

## Yogi Adityanath Takes "2 Namoonas" Dig, Akhilesh Yadav Flips The Script

**The Samajwadi Party has repeatedly claimed a power tussle between the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh and the BJP leadership at the Centre.**

**New Delhi .(Agency)**  
Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's "do namoone" jibe, apparently aimed at opposition leaders Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav, has drawn a sharp response from Yadav, who has twisted the Chief Minister's post to suggest that an alleged power tussle within the BJP is out in the open. In a video that has now gone viral, Adityanath is seen speaking in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly. The opposition had tried to corner the state government over the alleged smuggling of Codeine cough syrup in Uttar Pradesh and said that timely action could have saved hundreds of children. The Chief Minister trashed the charge and said not a single child died in Uttar Pradesh due to the consumption of the cough syrup. Without naming anyone, he tells the members of main opposition Samajwadi Party, "There are two



namoonas (specimens), one is in Delhi, and the other in Lucknow. Whenever a discussion takes place in the country, he flees abroad. I think the same is happening with your babua. He would travel to England and you will keep shouting here."

While Adityanath did not name anyone, the

remark was seen as a jab at Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, and Akhilesh Yadav, Samajwadi Party chief, a Lok Sabha MP and Uttar Pradesh's former Chief Minister. Earlier, Adityanath mocked Gandhi, Yadav and RJD's Tejashwi Prasad Yadav as "three monkeys" and called them "Pappu", "Tappu" and "Appu".

Addressing a rally in the run-up to the Bihar polls, he said, "Just as Mahatma Gandhi had three monkeys, today the INDIA alliance brought in three monkeys in the name of Pappu, Tappu, and Appu (Rahul Gandhi, Tejashwi Yadav, and Akhilesh Yadav). Pappu cannot speak the truth or say anything good. Tappu cannot see any truth, and Appu cannot hear the truth," he said.

Yadav has now responded to Adityanath's "do namoone" remark on X and called it a

"confession". "No one thought that the Delhi-Lucknow clash would reach this point. Those on constitutional posts should not cross the line of decorum. The BJP should not bring its infighting into the open," the Kannauj MP said. Interestingly, Yadav shared the post minutes after Adityanath posted a video of his remarks on X.

The Samajwadi Party has repeatedly claimed a power tussle between the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh and the BJP leadership at the Centre.

Those claiming a power struggle between the BJP central leadership and Yogi Adityanath have pointed to the appointment of Deputy Chief Ministers and specific bureaucrats, arguing that these are aimed at limiting the Chief Minister's powers. Adityanath has trashed such claims and said he is in the top post because of the party.

## Seat-Share Deal 'Done', Thackeray Brother's Mumbai Reunion A Step Closer

**The Congress, meanwhile, does not figure in this arrangement at all, a circumstance that some believe underlines tension within the MVA, particularly after the Thackeray brothers reunited.**



**Mumbai.(Agency)**  
The results of local body elections in Maharashtra last week – in which the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance dominated, winning 207 of 288 posts – underlined the size of the challenge facing the opposition, in particular Uddhav Thackeray and Sharad Pawar, as they plot a comeback.

Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena UBT won just nine seats while Eknath Shinde's BJP-allied Shiv Sena won 53, delivering a second consecutive defeat to the former and proving it has pivoted the undivided Sena vote base – at the grassroots level – towards the BJP's Hindutva model.

And then Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party – also a family-run party that split a year after the Sena, with nephew Ajit walking out to ally with the BJP – won only seven seats. The BJP cantered to victory with 117 posts. As in last year's Assembly election, in which Thackeray's Sena and Sharad Pawar's NCP won only 20

and 10 seats, respectively, and lost ground to their 'others'; Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar successfully derailed their former bosses' plans to boost the BJP's overall score. But dig a little deeper and there is another narrative – the BJP has consolidated its position of power, both within the state and, crucially before the Mumbai civic body election, the Mahayuti. Its 117 seats is its best ever showing in Maharashtra municipal elections and, importantly, it has improved its urban vote share – from 11 to 30 per cent, a key jump before the BMC election. Yes, the defeat of the opposition

Maha Vikas Aghadi was only possible with help from Shinde and Ajit Pawar, but the results also indicate the Bharatiya Janata Party seems to have suppressed its 'allies' under its growing stature within the Mahayuti alliance and the state.

Shinde and Ajit Pawar have been useful to the BJP in breaking the Shiv Sena's stranglehold on Marathi politics in general, and in almost completely eliminating the MVA that was, till the time the Sena and NCP were undivided, proving to be a surprisingly strong opposition force. But while the breakaway factions have triumphed over their former colleagues, they have not been allowed to outshine 'big brother', a fact underscored by the ruthlessness with which Shinde was removed as Chief Minister despite leading a stable government in his half-term. And, going forward, senior journalist Ejaz Ahmed pointed out, this sweeping local body elections will expand the BJP's hold on semi-urban and rural areas, strengthening its base before the BMC election and in the build-up.

Reacting to AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge's remarks, Siddaramaiah said Kharge's statement must be accepted. "No one can be bigger than the party," he added. Earlier, Mallikarjun Kharge said the confusion over leadership existed only at the local level and not within the party high command. "The high command has not created any confusion," he said, adding that internal issues should be resolved by local leaders. "If you keep blaming the high command for everything, how will the party function? Whatever happens here should be settled by the local leadership," Kharge said. On the issue of leadership change, the Chief Minister said the decision should be taken by Rahul Gandhi. "Whatever decision he takes, we will abide by it," he said, adding that he had already spoken to the party high command. "They have said they will decide, and we are committed to their decision," he reiterated.

Dismissing continued speculation, Siddaramaiah said the media was discussing leadership change excessively. "What is the need to ask so many questions? After I have already clarified this in the Assembly, there is no need to discuss it again," he said.



Responding to questions on former minister KN Rajanna meeting Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Siddaramaiah said, "Let him meet, DK Shivakumar is the party president – what is wrong in meeting him?" On reports that the Deputy Chief Minister had claimed he made Rajanna the Apex Bank president, the Chief Minister said, "Who did it while in power is not important. There is no such question." He added that SM Krishna was the Chief Minister at the time and that the appointment was done by the government.

## "Peace Will Prevail In Manipur, But It Will Take Time": Mohan Bhagwat

**Bhagwat, who recently visited Manipur, said he had held talks with all tribal and social leaders as well as youth representatives of the state.**

**Kolkata .(Agency)**  
RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat said it would take time to resolve differences among warring sides in ethnic strife-torn Manipur, exuding confidence that peace will ultimately prevail in the northeastern state. Bhagwat, who recently visited Manipur, said he had held talks with all tribal and social leaders as well as youth representatives of the state. He said that the disturbances, mainly law and order problems, are abating slowly and will end within about a year.

"But bridging the minds is a great task, and it will take time," he said, asserting that the only way is to have dialogue and bring the warring sides to "one page". "That can be done, because basically the spirit is already there," the RSS chief said at a programme held here to celebrate the centenary of the Sangh on Sunday.

"We could do it in Arunachal, Meghalaya, we are doing it in Nagaland and other places," he said. Bhagwat said that the RSS has around 100 shakhas in Manipur. Maintaining that peace will ultimately prevail in Manipur, he said, "But definitely it will take time." Asked by one of the participants in the lecture and interaction programme as to why the Sangh is maintaining a distance with the top BJP leadership, the RSS chief said that the Sangh has always maintained a distance with the saffron party.

"We stay very distant from all BJP leaders," he said, hastening to add, "We have always been close to Narendra bhai (PM Modi), Amit bhai (Union Home Minister Shah)." Both the leaders are known to be close to the Sangh, and PM Modi was earlier a pracharak of the organisation. He said such narratives regarding relations between the RSS and the BJP leadership should not be taken into account, maintaining that the Sangh does not hide its relationship with anyone, be it any political outfit.

## Delhi Court Seeks Response From Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi On Plea In National Herald Case

**New Delhi .(Agency)**  
The Delhi High Court on Monday asked Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and others to respond to a plea by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) challenging a trial court order refusing to take cognisance of its chargesheet against them in the National Herald case.

Justice Ravinder Duleja issued notice to the Gandhis and others on the main petition as well as on the ED's application seeking



a stay on the December 16 trial court order, which held that cognisance of the agency's complaint in the case was "impermissible in law" as it was

not founded on an FIR. The high court listed the matter for further hearing on March 12, 2026. While Solicitor General Tushar Mehta represented the ED in the case, senior advocates Abhishek Singhvi and R S Cheema represented the Gandhis.

