP-led NDA. Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala's capital, now has a municipal corporation under BJP's sway after decades of CPI(M) rule. That the BJP is a rising power in the state is one of the most telling results of this election. Similar gains in other corporations and panchayats underline a new, if still limited, urban foothold. That space has been created largely by default, by the failure of the Left front, inseparable from Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's persona. His undying love for himself is visible on billboards and at events. The party works as his PR machine, much like Narendra Modi and the BJP. The difference is that Modi is more skilful and his party's exploitation of identities more systematic and on a far vaster scale. Locally, the effect has been to enable the BJP to pose as an active option. Ward and municipal elections differ from state and national polls in that they are more intimate expressions of lived experiences. The LDF has been quick to claim credit for everything, but it failed to explain steep rises in water charges, power bills, and property transaction costs, even as it dispensed freebies, cash awards, and food kits from a perpetually bankrupt exchequer. Local bodies increasingly looked up to the chief minister's office for direction. The failure of a

corporation was read as the failure of the state government. The LDF's loss of the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation is the clearest expression of this transference of blame. Chronic waste-management crises, infrastructural stagnation, and administrative drift created conditions under which a once-remote BJP



could plausibly position itself as a governance alternative—politically unthinkable not long ago. Women voters in Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, and Thrissur prioritised everyday governance: waste disposal, waterlogging, broken footpaths, public transport, lighting, and safety. These failures affect women first and most persistently. The LDF's earlier advantage among women, built on welfare delivery and

Kudumbashree, yielded diminishing returns in cities where its rhetoric became repetitive—a kind of dystopian magical realism born of the gap between life and loudspeakers. This was not, however, a pro-BJP women's wave. Many women voted tactically—some towards the UDF, some towards the BJP—primarily to dislodge incumbents rather than to endorse ideology.

Christian voters, especially in Kochi and Thrissur, consolidated quietly behind the UDF, guided by comfort with coalition politics and unease with both CPI(M) ambiguity and the BJP's long-term intentions. This consolidation proved decisive in central Kerala city corporations. The BJP in the state, and to a lesser extent the UDF, now paint a rosy picture of 'viksit Kerala'. They are deluding themselves. Compared to many other states, Kerala is far ahead on crucial human-development indicators. Its work culture, political values, and relatively secular approach to life mean that the model of 'development' on offer in, say, Uttar Pradesh or Bihar is not materially attractive here. Half the population is abroad; the young are migrating in large numbers to Europe and Australia. No one is seriously looking to a factory future. Given Kerala's uniform urbanisation, high education levels, and environmental awareness, the only realistic development path is in artificial intelligence and knowledge work. This is what the CPI(M), stuck at best on techno-parks, should have pursued with clarity and urgency. Their thinking is clearly outdated. After all, how can you have a revolution without proletarians? And the answer is, there is no revolution. Move on.

Manipur government tightens security after Kuki militant attacks

Imphal. (Agency)

The Manipur government has tightened security around several villages in Bishnupur district following repeated attacks by Kuki militants. On Tuesday night, militants reportedly used sophisticated weapons and bombs to target villagers. Some villages of Imphal East also faced attacks by suspected Kuki militants.

Manipur Police today said a DIG of Manipur Police visited the affected villages on Wednesday and took stock of the prevailing situation. An FIR has been registered in connection with indiscriminate firing by Kuki armed groups at Torgung for further investigation, the police added.

Police said that no arrests have been reported so far. However, during extensive combing operations at Kangai in Churachandpur district, authorities recovered one long-range improvised pumpi, four medium-range improvised pumpis, one medium-range barrel-blasted improvised pumpi, one IED weighing around three kilograms, one single-barrel firearm, and 17 empty cartridges of various calibers.

Meanwhile, displaced villagers staged a protest demanding action against those responsible for the attacks. They alleged that despite the presence of large numbers of central security forces in Churachandpur district, no arrests have been made so far.

Meanwhile, police said a militant was nabbed yesterday at Thoubal district. Security forces along with a team of Ukhru district forest department also destroyed a total of 140 acres of poppy plantation at LM Block, Yaolen Chepu and Lamla Chingphei area. In the area, 16 huts suspected to be used by drug traffickers were also burnt yesterday.

Centre likely to release Rs 700 crore for Meghalaya's Jal Jeevan Mission by Jan 2026

Shillong. (Agency)

The union government is expected to release funds worth Rs 700 crore for works undertaken under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in Meghalaya by January 2026, Public Health Engineering (PHE) Minister Marciuse Marak said.

He said this decision was taken after the Centre's recent meeting with chief engineers from all the states in the national capital. "The chief engineer briefed me that the government of India will release the funds very soon, most probably in January. Some states have been asked to rectify issues in their JJM projects before the release," Marak

Fitting doors in homes, lighting dark spots, more patrol: Bahraich villages grapple with fresh wolf attacks

Administration steps up safety measures after three children killed in a fresh spate of attacks in the district

Lucknow. (Agency)

At Mallahanpurwa and Jaruva, streetlights are being installed on dark stretches, houses lacking doors are being fitted with ones, and sugarcane fields are being cleared.

In the two villages of Bahraich district's Kaiserganj tehsil, these are some of the preventive measures the administration is taking to prevent further wolf attacks which claimed the lives of three children and left another injured in the past one week only.

The sugarcane fields in the villages are often used by wolves as escape routes after attacks.

"We've never faced such terror before. Initially, we suspected that the wolves strayed into the residential area after their habitat near the riverbank was flooded. But even after the water levels receded, the animal attacks continued," said Chandan Kumar Rajbhar, husband of Mallahanpurwa village pradhan Suman Devi.

Besides the steps being taken by the administration, the villagers along with Forest Department teams and other government

officials are patrolling the area, Rajbhar said. Mishri Lal (35), a farmer from Mallahanpurwa, said most houses in the area are thatched structures and families are unable to install proper doors since they are poor. He stressed

Kiran, a village resident whose four-month-old infant was taken away and killed by a wolf in the early hours of December 7, says, "We don't have a door in our house. The animal managed to enter and take away my baby when we were sleeping on a cot."

Vinay Kumar, a Mallahanpurwa resident in his fifties whose five-year-old grandson was also killed after being taken away by a wolf when he was playing outside their house on November 28, says, "Fearing attacks, we now escort our children to and from school every day. We no longer allow them to play beyond the gate."

The two villages fall under the Godhiyagram panchayat that has a population of nearly 5,000.

Several villages in the district have seen a spate of wolf attacks this year. From September to October, wolf attacks left eight people — six of them children — dead and nearly 30 others injured. Most incidents were reported from Manjhara Taulki, with a few cases occurring in nearby villages. Four wolves believed to be behind the attacks were killed by the Forest Department teams at



that streetlights are needed around the village. "Officials are patrolling day and night but unless the sugarcane crop is cut, the threat of sudden wolf attacks will continue as the fields are very close to our homes."

Guwahati Railway Station Marks Major Upgrade with New Retiring Rooms and Modern Dormitory Offering World Class Amenities

The Sikh Times

Maligaon, 18th December: In a major initiative aimed at improving passenger comfort and station amenities, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has upgraded the Retiring Rooms and Dormitory facilities at Guwahati Railway Station under Lumding Division. The upgraded facilities were made operational in the presence of the General Manager of NFR, Shri Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, along with other senior Railway officials, reaffirming NFR's commitment towards passenger centric infrastructure development. The Retiring Room complex, located on the first floor of the station building, now offers a significantly enhanced stay experience for railway users. The accommodation comprises 09 Retiring Rooms, including 07 two-beded rooms and 02 five-beded rooms, along with a 12 bedded dormitory. As

part of the up-gradation process, all rooms have been converted

improvement in non-fare revenue generation for the Railways.

increase over the earlier in-house management model, which involved recurring operational costs and lower net earnings. The enhanced facilities reflect NFR's continued focus on delivering better passenger services by optimal utilization of Railway assets and sustainable revenue growth, in line with Indian Railways' broader modernization objectives. In order to achieve these improvements efficiently, the services of the Retiring Rooms and Dormitory have been outsourced and entrusted, through an open tender process with responsibilities for renovation, up-gradation, management and maintenance. The contract has been awarded for a period of five years. All renovation work has been carried out at no cost to the Railways, with complete operational responsibility resting with the service provider.



into fully air-conditioned units, equipped with more comfortable beds and improved interiors, ensuring a modern, hygienic and convenient environment for rail passengers during transit. The initiative marks a substantial

Under the new arrangement, NFR is projected to earn Rs. 1.94 Cr. over the next five year contract period, while incurring zero expenditure towards maintenance, operation or renovation. This represents a significant

Two Bangladeshi trawlers seized for fishing in Indian waters

Kolkata. (Agency)

A few days after a Bangladeshi naval vessel allegedly attacked and sank an Indian fishing trawler, the Indian Coast Guard, in a fresh case of suspected intrusion into Indian territorial waters, seized two Bangladeshi fishing trawlers and detained 35 fishermen on board.

The trawlers, along with the fishermen, were brought to Fraserganj in South 24 Parganas, where the fishermen were formally arrested by the police of Fraserganj Coastal Police Station yesterday night. They are scheduled to be produced before the Kakdwip Sub-Divisional Court on Thursday.

According to sources in the Coast Guard, the incident dates back to December 16, when two Bangladeshi trawlers—FB Ruposi Sultana and FB Sabina—were detected fishing inside Indian territorial waters in the Bay of Bengal.

Coast Guard personnel noticed the vessels during routine maritime patrols and subsequently intercepted them.

On boarding and questioning the crew, it emerged that all 35 fishermen were residents of Kutubdia upazila in Bangladesh. Following preliminary verification, the Coast Guard detained the fishermen and handed them over to the Fraserganj Coastal

Police yesterday. Later in the day, the arrested fishermen were brought to the Fraserganj fishing harbour, where necessary legal formalities were completed.

Police officials confirmed that the fishermen would be presented before the Kakdwip court, where further proceedings will determine the course of action. The latest detention comes at a time when tensions remain high following a tragic incident earlier this week involving Indian fishermen.

Incidentally a Bangladeshi naval vessel allegedly attacked an Indian fishing trawler on Monday after it reportedly strayed into Indian territorial waters in the Bay of Bengal.

The trawler eventually capsized and sank. According to sources in the police, 11 fishermen who had been on board were rescued and brought to Narayanganj ghat in Namkhana, South 24 Parganas but five fishermen remained missing.

However, after the sunken trawler was towed close to Narayanganj ghat, the bodies of two fishermen—Sanjib Das (56) from West Gangadharpur in Kakdwip and Ranjan Das (50) from Dubrajpur village in Purba Sthali-II block of Purba Bardhaman district—were recovered.

State Women Commission Member Sapna Kashyap Holds Public Hearing

The Sikh Times

Manoj Pal

Muzaffarnagar: State Women Commission member Sapna Kashyap visited Block Charthawal on Wednesday and conducted a public hearing related to women's issues. On her arrival, she was welcomed by officials from the administration, police and various departments. The programme commenced with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp. During the public hearing held at the block auditorium, a total of 20 applications were submitted, covering issues such as domestic violence, family disputes, maintenance, harassment and other social problems. Sapna Kashyap listened to each complaint carefully and issued clear instructions to the concerned officials to ensure timely, impartial and effective disposal of all cases. She emphasized that inter-departmental coordination should be strengthened so that aggrieved women are not forced to make repeated visits to offices. Information about various government-run schemes was also shared during the programme. Officials briefed attendees on schemes related

to women empowerment, child protection, health services, social security, senior citizen welfare and Ayushman Bharat. Special emphasis

for making Muzaffarnagar free from child marriage and called for collective efforts to safeguard child rights. After the public hearing,

approach towards patients and to ensure that the benefits of government health schemes reach all eligible beneficiaries. Officials from the District Probation Office, including Sachin Kumar, Nathi Ram and Renu Rani, also participated in the programme. A large number of women attended the public hearing and openly shared their grievances. Those present on the occasion included Additional Chief Medical Officer Dr Shailesh Jain, Deputy Superintendent of Police Rishika Singh, Block Development Officer Praveen Kumar, Community Health Centre In-charge Dr Satendra Kumar, Block Education Officer Amarveer, Child Development Project Officer Santosh Sharma, Deputy Jailer, Women Police Station In-charge Sangeeta Chaudhary, Charthawal Police Station In-charge Satyanarayan Dahiya, Sub-Inspector Doli, One Stop

Centre representative Pooja Narula, Protection Officer Neena Tyagi, officials from the Social Welfare Department, Labour Department representatives, Ayushman Mitra and officers of the Women Welfare Department.

was laid on encouraging senior citizens aged 70 years and above to get their Ayushman Vay Vandana cards made, so that they can avail better healthcare facilities. The public hearing was conducted by Child Welfare Committee member Dr Rajiv Kumar. He administered an oath to all pres-

Sapna Kashyap inspected the Community Health Centre, Charthawal. During the inspection, she reviewed medical services, cleanliness, availability of medicines and facilities being provided to patients. Doctors and staff were directed to maintain a sensitive

approach towards patients and to ensure that the benefits of government health schemes reach all eligible beneficiaries. Officials from the District Probation Office, including Sachin Kumar, Nathi Ram and Renu Rani, also participated in the programme. A large number of women attended the public hearing and openly shared their grievances. Those present on the occasion included Additional Chief Medical Officer Dr Shailesh Jain, Deputy Superintendent of Police Rishika Singh, Block Development Officer Praveen Kumar, Community Health Centre In-charge Dr Satendra Kumar, Block Education Officer Amarveer, Child Development Project Officer Santosh Sharma, Deputy Jailer, Women Police Station In-charge Sangeeta Chaudhary, Charthawal Police Station In-charge Satyanarayan Dahiya, Sub-Inspector Doli, One Stop

Centre representative Pooja Narula, Protection Officer Neena Tyagi, officials from the Social Welfare Department, Labour Department representatives, Ayushman Mitra and officers of the Women Welfare Department.

Shuts Down as Lawyers and Traders Protest for High Court Bench in Western UP

The Sikh Times

Manoj Pal

Muzaffarnagar: A strong protest was witnessed in Muzaffarnagar on Wednesday as lawyers and traders jointly demonstrated demanding the establishment of a High Court bench in western Uttar Pradesh. Advocates closed their chambers, while traders extended full support by keeping markets shut, leading to a complete shutdown in major commercial areas of the city. From early morning, the city's main markets remained closed, with shutters down across most business establishments. Large numbers of lawyers and traders took to the streets, staging demonstrations on key roads, which led to traffic disruptions and congestion at several locations. In view of the situation, the police administration deployed heavy security across the city to maintain law and order. Protesters said that lakhs of people from western Uttar Pradesh are forced to travel long distances to Prayagraj to seek justice, resulting in wastage of time, money and resources. They asserted that the establishment of a High Court bench in the region would make justice more accessible and strengthen the judicial system. The agitation is not limited to Muzaffarnagar alone. Lawyers across 22 districts of western Uttar Pradesh have launched coordinated protests, demanding the long-pending High Court bench. Advocates said the demand has been raised for decades and has received assurances from various governments in the past, but no concrete action has been taken so far.

District Bar Association General Secretary Chandraveer Singh stated that the demand for a High Court bench in western Uttar Pradesh is not just an issue for lawyers, but a necessity for the common people. He said traders, labourers and citizens from all sections of society have united in support of the cause, and the movement will continue until the bench is established. Traders supporting the protest said the absence of a nearby High Court bench causes unnecessary hardship to the public. They added that setting up a bench would also contribute to the social and economic development of the region. The protest remained largely peaceful throughout the day. Police personnel remained on alert, closely monitoring the situation and ensuring that no untoward incident occurred.

School buses collide due to dense fog in Mohali, flights cancelled and diverted

Chandigarh. (Agency)

Dense fog and extremely low visibility caused major disruptions to both road and air traffic in Mohali Thursday morning. On the Kharar-Kurali highway, two school buses collided on the service road in front of Jamuna Apartments. Weather conditions led to cancellations and diversions at the Shaheed Bhagat Singh International Airport.

According to sources, one of the buses involved in the accident belonged to Delhi Public School, while the other was from St Ezra School, Kharar. Eyewitnesses said one bus was coming from the Kurali side, while the other was moving towards Kurali in the wrong direction. Visibility at the time of the accident was extremely poor due to dense fog.

The collision left the driver of the Delhi Public School bus seriously injured, while three school children also sustained minor injuries. All the injured were rushed to a nearby civil hospital, where they are undergoing treatment. The injured driver was referred to the civil hospital in Mohali. The police have initiated an investigation into the accident.

The fog was equally severe at the airport, where flight operations were severely affected by very low visibility.

The airport authorities, in a statement, said, "Due to extremely poor visibility, flight operations were disrupted for passenger safety." As a result, IndiGo flight 6E 7413 to Jaipur and IndiGo flight 6E 2113 to Delhi were cancelled. Additionally, Air India flight AI 1879, also bound for Delhi, was cancelled. Furthermore, IndiGo flight 6E 6448, arriving from Delhi, and IndiGo flight 6E 7414, arriving from Jaipur, were diverted to Delhi.

Airport authorities advised passengers to check their flight status with their respective airlines before heading to the airport, as normal operations will resume only after visibility improves.

A video of the incident later went viral on social media, subjecting Prasenjit to extreme humiliation and mental trauma. Family members and locals allege that the public assault and the circulation of the video deeply affected Prasenjit's self-respect and mental health.

NAME CHANGE

It is for general information that I, DEV SINGH BHALSE S/o JAGDISH BALSE R/o JHUGGI NO. 104, SITUATED AT SHAYAMA PRASAND, MUKHERJEE CAMP, TAGORE GARDEN, PO: TAGORE GARDEN, DIST: WEST DELHI, DELHI-110027, declare that name of mine, my wife and my daughter has been wrongly written as DEV SINGH, SUNITA and RADHIKA in my minor daughter RADHIKA BHALSE aged 14 years in her School Record and birth certificate-MCDOLR-0111-004702631. The actual name of mine, my wife and my daughter are DEV SINGH BHALSE, SUNITA BHALSE and RADHIKA BHALSE respectively which may be amended accordingly.