In its order, the trial court said an investigation and the consequent prosecution complaint (equivalent to chargesheet) pertaining to the

offence of money laundering is "not maintainable" in the absence of an FIR for the offence mentioned in the schedule to the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). It said the agency's probe stemmed from a private complaint and not an FIR.

It said cognisance upon the complaint being liable to be declined on a question of law, other arguments relating to the merits of the allegations are not required to be adjudicated upon.

## Punjab Govt has been making strenuous efforts to raise standard of living of people in Punjab: CM Mann

**The Sikh Times**

SANGRUR, 22nd December: Continuing his campaign to interact with the people at grassroots level to give fillip to the development of the villages, the Punjab Chief Minister Sardar Bhagwant Singh Mann on Monday said that the move is aimed at ensuring world class civic amenities to the villages at par with the cities. Interacting with the people, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann, amidst huge round of applause from the masses, said that the holistic growth of villages was the need of hour to give further impetus to all round development of the state. "The state government is already making all out efforts for ensuring public welfare and giving impetus to development of villages. This gigantic task could not be possible without active support and cooperation of the general public," he added. Striking an emotional chord with the people, the Chief Minister said that the people and their elected representatives should regularly monitor the ongoing development works in the state adding that this will help in quality execution of work. He exhorted people to make sure that concerted efforts of the state government for giving fillip to the development of villages are successful with their assistance and guidance. "The majority of the population of the state live in villages so the state government was committed to ensure unprecedented development in them," he noted. The Chief Minister asserted, "The Punjab government is committed to

provide facilities at par with cities to facilitate people and no stone was being left unturned for this noble cause. The sole



aim of holding such events was to prepare a road map for giving further impetus to ongoing development of the state and especially in the villages." Laying thrust on the comprehensive development of rural areas, he said that the state government has already sanctioned a number of projects for accomplishing this task adding he solicited the support of the general public in strengthening rural infrastructure to further

accelerate the pace of development. Later on interacting with the media persons, CM Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the state government has no dearth of funds for the development of Punjab adding that all the issues like garbage heaps, street light, sewage problems or others will be resolved soon. "In the last four years unprecedented development has taken place across the state as the Punjab government has never complained about any fund shortage. Contrary to the previous regimes which had landed the state in debt trap his government has been repaying the debts," he affirmed. Citing the examples, he said that the state government has bailed out the electricity board, repaid the loans of the sugar mills, Markfed and others. "The Punjab government has been managing many old debts so that past liabilities are cleared, without halting any new development projects. The government has created more than 58,000 jobs, new buildings of the schools have been built, 43,000 kilometres of roads are being constructed as the state government has managed the expenditure with financial prudence," he pointed out. The Chief Minister said that the state government has been making strenuous efforts for raising the standard of life in Punjab adding that earlier no one had ever heard that the students from state are becoming pilots. However, he said that now the state government has bought seven planes for imparting this world class training to the students so that they can get into high-level jobs now.

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## News box

**Haryana horror: 17-year-old gang-raped in fields; accused threaten to circulate video on social media****Gurgaon.(Agency)**

A 17-year-old girl was allegedly gang-raped through the night by three men from her own village who lured her into the fields in Nuh. The accused, all known to the girl from before, allegedly threatened to circulate videos of the incident online if she spoke out, leaving her in fear and isolation.

According to an FIR filed at Sadar Tauru police station on Saturday, the three men -identified as Waseem, Afroz, and another Waseem - allegedly coerced the girl into maintaining contact with them over several months. Her father told police that the accused had given her a mobile phone and pressured her to stay in touch, warning that any attempt to break contact would result in the release of compromising videos recorded months earlier.

On Friday night, one of the accused allegedly called the girl under the threat of damaging her family's reputation. She was taken to a tubewell in the middle of fields on the outskirts of the village, where they allegedly took turns to assault her sexually. When the girl did not return home after a couple of hours, her family started to look for her through the night, but to no avail. "It was around 11 the next morning that the girl returned home and recounted her ordeal. There are allegations that the families of the accused threatened the girl and her father," an official said. A case was registered under relevant sections of the PoCo Act and the BNS, involving charges of aggravated sexual assault, criminal intimidation, and wrongful confinement.

**Man rapes and impregnates Gurgaon teen, arrested****Gurgaon.(Agency)**

A 34-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly raping a 15-year-old girl, a case that came to light after the girl delivered a child at the Civil Hospital in Sector 10 earlier this week. According to police, the accused, Rajesh Kumar of UP's Ayodhya, earlier lived in the same locality as the girl. He allegedly sexually assaulted the Class 7 student girl multiple times between Dec 2024 and Feb this year, and threatened her with serious consequences if she disclosed the abuse.

The case came to light on Tuesday when the girl complained of severe abdominal pain. Her parents rushed her to the hospital, where doctors discovered she was pregnant and in labour. She delivered a baby boy the same day, following which hospital authorities alerted the police. Based on a complaint filed by the girl's father, police registered a case under Section 6 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act at Sector 10 police station. Police said the accused is married and employed at a private firm. He had vacated his rented accommodation in Kadipur and fled to Delhi's Sangam Vihar in Feb, but was traced and arrested on Thursday. He was produced before a court on Friday and remanded to judicial custody. A police officer said the accused had repeatedly threatened the minor, leaving her too frightened to confide in anyone. "Despite being pregnant, she continued attending school and was unaware of her condition until she went into labour," the officer said.

**All sewer lines laid Villagers contest Greater Noida Authority's claims****Noida.(Agency)**

Villagers in Greater Noida have refuted the Authority's (GNIDA) claim, presented before the National Green Tribunal, that they are reluctant to take sewer connections. They argued that basic infrastructure is inadequate, leading to choked drains and overflow of sludge. While GNIDA asserted that 100% sewer lines are completed in 46 of 115 villages, villagers claimed that connectivity is lacking. The Authority said that out of 115 villages in its area, 100% households were provided with sewer connections in 25 villages. Sewer lines are now ready in 21 more villages, taking the total number to 46.

According to the affidavit submitted by the Authority on Feb 5 earlier this year, of the remaining 69 villages, 16 were supposed to be connected with sewer lines by Aug, while 22 villages are expected to be connected by the end of 2026 and the remaining 31 villages by the end of 2027. Villagers claim that the ground reality is quite different. Aadesh Bhadana of Nawada, a village claimed to have 100% of households connected with sewer lines, said that no villager is reluctant to get a sewer connection. "Those who got their households connected are experiencing backflow of sewage as the lines were never tried for proper operation," he said.

Similarly, Ravi Kumar of Vaidpura said that wastewater in their village flows into the low-lying areas and ponds through age-old drains in the village. "We have been writing to the authority and even the CM portal for redressal of our grievance, but no one pays heed," he said. The 25 villages where GNIDA claims to have achieved 100% household sewer connections include Aichher, Jaitpur-Vaishpur, Kyampur, Tugalpur, Brahmupur Gajrola urf Nawada, Bironda, Birondi Tajpur, Gurjarpur, Namoli, Rampur Jagir, Behumpur, Birondi Chakrasenpur, Chuhadpur Khadar, Dabri, Jalpur, Junpat, Malakpur, Mubarakpur, Mathuraapur, Nawada, Raipur Banger, Sakipur, Derin Chauganpur, Luksar, and Naton ki Mandaiya. Keshav Choudhary of Chhipiyana said that sewer lines have not yet been laid in their village. "The authority made very wide drains on the periphery of the village, but there are no sewer lines yet, and in the absence of village drains being connected to the wide drains, we continue to face filth and dirty water flowing on the village roads," he said.

**Gurgaon.(Agency)**

Passive building design, greener materials, efficient cooling systems and district cooling networks — these are part of a long-term strategy to tackle rising heat stress and surging air-conditioning demand in the city. Gurgaon, whose cooling demand and emissions will spike sharply by 2050, has released its first 'Cooling Action Plan'. The plan, commissioned by GMDA, focuses on green roofs combined with floor cooling systems along with reducing air leakage, among other measures. "The cooling action plan demonstrates that passive design, tighter building envelopes and targeted interventions such as green roofs and district cooling can reduce cooling energy use by up to two-thirds in some building types," says Anindya Bhattacharya, executive director of Celestial Earth, which has prepared the action plan, the same firm that earlier drafted Gurgaon's Net Zero Emissions Roadmap. Officials said the overlap is deliberate, with cooling identified as a

major future driver of electricity demand and emissions in the city". The two plans are designed to work in tandem, ensuring that rising cooling needs do not derail the city's long-term climate targets. Bhattacharya added "Our assessment shows that if Gurgaon continues on a business-as-usual path, rising heat and unchecked air-conditioning growth will significantly increase energy demand and emissions by 2050." "With this plan, all civic agencies — including HSIIDC, MCG and the town and country planning department — need to come together for implementation.