NAME CHANGE

It is for general information that I, AKEEL RANSI S/o GAFFAR KHAN R/o House No. 10B/16A, Gali No. 2, Bajrangbali Mohalla Maupuri, Garhi Mewa, PO: Seelampur, Dist: North East Delhi, Delhi-110053, declare that name of mine has been wrongly written as AKIL in my son name ADEEL aged 15 years in his 10th class Educational Documents. The actual name of mine is AKEEL RANSI, which may be amended accordingly.

NAME CHANGE

I hereto known as HARI KANT S/o SARVESH KUMAR residing at J-48 Old Seemapuri, PO-Jhilmil, Dist: East Delhi, Delhi 110095 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as HARSH SHRAVASTAV.

NAME CHANGE

I hereto known as LAXMI NARAYAN S/o ISHWAR R/o Purkhas Dhiran (159), Sonpat, Haryana -13102 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as LAXMI NARAYAN.

NAME CHANGE

I, NAVEEN S/o RAJIB SINGH R/o TAJA MAURA(95), ROHTAK, HARYANA-124001 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO NAVEEN RATHEE.

NAME CHANGE

It is for general information that I, CHITTE SACHCHIDANAND DAT-TATRAY S/o DATTATRAY CHITTE R/o Qtr. No. 135, Type-1, Press Colony, Mayapuri, New Delhi-110064, declare that name of mine and my minor son have been wrongly written as SACHCHIDANAND CHITTE, RAUSHREE and MITESH in my minor son name CHITTE MITESH SACHCHIDANAND aged 11 years in his School Records, and name of my minor son has been wrongly written as MITESH in his Aadhaar Card No. 881377466824. The actual name of mine and my minor son are CHITTE SACHCHIDANAND DAT-TATRAY, RAUSHREE CHITTE and CHITTE MITESH SACHCHIDANAND, respectively.

If we want Delhi to remain liveable, have an obligation to use public transport: CM Rekha Gupta

AQI expected to remain in 'Very Poor' category until December 20, following six days set to range from 'Very Poor' to 'Severe'

New Delhi.(Agency)

Flagging the high density of vehicles plying on the Capital's roads, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Wednesday said that air quality of Delhi will not improve unless people start ditching personal vehicles for public transport while travelling alone.

Speaking at the inauguration of the new Delhi Metro Museum at the Supreme Court Metro station, Gupta said, "When people talk about reducing pollution in Delhi, I tell them that a big contributor is transportation. Pollution caused by lakhs of vehicles that ply on the roads, and that too many without a pollution certificate, in a tiny place like Delhi where around 3 crore people live, is responsible for suffocating Delhi..."

"If we want Delhi to remain liveable, we have an obligation to use public transport. We cause problems for our own convenience and then wonder how the pollution will be reduced. That will only happen when all of us decide that we will not use a car if we are travelling alone. I will either carpool or use

the Metro or a bus," she added.

While there are close to 80 lakh vehicles registered in Delhi alone, the city's roads see vehicles from neighbouring states as well. Overall, around 2.88 crore vehicles ply on Delhi-NCR's roads daily, said sources. Listing the steps her government has taken to reduce air pollution, Gupta said a decision has been taken to completely convert the public bus fleet into electric vehicles. "We have already converted 3,500 of our buses to e-buses. By the end of 2026, we have set a target of converting all our buses to e-buses. We will bring our electric vehicle policy very soon," she added.

Delhi's air quality index (AQI) remained in the 'Very Poor' category on Wednesday, with the AQI recorded at 334, marginally improving from Tuesday's 354, aided by stronger winds

that helped disperse pollutants.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) and air quality bulletins warned that dispersion conditions are likely to deteriorate,

dispersal. As a result, as per the IITM's air quality forecast, Delhi's AQI is expected to remain in the 'Very Poor' category until December 20, with the outlook for the following six days ranging from 'Very Poor' to 'Severe'.

The AQI readings had crossed the 400-mark and fallen in the 'Severe' category on Saturday, Sunday and Monday.

On Wednesday morning, due to shallow fog, Safdarjung recorded the lowest visibility at 700 m, while Palam reported a visibility of 800 m. Source apportionment data from the Decision Support System (DSS) for air quality management showed a rise in transport sector emissions, accounting for around 16% of Delhi's pollution load on Wednesday. Emissions from Jhajjar in Haryana stood at 16.53%, nearly matching Delhi's transport sector's contribution.

Delhi and peripheral industries together

contributed 8.06%, while Rohtak accounted for 5.06%. Residential emissions were estimated at 3.97%, and Gurgaon's contribution remained relatively low at 1.79%. According to DSS forecasts, Jhajjar is expected to emerge as a dominant regional polluter in the coming days, with its contribution projected to rise sharply to 22.54% – potentially overtaking Delhi's transport sector emissions. The IMD attributed the marginal improvement in AQI to strong south-westerly winds, which reached speeds of up to 20 kmph over the past 24 hours, aiding dispersion.

However, meteorological conditions are expected to turn less favourable soon. While minimum temperatures are likely to remain near normal over the next three days, they are expected to rise by about 2 degrees Celsius. Delhi recorded a minimum temperature of 10.4 degrees Celsius on Wednesday, which was 2.3 degrees below normal, while the day temperature settled at 24.7 degrees Celsius, 2.5 degrees above normal, according to IMD.



Amid pollution curbs, workers gather at Labour chowk, only to return empty-handed

Govt announces one-time relief for out-of-work labour, but not many are registered

New Delhi.(Agency)

At 12 pm on Wednesday, Dilip (27) stood at Labour Chowk in Madanpur Khadar with a bag containing his lunch. He is among the 150-odd men and women who gather at the spot everyday in search of work, mostly at construction sites.

However, with the imposition of the strictest anti-pollution curbs in Delhi-NCR since Saturday – halting any kind of construction and demolition activities – people like Dilip are now thronging Labour Chowk in the hope of getting picked up for works related to plumbing and cleaning.

"If we get work, we will eat at the site; if not, we will go back home. The situation is very bad," he said.

Dilip has heard about Delhi Labour Minister Kapil Mishra on Wednesday announcing Rs 10,000 in compensation for construction workers rendered unemployed due to the pollution-battling Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) 3 and 4 measures. The only problem: The

money would directly be paid to the bank accounts of workers registered with the government.

"I only have Aadhaar and PAN cards. I do not know where to get registered with the government and get a labour card made," said Dilip, who earns



around Rs 500 daily, and has been working as a beldhaar (manual labourer) for the last five years. While he stays with his brother in a room paying a rent of Rs 3,500, his family stays in Lucknow.

Dilip is not alone.

Rahul (28) has recently started working

as a plumber. "Half of the people don't know what a labour card is. They don't even know that something like this exists... The middlemen extort money to make and renew a card," he said while waiting at Labour Chowk. Only around 30 people have been picked up for work since morning, he added.

Maintaining that it is difficult for migrant workers to survive in Delhi, he added, "My youngest child is two months old, how will I look after my child?... 90% of workers like us are not getting any work, the rest are getting work that is illegal."

"At night, I feel breathless when I return home from work. At first, I thought it was the cold, but when my eyes started burning, I realised that it was because of pollution," he said.

For people like Rahul, visiting a doctor in a government hospital means losing on a day of income. "We buy jaggery and eat it the whole year," he said.

Five Bishnoi shooters, wanted for murder of kabaddi player and Lawrence's ex-friend, arrested



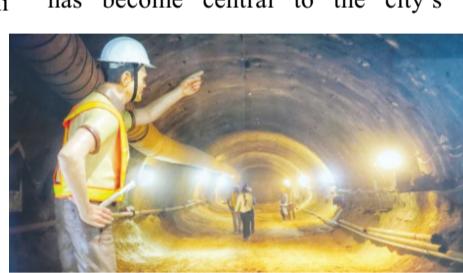
New Delhi.(Agency)

Five shooters attached to jailed gangster Anmol Bishnoi, allegedly involved in three high-profile murders in Punjab and Haryana, were arrested by the Delhi Police Special Cell on Tuesday. Additional Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) P S Kushwah said Piyush Piplani (28) and Ankush Solanki (23) from Haryana, as well as Kunwarbir (30), Lovepreet Singh (26) and Santokh alias Kapil Khatri (31) from Punjab, were arrested in two operations.

Police said the shooters are prominent members of Arzoo and Anmol Bishnoi-Harry Boxer syndicate, which is being operated from Canada and the US. The syndicate had put the Punjab and Haryana Police on high alert after allegedly murdering a bar and restaurant owner in Amritsar in September and a national-level kabaddi player in Panchkula in June. The syndicate, which was targeting kabaddi players and businessmen to extort them, was also allegedly involved in the murder of a former friend of jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi in Chandigarh earlier this month.

Kushwah said that Piyush and Ankush were among the main shooters in the murder of Lawrence's former friend Inderpreet Singh alias Parry, who was killed in Chandigarh's Sector 26 on December 1. Parry's murder was allegedly carried out against the backdrop of a gang war between Lawrence and Goldy Brar groups.

Piyush and Ankush were also involved in the murder of kabaddi player Sonu Nolta on June 5 at Panchkula in Haryana, said police. "Piyush was the lead shooter in both the murders, while Kunwarbir was the driver of the tail and getaway car in which Piyush and Ankush travelled to kill Parry."



transport system and has helped reduce dependence on private vehicles. Referring to the expansion of the network, she said the system, spanning around 400 km, has 289 stations and serves roughly 35 to 37 lakh passengers daily, easing road congestion and providing a cleaner mode of travel.

Recalling the time when former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee approved the Delhi Metro project, CM Gupta said there was scepticism about whether or not such a system could function successfully.

Among the exhibits at the museum are simulators that allow visitors to experience driving a Metro train, working models of a Metro tunnel with machines and launching girders, and interactive digital displays. The museum also includes a dedicated panel on former DMRC chief E Sreedharan, and a model of the Operations Control Centre.

The museum will open for the public from Friday and will operate from 10 am to 4 pm, Tuesday to Sunday, remaining closed on Mondays and public holidays.

New Metro museum at Supreme Court station now, opens for public on December 19

New Delhi.(Agency)

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta Wednesday inaugurated a new Delhi Metro Museum at Supreme Court Metro station – shifting the facility from Patel Chowk to a larger and more interactive space, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) said.

Transport Minister Pankaj Singh and DMRC officials, including DMRC Managing Director Vikas Kumar also attended the event, the DMRC said, adding that the inauguration marked another milestone in showcasing the evolution of the Capital's mass rapid transit system.

Spread across around 12,000 sq feet, the museum houses more than 50 panels, exhibits, kiosks and models depicting the Metro's construction and

operations, the DMRC's spokesperson said. Gupta said that the Delhi Metro has become central to the city's

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NEWS BOX

Glenn McGrath jokingly throws chair as Nathan Lyon surpasses his Test record

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Australia veteran spinner, Nathan Lyon's latest Ashes milestone was celebrated with wickets, records and a moment of pure humour, as Glenn McGrath jokingly "threw a chair" in the commentary box after being overtaken by the off-spinner on the all-time Test wickets list. What began as a routine morning session in Adelaide quickly turned into a memorable chapter in Australian cricket folklore.

Returning to the XI after being left out of the second Test, Lyon wasted little time in making his presence felt on day two of the third Ashes Test. Introduced in the 10th over, the veteran off-spinner struck twice in four balls to swing momentum sharply Australia's way. He first had Ollie Pope playing forward to a turning delivery, with Josh Inglis



completing a sharp catch at midwicket. That wicket drew Lyon level with McGrath on 563 Test scalps. Three balls later, history was rewritten. Lyon drifted one into Ben Duckett, beating the left-hander's bat and crashing into off stump to claim his 564th wicket. As the record fell, television cameras cut to McGrath in the commentary box, where the fast-bowling great reacted with mock annoyance, pretending to hurl a chair before laughing it off—a moment that quickly went viral. Lyon's twin strikes left England reeling at 42 for three, following Pat Cummins' earlier breakthrough to dismiss Zak Crawley. Australia had earlier been bowled out for 371 after resuming on 326 for eight, with Jofra Archer finishing with a five-wicket haul. Mitchell Starc provided late resistance with a fluent half-century, before Archer wrapped up the tail. With his two wickets, Lyon moved into sixth place on the all-time Test wicket-takers list and became Australia's second-highest wicket-taker, now only behind the legendary Shane Warne, who finished his career with 708 wickets. At 38, Lyon is also the highest active wicket-taker in Test cricket and the fourth-most successful spinner overall, trailing only Muttiah Muralitharan, Warne and Anil Kumble.

Auqib Nabi's 8.4 crore deal in IPL auction gives J&K cricket the hope it needs

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

After a three-week-long tussle between 32 teams, the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (SMAT) 2025 has finally reached its culmination, with Haryana and Jharkhand set to face each other in the final on Wednesday, 18 December, at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune. Both teams have dominated the tournament on their road to the final, sealing their places by finishing on top of their respective Super League groups. Ankit Kumar-led Haryana finished second in Group C with five wins from seven matches. Their two defeats came against Gujarat and



Puducherry. They then topped Super League Group A after registering victories over Hyderabad and Rajasthan.

On the other hand, Ishan Kishan-led Jharkhand finished at the top of Group D, winning all eight of their fixtures. They continued their strong form in Super League Group B, defeating Madhya Pradesh and Punjab, with their only loss coming against Andhra. The two teams are now all set to lock horns in the title clash, with all eyes on the coveted trophy. When to watch Haryana vs Jharkhand SMAT final live?

The Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy final between Haryana and Jharkhand will begin at 4:30 PM IST. Where to watch the SMAT final live? Live streaming of the SMAT final will be available on the JioHotstar app.

Haryana vs Jharkhand: Players to watch out for Ankit Kumar – The 28-year-old is the highest run-scorer of the tournament, amassing 448 runs from ten innings at an average of 49.77 and a strike rate of 172.97, including five half-centuries. He will once again be key to Haryana's chances in the final.

Ishan Kishan – The Jharkhand captain is the second-highest run-scorer of the tournament with 416 runs from nine innings at an average of 52 and a strike rate of 195.30, featuring one century and two half-centuries.

Winning Test series in Australia harder than getting Olympic gold: Monty Panesar

Monty Panesar recently caught up with in to discuss what all has gone wrong for Ben Stokes and his men in the ongoing Ashes. He also touched upon his banter with Steve Smith and revealed why he feels winning in Australia is far more difficult than winning an Olympic Gold.

BRISBANE. (Agency)

England find themselves in a precarious position in the ongoing Ashes 2025–26, trailing 0–2 in the five-match series. The Ben Stokes-led side has its backs against the wall heading into the third Test in Adelaide, as another defeat would consign them to a third successive Ashes loss in Australia. The Three Lions arrived on Australian shores under the new leadership of captain Ben Stokes and head coach Brendon McCullum, aiming to end a 14-year winless run in the country. However, their aggressive batting approach has been found wanting on Australia's fast, bouncy pitches. Panesar recently spoke to India Today.in to discuss what has gone



wrong for Stokes and his men in the ongoing Ashes. He also reflected on England's famous 2010–11 Ashes triumph in Australia, which he experienced first-hand, and explained why he believes winning in Australia is harder than winning an Olympic gold medal. While England were successful in driving the ball on the up in home conditions, the lack of patience and overaggressive attitude has only resulted in easy wickets for the Australian bowlers, feels

Panesar. "I think what has gone wrong is the way England have played on fast, bouncy pitches. Playing on the up in those conditions makes it much more difficult. In England you can get away with it because the ball doesn't bounce as much, but adjusting from low bounce to high bounce is a lot harder. They could have also given themselves more of a chance as batters. They seem to come in and immediately go into fifth or sixth gear. At times, it feels more like a T20 game than a

IPL auction: R Ashwin accused of leaking CSK picks, spinner has a funny response

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Former India off-spinner R Ashwin dealt with social media trolls with the same ease with which he once outfoxed batters using his carrom ball, after a few users accused him of leaking Chennai Super Kings' auction picks before their names came up for bidding at the mini-auction on Tuesday, December 16. After expressing disbelief at how easily some on social media fell for false claims circulated about him, Ashwin responded to a troll with a meme, adding that a few people seemed focused only on spreading venom. A social media user shared screengrabs of Ashwin's predictions related to CSK, alleging that they were posted minutes before the Super Kings purchased the players at the auction, thereby giving other franchises a heads-up and an opportunity to inflate prices.

Ashwin had predicted that Chennai Super Kings would buy Prashant Veer and Kartik Sharma minutes before their names came up for bidding. Eventually, CSK secured both uncapped players, paying a record Rs 14.2 crore each. "The Orange Army had



Muralitharan, Vettori, analysts and scouts sitting at the table and yet showed faith in my tweets," Ashwin replied. Ashwin, who has often called for better and more constructive fan discourse around cricket in the country, was actively following—and shaping—conversations in the lead-up to the IPL auction. From

discussing uncapped Indian players to conducting a mock auction featuring cricket enthusiasts, Ashwin led the build-up through multiple shows on his YouTube channel. The off-spinner has remained active on social media, regularly releasing content on YouTube and engaging with fans on X. Ashwin retired from international cricket midway through last year's Border-Gavaskar Trophy, a five-Test series between India and Australia. Ashwin returned to Chennai Super Kings for IPL 2025 after an 11-year gap. Bought for Rs 9.75 crore, his comeback to the franchise was met with considerable anticipation. However, the season did not pan out as expected, as the off-spinner managed just seven wickets in nine matches while conceding 9.12 runs per over. While speculation around Ashwin's future gathered pace ahead of the retention deadline, he announced his retirement from the IPL as early as August, a decision that surprised many. Ashwin brought the curtain down on a memorable IPL career in which he claimed 187 wickets in 221 matches.

Ecuadorian police say soccer player Mario Pineida has been shot dead in an apparent attack

QUITO. (Agency)

Ecuadorian police said on Wednesday that Mario Pineida, a 33-year-old Barcelona de Guayaquil defender, was shot dead in an apparent attack as violence escalates in the Andean nation. Another person who police did not identify was also killed in the incident, and a third was wounded.

Ecuador's Interior Ministry confirmed Pineida's death without providing details. Barcelona de Guayaquil said in a statement its fans are saddened by Pineida's death.