The use of treated water must be scaled up, greenhouse gas emissions controlled and future development aligned with climate goals," said conservator of forests, south Haryana, Subhash Yadav, who had commissioned the plan when he was in GMDA as its additional CEO. For a city dominated by glass-heavy commercial towers and dense residential clusters, the blueprint — built on a detailed, data-led

assessment — projects that targeted measures could cut cooling energy use by as much as 68% in some building types compared to a business-as-usual trajectory. It positions cooling as an urban resilience issue, not a lifestyle add-on. To put things in perspective,

For 2023, Gurgaon's total cooling demand is estimated at 48.5 million gigajoule (GJ), with associated emissions of 7,035 ktCO<sub>2</sub> and a per capita cooling demand of 23.7 GJ. What sets the plan apart is its methodology. Instead of relying on assumed floor-area norms, it uses a machine-learning-based tool called SPIBEAT to calculate real building volumes across three representative sectors: Sector 52A (residential), Sector 112 (mixed-use) and Sector 16 (commercial). The result is an unusually precise baseline for an Indian city.

Under the 2050 business-as-usual scenario, the plan flags hotter summers, intensifying urban heat islands and a steep rise in cooling loads across

residential and commercial buildings. Population growth, high-rise development and rising incomes are expected to push AC penetration deeper, driving electricity demand and emissions disproportionately higher. The modelling shows that not all interventions deliver equal results.

Tightening building envelopes (well-sealed barriers such as walls, roof, foundation, windows, doors) emerges as the most effective lever. Measures such as reducing air leakage, improving insulation and shifting to triple glazing can cut cooling demand and energy use by up to 68% in residential and mixed-use buildings by 2050, with emissions falling by around 65% in the most ambitious scenarios. Green roofs combined with floor cooling systems also perform strongly, reducing cooling demand by 53% in high-income residential buildings and by 16-18% in mixed-use and commercial areas. Emissions drop by as much as 63% in residential zones under these configurations.

**Minimum temperature rises by 5°C, but dense fog cover set to engulf Gurgaon in Christmas week****Gurgaon.(Agency)**

Temperatures saw a slight increase on Sunday, with the minimum recorded at 11.7°C — 5.3 degrees higher than the previous day, and the maximum at 15.7°C, up by 2.2 degrees. However, fog continued to impact early morning conditions across the city.

Christmas week is anticipated to be shrouded in a thick fog, with large areas of the state experiencing dense to very dense fog and cold-day conditions at isolated locations, according to IMD. Despite the dry weather, visibility remains a concern. According to the district-wise forecast from IMD, dense fog will persist at isolated spots on Dec 22, intensifying to dense to very dense fog between Dec 23 and 27. On Sunday, dense fog was reported in several areas, including Gurgaon, Yamunanagar, Karnal, Jhajjar, Faridabad, Rohtak, Sonipat, and Panipat. Cold day-like conditions were also recorded at isolated locations in Gurgaon, Yamunanagar, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Karnal, Jhajjar, Mewat, Palwal, Faridabad, Rohtak, Sonipat, and Panipat.

For Dec 22, moderate fog is likely at many places, with dense fog at isolated locations during the morning. Winds are expected to shift from west to northwest and increase to around 15kmph by afternoon, which may improve dispersion slightly. However, ventilation levels are still forecast to remain low. Marginally better dispersion conditions are expected on Dec 23 and Dec 24 as wind speeds increase further, but air quality is likely to remain in the 'very poor' category.

Dense to very dense fog conditions are likely to prevail at isolated places across Haryana over the next several days, particularly during late night and early morning hours. Cold-day conditions may continue at a few locations, and visibility is expected to remain poor along highways," said an IMD official, advising commuters to exercise caution

**Gurgaon chokes on 'very poor' AQI for third day in a row****Gurgaon.(Agency)**

The city's air quality remained in the 'very poor' category for the third consecutive day on Sunday, with the average air quality index (AQI) recorded at 328, according to official pollution data. This follows an AQI of 322 on Dec 19 and a sharp rise to 362 on Dec 20. Station-wise data also showed high pollution levels at monitoring locations. Sector 51 recorded the worst air quality with an AQI of 345, followed by Teri Gram at 337 and Gwal Pahari at 314, all falling in the 'very poor' category. Readings at Vikas Sadan were not available due to insufficient data.

Monthly trends show that the city largely remained in the 'poor' to 'very poor' range throughout Dec. AQI levels crossed the 300 mark on several days, including Dec 6, Dec 13, Dec 15, Dec 16, Dec 19 and Dec 20. Brief improvement was recorded on Dec 9 and Dec 18, when AQI levels dipped to 260 and 276, respectively.

Doctors have warned that prolonged exposure to such pollution levels can have serious health effects. "PM2.5 particles are extremely fine and dangerous because

of their size. They can travel deep into the lungs and even enter the bloodstream," said Dr Kuldeep Kumar Grover, head of critical care and pulmonology at CK Birla Hospital, Gurgaon. "Once inside the body, they cause inflammation and can damage multiple organs," he added.

According to Dr Grover, long-term exposure to high PM2.5 levels increases the risk of respiratory conditions such as asthma, chronic bronchitis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Lung function may decline over time, particularly in children, elderly people and those with existing health conditions. He added that PM2.5 weakens the lungs' natural defence mechanisms, making people more prone to repeated respiratory infections, including pneumonia.

Health experts said the impact is not limited to the lungs. Once PM2.5 enters the bloodstream, it can affect the heart and blood vessels, increasing the risk of heart disease, strokes, high blood pressure and irregular heart rhythms. In many cases, the effects develop gradually and are noticed only after repeated illness or

persistent breathing problems.

Unfavourable weather conditions are expected to continue restricting the dispersal of pollutants across the Delhi-NCR region. According to Decision Support System (DSS) for air quality, Dec 21 is likely to see a partly cloudy sky with mist or shallow fog during the evening and night. Light east to east-southeast winds of up to 10kmph and cold day conditions at isolated places are also forecast. The predicted mixing depth is around 700m, with a low ventilation index of 500 m<sup>2</sup>/s, which is considered unfavourable for pollutant dispersion.

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**Noida man lured to invest Rs 82 lakh in fake IPOs, loses all his savings****Noida.(Agency)**

A city resident lost nearly Rs 82 lakh after being lured into an investment scam that began with a simple WhatsApp group invitation.

The victim, who was tricked into making multiple payments between Oct and Dec, was promised lucrative returns in IPOs but ended up losing all his savings. According to a complaint filed with Cyber Crime police, the victim was added to a WhatsApp group on Oct 29 by fraudsters claiming to represent 'Anand Rathi Wealth Management'. Calling themselves genuine investment advisers, the fraudsters convinced him to invest in IPOs of reputed companies. Trusting their credentials, the complainant began



transferring money into multiple bank accounts provided by the group, with amounts ranging from Rs 10,000 to as much as Rs 10 lakh.

The cyber cons maintained the illusion by regularly sharing fake profit statements,

which encouraged the victim to invest larger sums. In a desperate bid to increase his investments, the complainant even took loans from various banks. The deception continued until he attempted to withdraw some of his purported profits. At this point, the scamsters demanded Rs 60.8 lakh as commission and a further Rs 91 lakh in taxes.

The victim managed to pay Rs 20 lakh, but as the demands kept escalating, he realised he had been cheated.

In total, the complainant reported a loss of Rs 81.8 lakh, naming one of the suspected fraudsters as Ganesh Mangalam in the FIR. Police have registered a cheating case under sections 318(2) and 319(4) of the BNS, as well as Section 66D of the IT Act.

**Sewer lines being cleaned for a month, muck on road raises a stink in Abhay Khand****Noida.(Agency)**

Residents of HIG Colony in Abhay Khand, Ghaziabad, have raised concerns over prolonged problems with the main sewer line and disruption of the drinking water supply. The sewer line, servicing houses 77 to 148, located behind the Abhay Khand police station, is being cleaned for nearly a month, leaving silt and debris on roads and causing a foul odour. Despite repeated complaints, there has been no redressal.