Pineida started his professional career at Independiente del Valle, where he played from 2010 to 2015. He then moved to the club of the coastal city of Guayaquil in 2016 and won two league titles there. The defender also had a brief spell at Brazil's Fluminense in 2022. Ecuadorian media reported the incident took place in the region of Samanes in the north end of Guayaquil, which lies 265 kilometers (165 miles) southwest of the capital Quito.

Ecuador is expected to have its most violent



year on record with more than 9,000 homicides, according to the Ecuadorian Observatory of Organized Crime. That figure was at 7,063 violent deaths last year and a then-record 8,248 in 2023.

President Daniel Noboa has pledged to fight

criminal organizations that have expanded

their operations in Ecuadorian territory in

connection with international drug cartels. In November, a 16-year-old footballer of Independiente del Valle died from a stray bullet, also in Guayaquil. Two months earlier, Maicol Valencia and Leandro Yépez, both players of Exapromo Costa, and Jonathan González, of 22 de Junio died from gunshot wounds.

on 29 as Australia tightened their grip in the opening session. With early wickets down, England once again turned to Root to anchor the innings. However, his stay was brief. Cummins produced a disciplined spell and drew Root into mistake, dismissing him for 19 off 31 deliveries right after lunch on Day 2. The wicket carried added significance, as it marked the 12th occasion Cummins has removed Root in Tests, surpassing Bumrah's tally of 11 dismissals of the England batter. Australia set England a stiff challenge after posting 371 in the first innings, using early movement and disciplined bowling to strike quickly. England lost momentum inside the opening session, and Root's dismissal left them chasing the game early on day two.

Australia maintained the pressure after Root's departure. Nathan Lyon struck twice in the same over to remove Ollie Pope for 3, deepening England's troubles. Harry Brook offered resistance and looked comfortable during his innings, but Cameron Green eventually broke through, dismissing him for 45. By the 36th over, England had slumped to 126 for five, firmly on the back foot. Cummins' influence was all the more notable given his return for the Adelaide Test.

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Joe Burns axed from Italy's maiden T20 World Cup after internal dispute: Report

Joe Burns' shock omission from Italy's T20 World Cup 2026 squad has sparked controversy with the former captain claiming he was pushed out after challenging cricket standards and off-field processes.

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Former Australian Test opener Joe Burns, who played a leading role in the rise of Italian cricket, was sensationaly dropped from the side ahead of their maiden campaign at the T20 World Cup 2026, which left people wondering why such a drastic call was made.

Burns, who has played 23 Tests for Australia, has become the face of Italian cricket with his leadership playing a vital role in their run to the T20 World Cup 2026, which will be held in India and Sri Lanka. On Wednesday, December 17, the Italian Cricket Federation confirmed that Burns would not be a part of their maiden World Cup campaign, and the leadership duties had been passed down to Wayne Madsen instead. In the cricket board's announcement, it was attributed that Burns' availability and contract had not been finalised, resulting in him being dropped from the side. But the situation might be more complex than it may seem. According to a report by The West Australian, an anonymous source revealed the internal talks, which suggested that Burns was pushing to improve his standards, especially off the field. But that was met with a negative response. "In my experience, we needed to address systems, processes, communication and integrity behind the scenes to give us the best chance on the field," Burns wrote to his teammates earlier last month. "Advocacy can be tough, but that's the weight of

responsibility," he added. "Their response was that my standards were above the



negotiations with the Italian board, where he also revealed that he had taken a pay cut to lead the side, as he believed that the leadership role should not be one for profit.

"Bizarrely, the Federation is now saying this is because I didn't agree to the WC (World Cup)/Nov proposal," Burns continued.

"To be clear, I accepted their proposal on three separate occasions, which was for less payment than pre-qualifying. The WC component was to follow MOU terms. I had also previously declined a proposed captain's bonus because I didn't think that role should be profited from. For months, I've wanted to focus on the cricket. I've got pages of notes on roles, strategy and training ideas that I was keen to get stuck into with you all, but the inefficiencies had gone on too long." The Italian team will have a tough run at their maiden World Cup run, with the likes of England, West Indies, Bangladesh and Nepal also slotted in along with them in the group stages, and Burns' international experience could have given them a bit of an edge.

Worst behind us, IndiGo CEO tells staff after days of flight cancellations chaos

New Delhi.(Agency)

IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers has told employees that the "worst is behind us" after the airline grappled with days of widespread flight cancellations, blaming the disruption on a compounding effect of several factors rather than a single failure. In a video message issued after operations stabilised, Elbers said IndiGo had restored its network to around 2,200 flights a day, calling the recovery a testament to teamwork and the airline's operating discipline. "The worst is behind us. As IndiGo employees, we stood tall and united, weathering the storm together, with unwavering support for one another. THANK YOU to our pilots, cabin crew, airport staff, OCC, customer service, and all functions that supported us," Elber said in the video message. Further in his letter, Elbers said he had informed employees on December 9 that operations were stabilising, following which the airline moved to rebuild its schedule. He said the immediate focus would now be on three areas -- resilience, root cause analysis and rebuilding. "What we witnessed seems to be a compounding effect of several factors," he said, while urging employees to stay calm, focus on their responsibilities and avoid engaging in speculation around the causes of the disruption.

He said IndiGo's Board has appointed an external aviation expert to conduct a comprehensive root cause analysis, adding that similar disruptions have affected large airlines in other parts of the world. "While every crisis is unique, lessons from others will also help us strengthen our systems," the letter said. The leadership team, including the CEO, will travel across the network to meet employees, understand the challenges they faced and seek feedback. Elbers said a combination of the root cause analysis and staff inputs would be used to strengthen the airline further.

Stock markets trade lower in early deals tracking weak global trends

MUMBAI.(Agency)

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty edged lower in early trade on Thursday, tracking a weak trend in global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 214.87 points to 84,344.78 in early trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty dipped 56.1 points to 25,762.45.

From the Sensex firms, Sun Pharma, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles, Mahindra & Mahindra, NTPC, Bharat Electronics and Maruti were among the biggest laggards. However, HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra and ITC were among the gainers. In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index quoted lower, while Shanghai's SSE Composite index traded in positive territory.

US markets ended lower on Wednesday.

"Global markets enter today's session on a cautious footing following a sharp overnight sell-off in the US. The S&P 500, Nasdaq, and Dow extended their losing streak as investors booked profits in high-value technology and AI stocks." Investor sentiment also remains cautious ahead of the release of US consumer price inflation data, with divided views in the market over the future trajectory of monetary policy, prompting participants to stay defensive and avoid aggressive positioning," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said. Asian markets opened on a weak note, mirroring the subdued tone on Wall Street after several sessions of sustained selling, he added.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Wednesday as they bought equities worth Rs 1,171.71 crore, according to exchange data.

Ghost malls: 15.5 million sq ft of space deserted; know these facts before investing

Kolkata. (Agency)

Whether for buying or for hangout or even for casual dining, shopping malls has become an extremely popular destination in different cities of India. As a result, numerous malls have opened in every small and big city. However, recent report has uncovered a shocking truth about shopping malls in the top 32 cities of the country. This report by Knight Frank has said that out of a total of 134.1 million square feet of retail space in the country, as much as 15.5 million or 1.55 crore square feet, has now become ghost malls. The message is simple -- these malls have no shops and no activity and are lying deserted like a haunted place.

Warning in the report

The report could be treated as an extremely significant one which shows that in retail real estate, location is not the only important factor. Quality, management and customer experience are perhaps bigger deciders than location. The report also warns that even areas once considered prime locations can become loss-making ventures. Therefore, investors have to become aware of these facts.

What are ghost malls?

According to the report, Ghost Shopping Centers are places where there are no retail or activity centers. These malls have only empty shops. Of the total 15.5 million square feet of ghost space, 11.9 million square feet is in Tier-1 cities, while 3.6 million square feet is in Tier-2 cities. Therefore, it is seen even in metro cities.

These malls in Gurugram

Gurugram is perhaps the shopping mall capital of the country. The report cites the example of MG Road in Gurugram, which was once referred to as the "Mall Mile". Five large shopping centers opened in this one area. As a result, only malls with the best locations and management survived, while the rest gradually lagged behind. The early shopping centers on MG Road are also part of this story. They were once synonymous with Gurugram, but as new and modern retail destinations emerged on CyberHub and Golf Course Road, the attraction of the older malls faded.

How Indian Railways is nearing full electrification of Broad Gauge Network; surpasses UK, Russia, China

Union Minister for Railways, Information & Broadcasting and Electronics & Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw, in a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha mentioned that Indian Railways is nearing full electrification at 99.2% of Broad Gauge Network, Far Ahead of UK (39%), Russia (52%) & China (82%).

New Delhi.(Agency)

In the last one decade, Indian Railways has been working at fast pace to improve its infrastructure, including Electrification of railway network, installing wifi at stations, modernised train coaches, etc. So

far, about 99.2% of Broad Gauge (BG) network has been electrified and the work is going on in remaining network. The Railways has installed free Wi-Fi services at 6117 Railway Stations across the country so far. Notably, no separate funds have been sanctioned by Ministry of Railways on these Wi-Fi services at Railway stations. Union Minister for Railways, Ashwini Vaishnaw, submitted a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha informing about the electrification of railway network. The minister said Railways' achievement in railway electrification stand out globally. According to the latest report of International Union of Railways (UIC) of June, 2025, railway electrification in

important railway systems is as under: In 2023-24, Railway Electrification achieved 7,188 Route kilometer, while in 2024-25 it stood at 2,701 RKM. Further, all new line / multi-tracking projects are being sanctioned and constructed with

electrification. The below-mentioned table shows Zone wise status of electrification: The written reply submitted in the Lower House



mentioned that the existing Broad Gauge network in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Mizoram states of North eastern region have been 100% electrified. CCTVs at Railway stations

The minister replied that the Railway is installing CCTV cameras at several stations and train coaches. "So far, CCTV Surveillance system has been provided at 1731 stations and 11,953 coaches for ensuring safe and secure journey to railway passengers," it stated.

"CCTVs were already installed at New Delhi Railway station to cover outdoor areas like entry/exit points, foot over bridges, platforms etc. and indoor areas like waiting halls, ticket counters etc. However, some new areas were developed at New Delhi station premises after

February 15, 2025 and accordingly additional CCTVs are provided to cover these areas. Presently, 250 Nos of CCTVs are provided at New Delhi Railway station," Ashwini Vaishnaw said in his written reply

India eases visa process for foreign professionals hired by domestic firms

New Delhi.(Agency)

India on Wednesday announced a simplified and streamlined visa process to help Indian companies bring in foreign professionals, including engineers and technical experts, whose services are required for key production-related activities such as machine installation, quality checks, training and plant design.

According to PTI, the streamlined visa process is expected to provide relief to domestic manufacturers that import machinery and specialised equipment from overseas, including from China, and require foreign experts to install, commission and maintain those systems. In recent months, several Indian firms had flagged difficulties in securing visas for Chinese professionals whose technical expertise was critical to ongoing projects. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) said it has rolled out a new online module that allows Indian companies to digitally generate sponsorship letters for inviting foreign professionals under the e-Production Investment Business Visa, also known as the e-B-4 Visa.

ONLINE MODULE LAUNCHED ON NSWS

The digital module was launched on November 29 on the National Single Window System (NSWS). DPIIT said the initiative forms part of a broader set of reforms under the business visa regime aimed at improving the ease of doing business in India. An official said the earlier system for securing visas for foreign experts was cumbersome and time-consuming, often involving multiple layers of approvals. The new mechanism, the official added, is designed to substantially reduce processing time.

As of now, 129 sponsorship letters have already been generated by Indian companies through the platform. Foreign professionals will use these letters to apply for visas and travel to Indian manufacturing facilities to provide their services. The time taken to grant visas will be significantly shorter now," the official said.

Officials stressed that business visitors had been travelling to India earlier as well, but the process has now been made more structured and transparent. "Business visitors were coming to India earlier also but now the visa process has been streamlined and simplified. It is much structured now," the official said. The facility is available to both companies covered under the production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes and firms that are not PLI beneficiaries. The reforms follow a circular issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs in August 2025 to address issues related to employment visas, business visas and the earlier e-PLI business visa.

ICICI Prudential AMC IPO GMP today: What grey market signals ahead of market debut

The IPO allotment was finalised on Wednesday, following heavy demand from institutional investors over the three-day subscription window.

New Delhi.(Agency)

ICICI Prudential Asset Management Company's initial public offering is set to make its stock market debut on Thursday, with investor focus firmly on the expected listing gains after a strong response during the bidding period.

The IPO allotment was finalised on Wednesday, following heavy demand from institutional investors over the three-day subscription window. While retail participation was moderate, strong interest from qualified institutional buyers pushed overall subscription numbers sharply higher. The ICICI Prudential AMC IPO was subscribed 39.17 times. The retail category was subscribed 2.53 times, the non-institutional investor segment saw subscriptions of 22.04 times, while the qualified institutional buyers



category was subscribed a massive 123.87 times, excluding anchor investors. This strong institutional demand has boosted confidence around the listing. Investors who applied for the IPO can check their allotment status on the websites of the registrar, Kfin Technologies, or the BSE. With allotment completed, attention has now shifted to the listing price and potential gains on debut. Grey market trends suggest healthy listing gains. ICICI

Prudential AMC IPO's last reported grey market premium stood at Rs 370, as of December 18 at 7:37 am.

Based on the upper price band of Rs 2165, the estimated listing price is around Rs 2535 per share. This indicates an expected gain of about 17.09% per share. Market participants point out that the rising GMP reflects steady demand for the issue, which received bids for over 1.37 billion shares worth nearly Rs 2,96,927 crore, against an offer size of just over 3.5 crore shares. The IPO was a book-built issue worth Rs 10,602.65 crore and was entirely an offer for sale of 4.90 crore shares. As a result, ICICI Prudential AMC will not receive any fresh funds from the issue. Existing shareholders have reduced their stake through the listing.

Amazon to lay off 370 staff in Luxembourg. What's driving the job cuts

NEW DELHI.(Agency)

Amazon is preparing to lay off 370 employees in Luxembourg in the coming weeks, adding to a wider round of global job cuts announced earlier this year, reported Bloomberg. The decision has raised concerns locally, especially among foreign workers employed by the company.

PART OF A BIGGER GLOBAL PLAN
The Luxembourg layoffs are part of Amazon's plan to reduce its global workforce by around 14,000 jobs. The company says the move is meant to simplify its operations and focus more on priority areas such as artificial intelligence and long-term growth. Meanwhile, Amazon employs about 4,370 people in Luxembourg, and the planned cuts will affect nearly 8.5% of its workforce there. Even after the layoffs, Amazon will remain one of the country's biggest private employers. However, this is the largest round of job losses Luxembourg has seen in more than 20 years, making it a



major event for the local labour market. **JOB CUTS REDUCED AFTER TALKS**
Under European labour laws, companies must hold discussions with employee representatives before making large-scale layoffs. After two weeks of consultations, Amazon reduced the number of planned job cuts from 470 to 370. Employee representatives say most affected staff are likely to receive formal notice in February.

WHAT AMAZON HAS SAID

In a memo sent to employees on December 12, Amazon said the layoffs were based on business needs and local

strategy. The company also claimed that the severance packages being offered are better than standard industry practices. The Luxembourg labour ministry has not yet made a public statement.

FOREIGN WORKERS FACE ADDED PRESSURE

The layoffs are especially worrying for foreign employees who moved to Luxembourg to work at Amazon. Workers from countries such as India, the US, Australia, Egypt and Tunisia now face uncertainty. Under local immigration rules, employees who lose their jobs usually have just three months to find new work if they want to stay in the country. With hundreds of people job-hunting at the same time, this may prove difficult.

UNIONS RAISE CONCERN

Trade unions in Luxembourg have criticised Amazon's decision, noting that the company benefits from favourable tax arrangements in the country.

55,000% rally in Indian AI stock triggers bubble concerns: Report

Investors who applied for the IPO can check their allotment status through the registrar, Kfin Technologies, or the BSE website once the allotment is finalised.

New Delhi.(Agency)

The world's best-performing stock has turned into a warning sign for investors chasing quick gains from the artificial intelligence boom. A little-known Indian company has delivered a stunning 55,000% rise in just under two years, raising serious questions about hype, regulation and investor risk, reported Bloomberg. RRP Semiconductor Ltd, which was largely unknown even within India until recently, has become a social

media sensation after its shares surged more than 55,000% in the 20 months leading up to December 17. Bloomberg reports that this makes it the biggest stock gainer globally among companies with a market value above \$1 billion. The scale of the rally looks even more striking when placed against the company's fundamentals. Bloomberg notes that RRP Semiconductor reported negative revenue in its latest financial results, has just two full-time employees according to its annual report, and only a loose connection to the global semiconductor spending boom.

FROM REAL ESTATE TO SEMICONDUCTORS

The company's transformation began in early 2024. Bloomberg reports that RRP's promoter, Rajendra Chodankar, shifted the company away from real estate and renamed it RRP Semiconductor. Chodankar, whose earlier business interests included thermal imaging systems and drone camera equipment, took control of the listed company by repaying an Rs 80 million

loan owed by G D Trading and Agencies Ltd in exchange for equity.

On April 23, the board approved issuing shares to Chodankar and others at Rs 12 each, around 40% below the market price at the time. This move gave Chodankar a



74.5% stake and reduced the original founders' holding to less than 2%, according to Bloomberg. Around the same time, Chodankar set up a private company, RRP Electronics Pvt Ltd, with plans to build an outsourced semiconductor assembly and testing unit in Maharashtra. While the listed firm does not own this private company, Bloomberg

notes that both are controlled by Chodankar, which may have added to investor excitement.

THE ROLE OF HYPER AND LIMITED FLOAT

Bloomberg points out that the rally was driven by a mix of online hype, a very small free float, and a surge in retail investor participation in India. About 98% of RRP Semiconductor's shares are held by Chodankar and a small group of associates, leaving very little stock available for public trading. This lack of supply helped fuel extreme price moves. The shares reportedly hit 149 straight upper circuit sessions, even as both the company and the stock exchange issued warnings to investors.

"Semiconductors have been really hot and people are willing to buy any name given India has limited stocks to offer," Sonam Srivastava, founder at Wryght Research & Capital, told Bloomberg. She added that cases like RRP show how investors can be drawn into risky trades during periods of market excitement.