The RWA president CP Singh brought the matter to the attention of local authorities and councillors, highlighting the dire need for immediate intervention. He said that in addition to the sewer issues, during the recent repair work, an earthmover mistakenly severed the drinking water line, leaving the entire community without a proper water supply since Dec 12. "Instead of solutions, we have been labelled as 'professional complainants'. The city is drowning in dirty water due to corruption and



negligence in the sewer system, while those who raise concerns are treated dismissively," said Meena Bhandari, a resident of Abhay Khand HIG Flats. Bhandari further pointed out the irony of the municipal corporation's zonal office, which suffers from the same hygiene issues residents face.

"If the very office responsible for maintaining cleanliness is chaotic and filled with dirty water, what can we expect for the rest of the city?" she questioned. Another resident, Anand Pandey from Anupam Apartment in Ward 79, said that damaged trees due to a broken drain are

being uprooted by sewer water, adding to the already challenging circumstances. Residents call for accountability and action from public representatives on the matter. "We urge all to take a stand against the negligence that has left the community suffering. The residents of Abhay Khand

are determined to draw attention to this plight and demand action," said Singh.

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# KIT Nanhni Pari's Silver Flight

## Achyuta Samanta

The Bhagavad Gita speaks of four paths to spiritual fulfilment: Karma Yoga (the path of action), Jnana Yoga (the path of knowledge), Bhakti Yoga (the path of devotion), and Raja Yoga (the path of meditation). I have always believed myself to be a Karma Yogi, finding purpose through selfless action and service. My professional journey has traversed multiple domains—education, healthcare, tribal empowerment, sports, media, art, cinema, literature, and spiritualism. Each area of contribution has underlined a fundamental truth that genuine transformation occurs when we move beyond celebrating past achievements and remain focused on emerging possibilities. I have dedicated myself to community outreach initiatives like Art of Giving, Kanya Kiran, Kalinga Fellowship, India Against Negativity, Education for All, New Minds New Dreams, Health Empowerment of Rural Odisha, and KIIT Kares, besides my regular work.

Among my various endeavors, KIIT Nanhni Pari holds particular significance as the oldest continuous program. Twenty-five years ago, social worker Mr. Malay Mohapatra approached me with a compelling vision to create a platform where adolescent girls could explore their inherent capabilities. The ancient Sanskrit text Manusmriti articulates a profound principle: "Yatra yastu pujyante

ramante tatra devata," meaning where women



receive honor, divinity manifests. With zero registration fees and complete institutional support

for transportation, lodging, meals, and profes-

ground, could recognize her legitimate place in this forum. Thus began Nanhni Pari, and the rest is history.

Today, KIIT Nanhni Pari functions as India's most comprehensive talent platform for girls aged 13 to 16. Over 15,000 participants have engaged with the program across 25 years, with over 5,000 registrations received this year alone. This Silver Jubilee edition to be held on December 22-23, brings together 35 finalists from auditions conducted in 25 cities nationwide, with the Grand Finale extending across three days in Bhubaneswar under complete institutional sponsorship. However, quantitative measures represent only partial outcomes. Ms. Snigdha Malviya, our

2023 winner from Uttar Pradesh, articulates how Nanhni Pari fundamentally altered her self-perception, while Ms. Dilishaa Behera, crowned in 2024, discovered previously unrecognized capacities within herself. What distinguishes KIIT Nanhni Pari from comparable initiatives is our fundamental rejection of reductionist approaches to young women's assessment. Our ten categories acknowledge diverse forms of excellence: Miss Whizkid recognizes intellectual achievement, Miss Active celebrates athletic capability, Miss Urvashi honors multifaceted talent, and Miss Personality rewards cognitive acuity and communication proficiency. Each category deliberately communicates that individual worth transcends

singular metrics of evaluation. The financial commitment reflects our institutional priorities, with this year's prize pool totalling Rs 56 lakhs, unprecedented in our history. The winner receives Rs 28 lakhs, while the first and second runners-up receive Rs 14 lakhs and Rs 12 lakhs respectively. Each category winner receives Rs 20,000.

KIIT Nanhni Pari integrates with our broader developmental framework, including programs such as Kanya Kiran and Kalinga Fellowship. Societies are measured not by the monuments we build but by the confidence we instill in our daughters. Over the years, KIIT Nanhni Pari has demonstrated that when young women receive resources, recog-

nition, and belief, they redefine what success means. When a thirteen-year-old girl from a remote district walks onto the stage, she carries with her the dreams of countless women who came before her and the possibilities of generations yet to come. I believe every girl arrives with wings; society's responsibility is not to grant flight but to remove the weights that prevent it. KIIT Nanhni Pari does not shape exceptional young women; it reveals the light they have always carried. India's daughters were never powerless - they only awaited belief. KIIT Nanhni Pari and I dare to offer that belief.

The writer is the Founder of KIIT, KISS & KIMS

## Stabbed outside school, Delhi boy reaches police station with knife lodged in chest

New Delhi: Three minors have been apprehended for allegedly stabbing a 15-year-old boy outside his school in central Delhi's Paharganj area, police said on Saturday. The incident took place on September 4, when the injured boy reached the Paharganj police station with a knife lodged in his chest, police said in an official statement. He was rushed to Kalawati Saran Hospital and later referred to RML Hospital, where doctors successfully removed the knife from his chest, they said. Preliminary inquiry revealed that about 10-15 days ago, one of the accused minors was beaten by some boys and he suspected the victim of having instigated the assault. To take revenge, the boy and his two associates confronted the victim near his school gate and stabbed him, according to police. "One of the minors stabbed him with a knife while his associates restrained him.

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## NEWS BOX

## Pakistan's Asim Munir conferred with Saudi Arabia's highest civilian honour

ISLAMABAD. (Agency)

Pakistan's Chief of Defence Forces, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, has been awarded Saudi Arabia's highest civilian honour, the King Abdulaziz Medal of Excellence. Munir is currently on an official visit to the Kingdom.

"Under a Royal Decree issued by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the King Abdulaziz Medal of Excellent Class, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's highest national honour was also conferred upon the Field Marshal," the army said on Monday. The Saudi leadership conveyed its appreciation for Field Marshal Asim Munir's professionalism and strategic outlook, noting his commitment to strengthening the longstanding, brotherly ties between the two countries.

Field Marshal Munir expressed gratitude to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the Saudi leadership for the honour, describing it as a reflection of the enduring bonds between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. He reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to the security, stability, and prosperity of the Kingdom.

Munir also called on Prince Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Minister of Defence of Saudi Arabia, during his official visit to the Kingdom.

During the meeting, both sides held discussions on matters of mutual interest, including regional security dynamics, defence and military cooperation, strategic collaboration, and evolving geopolitical challenges.

## Teacher Hides Student's Death With 'Transfer' Lie, Asks Kids To Write Farewell Letters

WORLD. (Agency)

"We all miss you" - This is the message farewell letters handwritten by primary school students in China for their classmate, whom they no longer meet, carry. The teacher says he has moved to another school. It is a gentle lie to protect children from a harsh truth - their friend is dead.

A third-grade student in Tianjia'an District, Huainan, in China's Anhui Province, died of an illness, leaving his homeroom teacher, who had taught him for two years, in tears. The teacher remembered him as someone who would always gather around her after class, sharing smiles and fun stories, the South China Morning Post reported. "The child's final moments were painless. Fearing that the child would be frightened, we did not choose to bring him back from Shanghai by ambulance. The family was together; the father drove, and the child passed away in the mother's arms. The final moments were happy, with a smile on his face," the teacher wrote in a post on social media. Heartbroken, the teacher decided to shield her other students from this devastating news and told them that the student had to transfer schools. The teacher asked students to write a letter to their friend who has moved out. You always answered questions in class and played games with us afterwards," wrote a kid. "Since you transferred, we all miss you. If you are lonely or sad at your new school, just read this letter. We will always remember you." Another kid suggested the boy carry their letters, hoping it brings him some warmth, reported sanqin.com.

## Bangladesh Student Leader Shot In Head As Violence Spirals Ahead Of Polls

WORLD. (Agency)

Amid violence over the killing of Inqilab Manch spokesperson Usman Hadi, Bangladesh witnessed another high-profile shootout after unknown gunmen attacked a senior leader of the student-led National Citizen Party (NCP). Muhammad Motaleb Sikdar, a central figure in NCP's labour organisation, was shot in the head in Khulna, according to Bangladeshi media reports. The incident occurred around 11:45 am on Monday at a house in the Sonadanga area of the city, the Bangladeshi daily Prothom Alo reported.