Janhvi Kapoor

Masters The Art Of Low-Key Travel And We Are Taking Notes



Skipping the usual flashbulbs and poses, Janhvi Kapoor made a low-key airport exit that still turned heads. Spotted exiting Mumbai airport on Tuesday, the actress kept things refreshingly low-key, choosing comfort and calm over cameras and poses. Janhvi avoided stopping for the paparazzi, but she didn't ignore them either. As the actress walked towards her car parked outside the terminal, she acknowledged the shutterbugs with a quick wave and a wide smile on her face. Dressed in an ivory top paired with relaxed, comfy trousers, Janhvi's travel look struck the perfect balance between chic and practical. The way she carried herself, she looked relaxed and at ease, moving swiftly through the terminal. Janhvi Kapoor is also in the news for a professional high. Her film *Homebound*, directed by Neeraj Ghaywan, has been shortlisted for the 98th Academy Awards in the Best International Feature Film category. Starring Ishaan Khatter, Vishal Jethwa and Janhvi Kapoor, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced the shortlists across 12 categories on Tuesday. In the International Feature Film category, 15 films from around the world have been selected for the next stage. Alongside *Homebound*, the shortlisted titles include Argentina's *Belén*, Brazil's *The Secret Agent*, France's *It Was Just an Accident*, Germany's *Sound of Falling*, Iraq's *The President's Cake*, Japan's *Kokuhō*, Jordan's *All That's Left of You*, Norway's *Sentimental Value*, Palestine's *Palestine 36*, South Korea's *No Other Choice*, Spain's *Sirat*, Switzerland's *Late Shift*, Taiwan's *Left-Handed Girl*, and Tunisia's *The Voice of Hind Rabab*.

Dharma Movies Celebrate Homebound's Achievement

The news of *Homebound* moving a step closer to a potential Oscars 2026 nomination was shared by Dharma Movies on its official social media handle. Sharing the film's poster, the production house wrote, "Homebound has been shortlisted for Best International Feature Film at the 98th Academy Awards. We're deeply grateful for the extraordinary love and support we've received from around the world."

Homebound On Netflix

Homebound, which premiered on Netflix on November 21, has been steadily collecting accolades across international film festivals. The film is produced by Karan Johar, Adar Poonawalla, Apoorva Mehta, and Somen Mishra with Marijke deSouza and Melita Toscan Du Plantier as co-producers. Martin Scorsese and Pravin Khairnar serve as Executive Producers, adding global weight to the project.

'The Awful Producers Didn't...'

Radhika Apte

Wants To Forget First Film *Vaah! Life Ho Toh Aisi!*

Radhika Apte has been in the industry for 2 decades now, and the actress has always proven her versatility through the different types of roles that she has done. Now, as she completes 20 years in the industry, Radhika wants to forget her first film *Vaah! Life Ho Toh Aisi!*, which also starred Shahid Kapoor, Sanjay Dutt, Amrita Rao, and Arshad Warsi, among others.

treated us horribly. Mahesh Manjrekar was a great guy. That's why I like to forget my film because the production was awful! And I say it out loud," Radhika shared.

The actress, who played a supporting role in the film, further continued, and while sharing how she landed the role, said, "I was doing a play called *Brain Surgeon*. It was a good play. We won an award in a state competition. Mahesh Manjrekar was one of the judges. He called me after the play and said, 'I want to cast you.'"

Continuing on why she doesn't count *Vaah! Life Ho Toh Aisi!* as her first film, she said, "Then I didn't do a film for a long time. I finished college, and then I went back to films after a long time. So, I don't really count that as one of the films I did. But yeah, it's been two decades."

Radhika Apte's Upcoming Project

The actor is currently seen in *Saali Mohabbat*, a psychological thriller that premiered on ZEE5 on December 12, 2025. Directed by Tisca Chopra, the film marks the filmmaker's entry into feature direction and has already received acclaim at prominent festivals, including the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) and the Chicago South Asian Film Festival. With its moody, atmospheric tone, *Saali Mohabbat* is being positioned as one of Apte's most compelling performances in recent years.



In a recent interaction with India Express, the actress spoke about how she had an awful experience during her first film and blamed the producer Sangeetha Ahir for the disappointing start to her career. "The awful producers didn't put me up, didn't pay me. When my mother and I asked them to sign a contract, they said, 'Arey, even Urmila Matondkar didn't sign a contract. I don't know if she signed or not,' but they



Telugu Actress Nivetha Thomas Angry Over Her Viral AI Photos: 'Unacceptable And Unlawful'



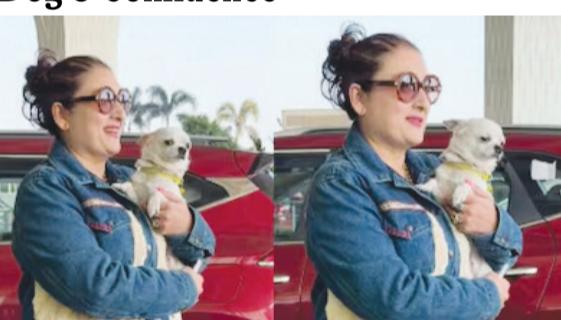
Telugu Actress Nivetha Thomas has expressed disappointment over her viral AI-generated photos. On Wednesday, the actress shared a long note on her X handle and called the circulation of photos "unlawful and unacceptable". She urged everyone to stop sharing those photos and warned of legal action.

"It has come to my attention that AI-generated images misusing my identity and a recent photograph I shared on my social media are being circulated online. The creation and circulation of such content without consent is deeply disturbing, unacceptable, and unlawful. It constitutes digital impersonation and a serious invasion of my privacy," Thomas wrote. "I am putting this on record. Those responsible, including accounts operating behind anonymity, are directed to immediately stop and take down such content. I urge others to recognise the harm in enabling this behaviour. Do not reshare, engage with, or legitimise such material in any form. Any continued circulation will be treated as deliberate misuse of my identity and escalated legally," the Darbar actress added.

Sreeleela Also Slams Misuse Of AI

Earlier today, Sreeleela, who will soon be seen in Nitesh Tiwari's *Ramayana*, also expressed concerns over the misuse of Artificial Intelligence (AI). She took to her Instagram account and penned a lengthy note urging everyone not to misuse AI. She explained that technology is to make human life easy, not to complicate it. "I put my hands together and request every social media user not to support AI-generated nonsense. There is a difference between using and abusing technology. Advancements in technology are meant to simplify life, not complicate it, in my opinion. Every girl out there is a daughter, granddaughter, sister, friend, or colleague, even if she chooses art as one of her professions. We wish to be part of an industry that spreads joy, with the confidence that we are in a protected environment," she wrote.

'Pichle Janam Main Yeh Star Hoga': Sunita Ahuja Talks About Peg Dog's Confidence



After spending weeks in the headlines due to ongoing controversies, Sunita Ahuja is back in the limelight for a refreshingly heartwarming reason. This time, it's not speculation or rumours that have caught attention, but a sweet moment showcasing her unconditional love.

In a recently surfaced video, Sunita Ahuja was spotted at the airport accompanied by the love of her life, her pet dog. The duo instantly grabbed attention as Sunita interacted cheerfully with the paparazzi while posing for cameras. What made the moment even more endearing was how her dog also appeared perfectly comfortable, looking straight into the cameras as if posing alongside her.

Sunita Ahuja's Funny Comment Goes Viral

As the paparazzi clicked pictures, Sunita couldn't help but joke about her pet's star-like confidence. Watching her dog stare into the cameras, she quipped, "Pichle janam me yeh star hogा", a comment that instantly won hearts online and added a playful touch to the moment.

Sunita Ahuja's Bigg Boss 19 Appearance and Bond with Salman Khan

Earlier, Sunita Ahuja had also made headlines for her appearance as a guest on *Bigg Boss 19*. Her warm and friendly rapport with host Salman Khan was widely appreciated by viewers. Following the episode, Sunita addressed questions about potentially working with Salman Khan during her latest YouTube vlog, further sparking curiosity among fans.

Sunita Ahuja Addresses Work Speculations in Her YouTube Vlog

In her vlog, Sunita candidly responded when asked about her future projects and whether she would consider collaborating with Salman Khan. Her openness and candid tone were praised by fans who enjoyed seeing a more personal side of her beyond headlines and rumours.

Sunita Ahuja and Govinda's Marriage: Separation Rumours Explained

Apart from her public appearances, Sunita Ahuja has also been in the news due to rumours surrounding her marriage with Bollywood actor Govinda. Reports in 2025 suggested that Sunita had filed for divorce in late 2024, citing reasons such as adultery, cruelty, and desertion.



Short trips from Mcleodganj and Dharamsala

Wondering what else lies hidden in the Himalayas around Mcleodganj and Dharamsala? If yes, you are in for some surprises for there are a lot of places to visit around Mcleodganj and Dharamsala. Both the towns are surrounded by some famous as well offbeat places, leaving you with plenty to pick from. You can choose from the adventure sport destinations of Bir and Billing, the old-world Dalhousie, the astonishing greens of Khajjiar and Chamba or Barot, a place well-guarded by cedar forests. You can also explore the tea estates of Kangra and Palampur on your way to Barot, Bir and Billing. Darang is another option with nothing much to do other than a stay at a 150 plus years old tea estate. Located on the banks of the Bagmati River, the massive Pashupatinath complex is one of the holiest pilgrimage spots in Nepal. It's best-known for housing a major temple of the Hindu god Shiva, also known as Pashupati. While the present temple was constructed in the 17th century, its history dates back to 400 AD. It has been built in the



pagoda style of architecture, with a two-tiered roof rising above the central shrine. Only Hindus are allowed to enter the

temple premises. The central point of interest is the black four-headed idol of Pashupati, and a golden statue of his bull, Nandi.