Saif Nawaz, an organiser of the NCP's Khulna metropolitan unit, told the publication that Sikdar is a central organiser and the Khulna divisional convener of the NCP's labour wing, Jatiya Sramik Shakti.

He was working on organising a divisional labour rally for the party in Khulna, which was scheduled to take place soon, when the attack occurred. Sikdar received a gunshot wound to the left side of his head and is receiving treatment at a hospital, the report said. Animesh Mandal, the Inspector (Investigation) of Sonadanga Police Station, confirmed the development and said that Sikdar was rushed to Khulna Medical College Hospital after being shot. From there, he was taken to City Diagnostic Center for a CT scan of his head. Political Violence in Bangladesh witnessed violent protests across the nation last week after the death of radical leader Sharif Osman Hadi. A polarising figure known for his strong anti-India rhetoric, Hadi, 32, gained prominence during Bangladesh's 2024 student uprising, which led to the ouster of former premier Sheikh Hasina. Hadi was shot by masked assailants on December 12 while leaving campaigning for upcoming polls in Dhaka. He was airlifted to a hospital in Singapore for treatment, where he succumbed to his injuries on December 18. Bangladesh is set to hold its elections in February 2026, with political tensions running high. As the polls draw closer, violence has intensified across the country, with reports of violent protests and attacks on Hindu minorities. Bangladesh is set to hold its elections in February 2026, with political tensions running high. As the polls draw closer, violence has intensified across the country, with reports of violent protests and attacks on Hindu minorities.

## The new vessel is planned to be ready in 2038, replacing the aging Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier, which came into service in 2001.

PARIS. (Agency)

France will build a new aircraft carrier with a capacity for 30 fighter jets and 2,000 sailors, French President Emmanuel Macron announced Sunday in what he described as "the display of our nation's power in the service of freedom on the seas and amid the turbulence of our times."

"In an age of predators, we must be strong in order to be feared, and especially strong at sea. This is why, in line with the last two military programming laws, and after a thorough and careful review, I have decided to equip France with a new aircraft

carrier. The decision to launch the construction of this very large-scale program was taken this week," Macron told French troops stationed in Abu Dhabi.

The new vessel is planned to be ready in 2038, replacing the aging Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier, which came into service in 2001. It will have a displacement of about 78,000 tons and a length of 310 meters (1,017 feet), compared to 42,000 tons and 261 meters (856 feet) for the Charles de Gaulle. The new carrier would still be smaller than the USS Gerald Ford aircraft carrier, the largest warship in the world, which has a displacement of more than 100,000 tons and measures 1,100 feet (334 meters). Like its predecessor, France's new aircraft carrier will be nuclear-powered and equipped with French Rafale M fighter jets. Macron said the project will benefit hundreds of suppliers, most of them small-



and medium-sized businesses.

"I will personally guarantee this commitment in support of our companies, and I will visit the shipyard next February to meet them," he said.

The new carrier will be able to engage in heavily armed, long-range deployments at short notice, repeatedly and for extended

periods of time, the French defense ministry said on its website.

In 2023, the cost of a new aircraft carrier was estimated at about 10 billion euros (\$11.7 billion) by Sébastien Lecornu, defense minister at the time and now French prime minister. Macron has announced 6.5 billion euros (\$7.6 billion) in extra military spending in the next two years. He said France will aim to spend 64 billion euros on defense in 2027, the last year of his second term, double the

level of 32 billion euros when he became president in 2017. France's military currently comprises around 200,000 active personnel and over 40,000 reservists, making it the second-largest in the European Union, just behind Poland. France wants to increase the number of reservists to 80,000 by 2030.

## Russian general killed by bomb under his car in Moscow

MOSCOW. (Agency)

A Russian general was killed Monday morning after an explosive device detonated underneath his car in southern Moscow, investigators said.

Lt. Gen. Fanil Sarvarov, head of the Operational Training Directorate of the Russian Armed Forces' General Staff, died from his injuries, Svetlana Petrenko, official spokesperson for Russia's Investigative Committee, said. "Investigators are pursuing numerous lines of enquiry regarding the murder. One of these is that the crime was orchestrated by Ukrainian intelligence services," Petrenko said.

Russian news outlets reported that a car exploded in a parking lot on Moscow's Yaseneva Street with the driver inside at approximately 7 am. Ukraine's security service claimed responsibility for a similar attack against a high-



ranking Russian soldier in December 2024. Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, the chief of the military's nuclear, biological and chemical protection forces, was killed

by a bomb hidden on an electric scooter outside his apartment building a day after Kyiv leveled criminal charges against him.

## Gunmen release Catholic schoolchildren abducted last month in Nigeria

### Gunmen seized at least 303 schoolchildren and 12 teachers in Nigeria's north-central Niger state when they attacked St. Mary's Catholic School in the Papiri community on Nov. 21.

ABUJA, Nigeria. (Agency)

Some 130 schoolchildren and staff abducted from a Nigerian Catholic school last month by gunmen have been released, police said Sunday.

Gunmen seized at least 303 schoolchildren and 12 teachers in Nigeria's north-central Niger state when they attacked St. Mary's Catholic School in the Papiri community on Nov. 21. Fifty escaped in the hours that followed and 100 schoolchildren were freed earlier this

month. Niger State police spokesperson Wasiu Abiodun said in a statement that "the remaining batch of the abducted students" has now been released. "A total number of 130 victims including the staff have been

released," Abiodun said. When asked about the 35 unaccounted for schoolchildren and missing teachers, Abiodun told The Associated Press: "Further details will be communicated." Presidential spokesperson Bayo Onanuga said in a post on X that the "remaining 130 schoolchildren abducted" have been released. He said the released schoolchildren would arrive in Minna, the Niger state capital, on Monday and rejoin their parents for Christmas.

"The freedom of the schoolchildren followed a military intelligence driven operation," Onanuga said. Sunday Dare, another spokesperson for Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu also said 130 schoolchildren were released and that none are left in captivity, in a post on X. No group has claimed responsibility for the Nov. 21 abduction, but locals blamed armed gangs that target schools and travelers in kidnappings for ransoms across Nigeria's conflict-battered north. The Niger state attack was among a spate of recent mass abductions in Nigeria, and happened four days after 25 schoolchildren were seized in similar circumstances in neighboring Kebbi state's Maga town. A church in southern Kwara state was also attacked around the same time and the 38 worshippers abducted in that attack last month were freed. Bola Tinubu had been under pressure at home and from US President Donald Trump, who has alleged that Christians are being targeted in Nigeria's security crisis.

Nigerian authorities usually do not say much about rescue efforts and arrests in such cases are rare.

## Starlink in the crosshairs: How Russia could attack Elon Musk's conquering of space

world. (Agency)

Two NATO-nation intelligence services suspect Russia is developing a new anti-satellite weapon to target Elon Musk's Starlink constellation with destructive orbiting clouds of shrapnel, with the aim of reining in Western space superiority that has helped Ukraine on the battlefield.

Intelligence findings seen by The Associated Press say the so-called "zone-effect" weapon would seek to flood Starlink orbits with hundreds of thousands of high-density pellets, potentially disabling multiple satellites at once but also risking catastrophic collateral damage to other orbiting systems.

Analysts who haven't seen the findings say they doubt such a weapon could work without causing uncontrollable chaos in space for companies and countries, including Russia and its ally China, that rely on thousands of orbiting satellites for communications, defense and other vital needs. Such repercussions, including risks to its own space systems, could steer Moscow away from deploying or using such a weapon, analysts said. "I don't buy it. Like, I really don't," said Victoria Samson, a space-security specialist at the Secure World Foundation who leads the Colorado-based nongovernmental organization's annual study of anti-satellite systems. "I would be very surprised, frankly, if they were to do something like that."

But the commander of the Canadian military's Space Division, Brig. Gen. Christopher Horner, said such Russian work cannot be ruled out in light of previous U.S. allegations that Russia also has been pursuing an indiscriminate nuclear, space-based weapon.

"I can't say I've been briefed on that type of system. But it's not implausible," he said. "If the reporting on the nuclear weapons system is accurate and that they're willing to develop that and willing to go to that end, well it wouldn't strike me as shocking that something just short of that, but equally damaging, is within their wheelhouse of development."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov didn't respond to messages from the AP seeking comment. Russia has previously called for United Nations efforts to stop the orbital deployment of weapons and President Vladimir Putin has said Moscow has no intention of deploying nuclear space weapons. Weapon would have multiple targets.