Bir and Billing

Bir and Billing, two villages situated at some 60 km from Dharamsala, are perfect for a short trip from the town. The two picturesque villages in the Dhauladhar, now famous as one of the best paragliding spots in Asia, are a break from the more touristy Mcleodganj and Dharamsala. While hiking, camping and paragliding are the most sought after activities here, the place has a spiritual connection as well. Bir and Billing house two Buddhist monasteries - Chokling and the Palpung Sherabling Monastery. Both the monasteries are much revered by Tibetans and Buddhists in the region and are open to visitors. These are perfect for a short trip from Mcleodganj/Dharamsala if you are searching for a more solitary experience. A 3-4 hours drive from Dharamsala will have you in Bir-Billing.

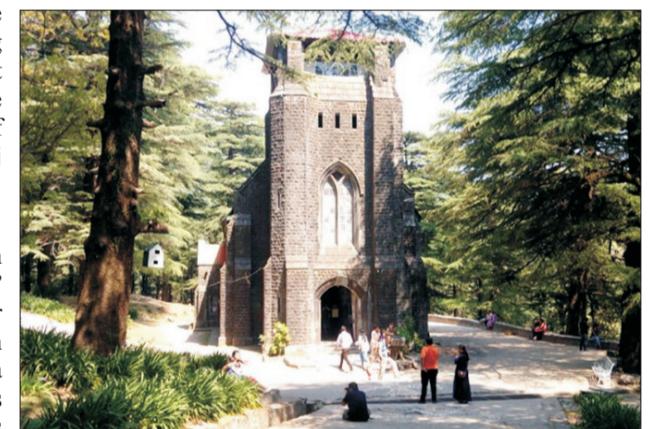
Palampur

Palampur is a short drive (2-3 hours) from

Dharamsala and is one of the best places for the lovers of tranquility. Abundant with tea estates, trekking trails, campsites and quaint monasteries, it sees lesser crowd compared to Dharamsala. While Tashi Jong Monastery is one of the highlights of Palampur, you can also go hiking in the Dhauladhar, set camp in the pine forest around, visit the tea estates, gorge over some homemade thukpa and Tibetan food at one of the eateries around or do nothing other than stargazing. Perfect if you wish to avoid the weekend crowd of Dharamsala and Mcleodganj in summers.

Barot

Visit Barot if you have been scouring for a "do-nothing" place near Mcleodganj/Dharamsala. An idyllic hill town, it lies at a drive of around three hours from Mcleodganj. Barot is



hidden deep in dense cedar forest, often taking visitors by its surprisingly serene location. This charming place is lined with terrace fields and will bowl you over with the calm spread here. Only to be broken by the gushing sounds of some waterfall nearby. A lot of trekking trails in the pine forest, angling spots along Uhl river and a trout farm are some other highlights of Barot. Charming grins of the village people will, of course, woo your heart.

Chamba and Khajjiar

Another one for the lovers of offbeat, Chamba is as stunning as a tiny hamlet in Himachal Pradesh can be. It lies at some 130 km from Mcleodganj/Dharamsala and has a charm that is hard to beat. Explore the ancient temples, wooden forts, the rolling meadows and immerse yourself in the many folk tales that the locals are too happy to recount for anyone who looks keenly interested. Hailed as a land of Gods, Chamba fascinates with its sheer mysticism. Gorge over the famous rajma-chawal in one of the homestays here and head for the neighbouring Khajjiar. Its claim to fame is the title of "Mini Switzerland". A ground that resembles Alpine meadows, with a stream-fed lake in the middle, Khajjiar is a hill-lover's wish come true. You will find plenty of scenes of both Chamba as well as Khajjiar in the critically-acclaimed movie, The Blue Umbrella.

Dalhousie

Dalhousie lies at some 120 km from Mcleodganj. A tiny town that was much fancied by the British, it still retains its old-world charm. Walk along the pine-lined roads in the evening, savour a plate of fresh, steaming momos, buy a pair of mittens or more from the Tibetan market, visit the two churches, trek up to Dain Kund and enjoy a cup of coffee with some vintage books in the church library. If this sounds like a perfect getaway to you, hit the road to Dalhousie from Mcleodganj - a journey that is an enticing as the destination.



Guess what? You can also be a tomb raider!

Not everyone is Angelina Jolie, but then it is not mandatory to be one of the world's top actors to nurture a very niche sense of travelling. To start with, you can go globetrotting and visit some of the most famous tombs across the planet!

All of us have a set of heroes and idols - musicians, actors, athletes, authors, politicians and more - people we want to meet, see and talk to in person. But what if your heroes have bidden farewell to the world before you could catch a glimpse of them? Apart from (or rather than) penning elegies and wishing you could meet them, you can visit their tombs and pay your tribute like a true admirer!

But, in case, you find this idea outlandish and not worthy of a shot, we would like to share with you the fact that the tomb of poet-playwright William Shakespeare is one of the most visited memorials on earth, let alone a forerunner in tomb destinations. The Bard of Avon was laid to rest in the Holy Trinity Church in his hometown of Stratford-on-Avon. Located on the banks of the Avon river in Warwickshire, England, the tomb of the poet supreme bears an epitaph that is believed to be written by the maestro himself. More of a



warning, it reads like this:
Good friend for Jesus sake forbear,
To digg the dust encloas'd heare.
Blesse be the man that spares these stones,
And curst be he that moves my bones.
... So unless you intend to move the playwright's bones, there is no fear in visiting Stratford-on-Avon. When Elvis 'The King' Presley passed away in 1977, his fans found themselves at the end of a road that had no milestone on it, so they decided to make their hero's tombstone one! The Rock and

Roll legend rests in his home Graceland in Memphis, Tennessee. The fact that his tomb is visited by 600,000 people annually is just an indicator that 'tomb tourism' does exist. And if sources are to be believed, this alone brings over \$100 million a year to the city of Memphis!

Courtesy its illustrious founder Napoleon Bonaparte, the Pere-Lachaise cemetery in Paris marks a special territory for itself in the French capital. This place is home to the graves of eminent personalities like Edith Piaf, Max Ernst and Oscar Wilde. But the tomb that attracts maximum visitors is that of rock legend Jim Morrison's. The Lizard King, as he is often referred to as, breathed his last in the city of Paris at the age of 27, leaving a legion of fans that would make him a cult figure in coming decades. Jim Morrison's influence on music and pop culture does not need any testimony and it is obvious that thousands of music lovers flock to his last resting ground not only to offer their homage but also to celebrate Morrison's life as a poet-musician himself observed in an interview:

... People fear death even more than pain. It's strange that they fear death. Life hurts a lot more than death. At the point of death, the pain is over. Yeah, I guess it's a friend.

The same cemetery has the tomb of Irish playwright, novelist, poet Oscar Wilde; the tomb with the curious distinction of being one of the most kissed tombs on earth! Known for his quirky wit and sharp observation, Oscar Wilde now rests under a headstone that is decked with lipstick-covered kisses! While Wilde passed away in 1900, the practice of kissing his tombstone started somewhere in the late 1990s, when someone left a kiss mark on it leading to a flood of red in coming times. In 2011, the cemetery authority placed a glass barrier around the grave which met a similar 'lipstick fate' in no time!

Reggae legend Bob Marley, literally, rules from his grave! Being fans' favourite is one thing, while getting a national holiday on your death anniversary is another level of accomplishment and Bob Marley has both in his kitty! Every year on February 2nd (his death anniversary), thousands of Marley fans gather at a music festival near his grave in his native village of Nine Miles, Jamaica. What else to expect from someone, who was buried with a guitar (either a Les Paul or a Fender Telecaster) and marijuana bud? ROCKSTAR!

Period.

Marilyn Monroe, too, continues to be the benchmark of sensuality even in this age of Irina Shayk and Emily Ratajkowskis. The eternally beautiful actor's sudden death in 1962 took the world by shock and conspiracy theories refuse to die out even today. Buried in Westwood Village Memorial Park Cemetery in Los Angeles, the tomb of this timeless diva is a crowd puller in every sense of the term. What is more intriguing is the rumour that the tomb space directly above hers is reserved for Playboy boss, Hugh Hefner!

... In the year 1993, a martial arts teacher, a student and a 59-years-old former doctor from the Mongolian Olympic wrestling team walked 3700 miles from Mongolia to pay their homage at Bruce Lee's grave in Seattle's Lakeview Cemetery on his 53rd birth anniversary. This is just an indicator of the immense number of visitors to the tomb of the kung-fu legend witnesses every year. The 'Fists of Fury' actor-fighter's life came to an abrupt end, when he passed away at the age of 33 due to 'an allergic reaction to aspirin'. Fans refuse to accept this reason even today and relate his death to some sort of curse that has been associated with the house Bruce Lee was living in.