The intelligence findings were shown to the AP on condition that the services involved were not identified and the news organization was not able to independently verify the findings' conclusions.

The U.S. Space Force didn't respond to e-mailed questions. The French military's Space Command said in a statement to the AP that it could not comment on the findings but said.

## Southeast Asian ministers meet in Malaysia to address Thailand-Cambodia border conflict

KUALA LUMPUR. (Agency)

Southeast Asian foreign ministers met Monday in Malaysia for crisis talks aimed at halting deadly border clashes between Thailand and Cambodia, which pressed on despite regional and international diplomacy. Renewed fighting this month has killed at least 22 people in Thailand and 19 in Cambodia, and displaced more than 900,000 on both sides, officials said.

Malaysia, which chairs the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), expressed hope the talks in Kuala Lumpur would help achieve a lasting ceasefire between the two countries, both bloc members. Speaking at the start of Monday's meeting, Malaysia's Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan urged the feuding neighbours and other ASEAN representatives to "give this matter our most urgent attention." "We must consider the wider ramifications of the continued escalation of the situation for the people we serve," Mohamad said. Last week, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said ASEAN's duty "is to present the facts, but more importantly, to press upon them

(Thailand and Cambodia) that it is imperative for them to secure peace."

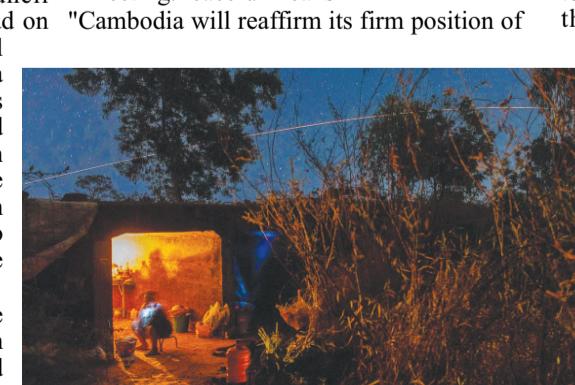
Thailand's National Security Council secretary-general Chatthai Bangchudh on Monday acknowledged international efforts at the ASEAN meeting in Kuala Lumpur, but insisted "the process should be bilateral between Thailand and Cambodia". Meanwhile Phnom Penh's defence ministry said the fighting continued early Monday with Thailand firing artillery shells into Cambodian territory, wounding one civilian.

The violence shattered a fragile truce reached after five days of clashes in July, mediated by the US, China and Malaysia.

In October, US President Donald Trump backed a follow-on declaration touting trade deals after they agreed to prolong the truce. Each side has blamed the other for instigating the clashes, claiming self-defence and trading accusations of attacks on civilians. On Sunday, both Cambodia and Thailand said Monday's gathering could help de-escalate tensions.

Both governments have confirmed they would send their top diplomats to the meeting. Peaceful means?

"Cambodia will reaffirm its firm position of



cooperate in de-mining efforts at the border. Those conditions, the spokeswoman told reporters, "will guide our interaction in the discussions tomorrow in Kuala Lumpur".

The Thai government gave no guarantee that the meeting would produce a truce, saying a "ceasefire can only be achieved when it is based primarily on the Thai military's assessment of the situation on the ground". US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said last week Washington hoped for a new ceasefire by early this week. Trump, who helped broker an earlier truce, claimed this month that Thailand and Cambodia had agreed to halt the fighting. But Bangkok denied any such deal, with clashes continuing for two weeks and spreading to nearly all border provinces on both sides of the frontier.

The conflict stems from a territorial dispute over the colonial-era demarcation of their 800-kilometre (500-mile) border and a smattering of ancient temple ruins situated on the frontier.

## NEWS BOX

**Fisheries Department carried out a major crackdown against illegal fish sale in the Pong Reservoir area**

**Dharamshala. (Agency)**

The Fisheries Department has carried out a major crackdown against illegal fish sale in the Pong Reservoir area of Kangra district, registering 14 cases and recovering a fine of Rs 11,800 during a week-long special enforcement drive.

The intensive campaign was conducted under the leadership of Assistant Director Fisheries Sandeep Kumar. A special team comprising fisheries officials from Khatiyad, Sthana, Dhameta, Jawali, Barnali and Nagrota Surian inspected shops and roadside eateries across Jawali, Ghar-Jarot, Nagrota Surian, Fatehpur and adjoining areas. During inspections, several shops were found selling fish without valid bills.

Illegally sold fish was seized on the spot and legal action was initiated against the violators as per rules. In just one week, 14 cases of illegal fish sale were detected and penalties imposed.

Fisheries Director, Himachal Pradesh, Vivek Chandel said the department follows a zero-tolerance policy towards illegal fishing and sale. He informed that during the financial year 2025-26, the Pong Reservoir Fisheries Circle has so far detected 305 cases of illegal fishing and sale, recovering a total fine of Rs 2,92,350.

Chandel said Pong Reservoir is a vital source of livelihood for fishermen and illegal activities would not be tolerated under any circumstances. He added that such surprise inspection drives would continue in future as well.

The department has also appealed to the public to immediately inform fisheries authorities if any illegal fish trade is noticed, so that timely and strict action can be taken.

**CSKHPKV concludes 10th veterinary disaster response training course successfully**

**Palampur. (Agency)**

The Veterinary Emergency Response Unit (VERU), North Zone, of Chaudhary Sarwan Kumar Himachal Pradesh Krishi Vishvavidyalaya (CSKHPKV), Palampur, successfully concluded its 10th Block Certificate Course on Veterinary Emergency Response Operations, aimed at strengthening disaster preparedness among veterinary students.

Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. A.K. Panda presided over the valedictory function and distributed certificates to the participants. A total of 48 final-year B.V.Sc. & A.H. students underwent intensive training comprising expert lectures, practical demonstrations, and field exposure.

The programme included hands-on training in fire safety, search and rescue, casualty evacuation in hilly terrain, first aid and CPR, with support from experts of the Fire Brigade, Dog Squad (Kangra), mountaineering professionals, and the NDRF.

The initiative marks a significant step towards building disaster-resilient veterinary manpower, particularly for fragile hill ecosystems, the university said.

**Chennai: Thiruvanmiyur depot work stalled as it crosses path with elevated corridor**

**CHENNAI.** The proposed Rs 35-crore redevelopment of Thiruvanmiyur bus terminus in south Chennai has run into a regulatory roadblock, with the Tamil Nadu State Highways Authority flagging a direct conflict between the project's footprint and the alignment of a planned elevated road corridor.

According to sources from the state highways department, key elements of the proposed bus stand and depot redevelopment would overlap with the alignment of a Rs 2,100-crore elevated corridor project being implemented under the public-private partnership (hybrid annuity) model.



The corridor has a three-year construction period followed by five years of operation and maintenance, and bids have been invited, sources said. The Thiruvanmiyur redevelopment—planned over 1.66 acres—envisioned a three-storey bus terminus with a built-up area of about 6,000 sq metres, attached to the existing depot. The design includes 13 bus bays, capacity to handle nearly 70 buses at a time, separate passenger boarding and alighting zones, ticket counters, waiting halls, crew rest rooms, medical facilities and shops, along with a separate two-storey commercial block. However, the highways authority said a detailed examination of the layout approved by the CMDA showed that structural elements such as ramps, platforms, parking areas and the depot layout fall within the elevated corridor's approved alignment.

## With backers lobbying with Congress top brass, Karnataka minister Parameshwara may land DCM post

**Parameshwara, backed by the Siddaramaiah camp, is likely to visit Delhi on December 26, on the eve of the Congress Working Committee meeting that will discuss issues of national importance.**

**BENGALURU. (Agency)**

Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara, being touted as the dark horse for the chief minister's post amid the change in leadership tussle between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, is waiting to meet the high command leaders to throw his hat into the ring, sources said. Parameshwara, backed by the Siddaramaiah camp, is likely to visit Delhi on December 26, on the eve of the Congress Working Committee meeting that will discuss issues of national importance. It is to be seen if he can meet senior party leader Sonia Gandhi, with whom he had a good equation.

Though he has not been to Delhi in a while, his sympathisers are said to be lobbying for him with the high command, sources said. If not the CM post, Parameshwara could land the deputy chief minister's post. But he is pitted against AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge's son and RDPR minister Priyank Kharge, who seems to have emerged as a strong contender for that position under the Dalit

quota, sources added. "You (media) are planting many aspirants for the CM post. But I have said on many occasions that I will adhere

He felt it is better for the high command to resolve the confusion over change in leadership in the interest of development, as the state budget is fast approaching and is likely to be presented in February 2026.

"The high Command has seen many situations like this (Karnataka's) and can resolve it in a fraction of a second. But it could be waiting for the right time to intervene as it is reportedly summoning Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar," he maintained.

"When I meet the high command, I will suggest that they put an end to the confusion and statements from different leaders. People have elected us to deliver the goods that we promised in our manifesto," he said. He clarified that he will visit Delhi only if the situation demands. "I will not go to Delhi unnecessarily and upset my health in the chilling cold and pollution," he joked. Yet, it is interesting to see if he will accompany the CM Siddaramaiah camp during his visit to Delhi.



to the high command's decision," he told reporters. He was answering a query on whether Shivakumar who contacted several leaders from the Siddaramaiah camp, left him out considering him to be a serious contender for the CM's post.

## Gujarat Biotechnology University contributes to Alzheimer's research breakthrough

**Researchers from INST Mohali, NIPER and Gujarat Biotechnology University have developed a nanoparticle-based therapy for Alzheimer's that boosts damaged brain cell survival from about 50 to nearly 90 per cent.**

**Ahmedabad. (Agency)**

A team of researchers from Mohali's Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST), National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER), Raebareli and Gujarat Biotechnology University (GBU) has led a breakthrough in a nanoparticle-based therapeutic approach for Alzheimer's disease which shows cell survival has increased from around 40-50 to nearly 90 per cent.

The study, published in international journal *Small*, involves a multifunctional nanoparticle-based therapeutic approach for Alzheimer's disease. "Unlike conventional treatments that address a single aspect of the disorder, the new strategy simultaneously targets toxic protein accumulation, neuronal damage, inflammation, and brain repair — offering renewed hope against one of the most



complex neurodegenerative diseases," Prof Nisha Singh, Assistant Professor of Bioinformatics at Gujarat Biotechnology University (GBU) told.

Explaining the research, Prof Singh said, "Alzheimer's disease happens when harmful

protein clumps (called A $\beta$  plaques) build up in the brain and damage brain cells, leading to memory loss and thinking problems. This research shows a new and promising way to treat Alzheimer's disease by using tiny particles that work on multiple problems at once — removing toxic proteins, protecting brain cells, reducing inflammation, and supporting brain repair. This multi-action approach could lead to more effective future treatments for Alzheimer's disease."

Prof Singh holds a PhD in Plant Genomics and has completed postdoctoral research at Cornell University, USA. Her role involved computational modelling, molecular simulations and bioinformatics-driven analysis, which helped validate how the nanoparticles directly interact with and dismantle harmful amyloid-beta protein plaques in the brain.

**Suspended TMC MLA Humayun Kabir to launch new party in Murshidabad**

Kolkata. (Agency)

Suspended Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir on Monday announced that his new political outfit will be named the Janata Unnayan Party (JUP) and will have a 75-member state committee with around 20 per cent representation from the Hindu community.

Kabir said the formal launch of the party would take place at a public meeting in Beldanga in Murshidabad district, around 170 km north-northwest of Kolkata, later in the day.

Murshidabad, a Muslim-majority district, has 30 Assembly constituencies out of West Bengal's total 294 seats, which will go to polls in early 2026. The Bharatpur MLA said he would also announce at least five prospective candidates for the upcoming Assembly elections.

Kabir said he plans to contest from both Rejinagar and Beldanga constituencies and is confident of winning both seats in 2026, though he would later relinquish one.

"However, I will have to give up one seat, which will be decided later," Kabir told reporters as hundreds of his supporters gathered at the Beldanga ground. Some supporters were also seen carrying flags of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM).

A supporter associated with the S undar b a n s U n n a y a n Educational Trust announced a contribution of Rs 1 crore for setting up an educational institution, which Kabir said would come up in the proposed Babri Masjid complex in the near future.

Asserting that he would continue working for the people of West Bengal, Kabir claimed that his party's flag would soon be seen across the state. He said the party flag would resemble that of the Trinamool Congress and the Indian National Flag.

The formal announcement of the party was scheduled around 1 pm. Along with the launch, Kabir said he would declare the names of the state committee office-bearers and district presidents. The announcement will be made from Mirzapur, near Beldanga, which also houses the proposed Babri Mosque site planned by Kabir.

## Pregnant woman beaten to death by father in Karnataka over marriage to Dalit man

**The woman, who was six months pregnant, suffered severe injuries in the assault and died later that night at a private hospital.**

**HUBBALLI. (Agency)**

A 20-year-old pregnant woman died after being allegedly attacked by members of her family over her inter-caste marriage in Karnataka's Hubballi rural area. The incident occurred on Sunday evening at Inam-Veerapur village in Hubballi Rural taluk. The woman has been identified as Manya, who was six months pregnant, suffered severe injuries in the assault, and died later that night at a private hospital. Her husband Vivekananda and his parents have also sustained injuries in the attack by the girl's father and relatives. He has been admitted to KIMS hospital in Hubballi.

According to the police, the victim had married a man from a different caste in May, against her family's wishes. Following threats, the couple had been living in their relatives' house in Haveri, but returned to the village on December 8.

According to police, soon after the marriage, the police had warned the parents of Manya to stay

away from the couple. The same was taken in writing from Prakash Gouda. In fact, Prakash went to the house of Vivekananda a few times this month

to meet his daughter. And on Sunday night, on the pretext of meeting, they attacked the girl and others.

According to eyewitnesses, the father of Manya Prakash with his two sons Irranna Gouda and Arun Gouda, barged into the house of Vivekananda and started attacking with iron rods and other weapons. Prakash Gouda belongs to the Lingayat community.

Three people, including the victim's father, have been arrested in connection with the case. A case has been registered at the Hubballi Rural police station, and further investigation is underway.

The Dalit organisations in Hubballi and Dharwad have condemned the incident. The organisations are expected to hold protests in Inam Veerapur and Hubballi on Monday.



## Himachal lawmaker treks to village, promises land to monsoon victims

**Dharamshala. (Agency)**

A Himachal Pradesh lawmaker trekked nearly two kilometers to reach a remote village where eight families lost land and homes to heavy monsoon rains, promising swift government relief under forest rights laws.

Kewal Singh Pathania, a legislator and deputy chief whip of the state assembly, visited Jawnali village in his Shahpur constituency to meet with affected residents. He directed government departments to expedite paperwork so displaced families could receive land allotments without delay.

"Land would be allotted to them at the earliest under the Forest Rights Rules," Pathania told the families, expressing sympathy for their losses during this year's monsoon season. Earlier in the day, Pathania attended the annual prize distribution function of Government Senior Secondary School, Kareri, as the chief guest. He laid the foundation stone of a protective retaining wall to be constructed in the school premises at Rs 10 lakh.

Addressing the gathering, he said the

state government was implementing a cluster system to further strengthen the quality of education in government schools. Through this system, optimal use of laboratories, playgrounds, libraries, and other resources would be ensured to provide better academic facilities to students.

He added that annual school functions were an integral part of the education process as they helped parents assess students' academic and co-curricular progress while boosting students' confidence and talent. Sharing details of development works in the area, the MLA said construction of the Ghera-Sukkhuhat-Chamiyara-Bhiti road was underway at a cost of Rs 2.83 crore. Repair work on the Salli-Khadi Bahi road, damaged due to landslides caused by heavy rains, was also in progress with an expenditure of Rs 3.43 crore, and the Public Works Department had been directed to complete it at the earliest. He further informed that construction work on the Ghera-Varnet road would be carried out at Rs 2.13 crore.

## Mumbai's Property Tax Conundrum: BMC's Rs 10,899-cr tax claim based on complex formula and overrides HC, SC orders

**Since Aug 2025, as many as 481 properties in Mumbai have pending property tax dues on a new formula — 100% tax amount as per the rateable value was added along with 50% of the proposed CVS value**

**Mumbai. (Agency)**

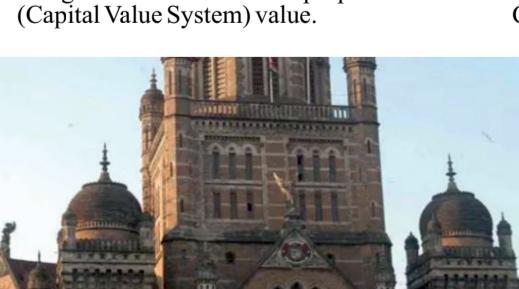
In January this year, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC)'s assessment and collection department sent a notice to residents of Annavista Cooperative Housing Society (CHS) at Bandra's Perry Road, demanding payment of pending property tax dues amounting to Rs 35.23 lakh (nearly 20 times of what was usually paid by the residents). It also threatened coercive action, including attachment and auction of the property and power and water supply disconnection, if the residents failed to pay taxes within 21 days. Two weeks later, the residents replied to BMC's letter stating that all the dues for the ongoing financial year were settled and that the property tax stood at Rs 1.73 lakh only, urging the civic body to revoke its notice. This is not a case in isolation as the BMC has sent several such notices to buildings and establishments demanding significantly

higher property taxes than what they were paying. Civic body's records show that as of August 2025, as many as 481 different properties in Mumbai have pending property tax dues amounting to Rs 10,899.96 crore, including penalty on the unpaid component of taxes.

Reason for the dues: In 2010, the BMC introduced a new formula to calculate and implement property taxes — based on potential Floor Space Index (FSI) or the maximum buildable area. After the civic authorities proposed it, multiple parties challenged the methodology of calculating and imposing property taxes. While the Bombay High Court in 2019 quashed the new methodology, even the Supreme Court upheld the High Court's decision in 2022.

Notwithstanding the court order, the BMC continues to send high property tax bills based on a new formula — 100% tax

amount as per the rateable value was added along with 50% of the proposed CVS (Capital Value System) value.



As it sends the bills under this formula, the footnote of the bill stated that the bill has been issued on a protective basis.

"We wrote to the BMC immediately after the receipt of the notice, pointing out that they had sent an inflated bill. We are well aware

of the court's ruling that came in 2022, and have been paying taxes accordingly," Cornell Gonsalves — a resident of Annavista CHS told.

Even as the BMC continues to calculate property taxes on this newly devised formula, BMC Commissioner Bhushan Gagrani is of the view that the property tax should be calculated on the base value of the land.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Gagrani said, "In my opinion, the property tax of any property on a land parcel should be determined on the base value of the land. The SC questioned BMC's method of calculating the property tax on a land parcel and I am already carrying out correspondence with the state government to formulate a proper GR that would determine a permanent establish policy to calculate the property tax rates."

# Not everything beautiful should be possessed

There are two things I remember distinctively in my great grandmother's house—a red oxide floor, gleaming like water, cool and unmarred by tile-style boundaries, and a squawking parakeet in a cage next to the kitchen.

The parakeet, large-headed and loud-voiced, would often be provided with scraps or whole food—chickpeas, chilies, fruit, vegetables. He would in turn feed the family with his wisdom—words and phrases, some decidedly undecipherable. In the unbearable humidity of Bengal, I'd lie cheek-pressed to the coolness of that water-like floor, looking at the parakeet.

My great grandmother cooked for everyone. Perhaps the parakeet was the only creature that did not receive her cooking, but she loved him the most. As we grew older, we learned parakeets are wild animals and are best left in the wild. The pet trade in parrots and parakeets—whether Indian species (which is illegal), or foreign species (legal, but only with permits)—masks a cruel trade in which birds are snatched from the wild, or kept in terrible conditions before sale. As an adult when I went birdwatching, parakeets effortlessly grabbed my attention. Rose-ringed parakeets are found in many parts of the country, and are loud and jaunty. I still haven't seen one fly without crying out lustily to all the world, announcing its flight. Alexandrine parakeets were for some years on the red list as a Near Threatened species. The Plum-headed parakeet has a melodious tui-tui call, and



the male possessing a grand head which is the colour of a ripe plum. Smaller than Rose-ringed or Alexandrines, I have spent many happy hours watching Plum-heads, which are smaller than Rose-ringed and Alexandrines, perch on the tips of peepal tree branches, feeding off purple peepal figs, ripe and just correct for eating.

And if you've ever sat under a tree and pieces of fruit have rained down on you, you can know without looking that it is the work of a parakeet. A Rose-ringed for instance will swallow a couple of bites from a guava, and then take great mouthfuls of the rest and spit them out with great conviction. This is great for germination of new trees, but may not be amenable to keeping your hair clean in case you are sitting under the tree.

Watching parakeets, it is easy to understand why people have coveted them as pets. The birds are electrified with energy and a zest for life. They squawk, they jump, they hang upside down, they groom each other, and then they squawk some more. Yet not everything beautiful should be possessed. Wild animals are always better off in the wild. Apart from the cruelty and naked commerce of wild animal trade, wildlife's needs can never be met in captivity. And our wild animals are still under threat from trade—whether as live animals or as animal parts. A female tiger poacher, who Interpol was on the lookout for, was apprehended in India this month. And recoveries of tiger skin and bones mean that people still covet wild animals, wanting to borrow their charisma.

Being a dyed-in-the-wool (now a 'dead in the water') bureaucrat, I have never been the life and soul of any party. But strangely enough, hostesses kept inviting me frequently to dinners, I suspect because of my village idiot qualities, as I could keep a conversation flowing in the silences when everyone else had their snouts buried in the main course. But since 2015 or so, the invitations have dried up, like the mythical Saraswati river: divergent political perceptions make the breaking of bread with me an uncomfortable experience. Most of my erstwhile friends, colleagues (those not yet brain dead, that is) and those sharing the Shukla genes with me, are of the view that Mr Modi's arrival has been like the Second Coming, whereas I see it as Paradise Lost or the arrival of the False Messiah. But this suits me fine: in these twilight (not yet sunset, folks) years, one cannot wish for more than an evening with a single malt at hand, a contented pooh at one's feet and the sounds of Beethoven's Emperor concerto wafting through the house, a voice-over, as it were, to the sounds of the city.

Which brings me smoothly to the media frenzy about the invitations for the dinner/banquet for Mr Putin recently. It was made out that Rahul Gandhi's omission from the guest list was a well-deserved snub for his hostility to Modi and the purchase of Russian oil by India. To which my response is: Huh?

Being invited for dinner with a fugitive from an ICC arrest warrant, a killer of Ukrainians and his own soldiers, accused of abduction of children—that is not exactly the greatest honour in the world, is it? (I am not even going into the question of whether it was appropriate for India to have hosted, and laid out the red carpet, for him). Mr Modi and his cohorts may be comfortable in the company of the Putins and Netanyahus of this world, but most of the civilised world is not. And I suspect the government knew this, and that RG would in all probability turn down a dinner invitation in any case and so made a virtue out of necessity.

Something Mr Shashi Tharoor should have done, in my view. He is no longer a part of India's government or even its official diplomatic framework, and was thus not bound by MEA's protocol or the invitation. I am not saying that he should have refused the invitation as part

of the Congress' "boycott" of Modi or Putin, but as a moral statement. If he could disassociate himself from a Savarkar award, then why not a Putin dinner? Aren't both based on the same principle of right and wrong? Surely, what is sauce for the RSS goose should also be sauce for the Russian gander. But maybe Shashi was just

that the person you dislike most in the world is seated next to you, you need to be fluent in at least seven languages in order to converse with anyone, all the pretty ladies are arranged next to the chief guest or host like a row of savouries, out of reach of even an Indian Wrestling Federation office-bearer. Everyone is more tight-lipped

than the oyster in your soup lest they let a state secret slip, the food tastes like a dog's breakfast, no liquor is served in India: they served apple juice or nimbu pani during my time but it's probably cow urine now. Everything is so formal and starchy that even the chicken legs on the plate stand at attention. No wonder Rahul Gandhi skipped the Putin-feeding orgy and went to a pizza joint instead.

But I must concede that rejecting such invitations is not without its risks. In the '90s, as a junior secretary in Shimla, I received an invite for a dinner at Raj Bhavan. I had attended these ghastly functions earlier, in which you had to sing the National Anthem before the soup and again after the dessert, and had no intention of parading my patriotism again. So I fixed up a squash game with my buddy Sandeep Madan that evening and sent a regret to the Governor's secretary. Sandeep, who thinks that keeping an appointment with a senior is a sign of servility, never turned up, so I missed both the

dinner and the game. Next morning, I was summoned by the Chief Secretary, Mr Tochhawng.

Now, no one with an IQ of 25 and above (the UPSC benchmark for the IAS) argued with Mr Tochhawng, primarily because he was built like a Patton tank, was about 6'6" tall and had a genuine 56" chest, unlike some people I don't know. He was a mild man most of the time, but when he was wont to shout, he sounded like thunder reverberating among the mountain peaks. He started reverberating the moment I entered his room. "What's this I hear about your refusing a Raj Bhavan invitation, Shukla?" he roared like a primed IED. "I had a squash game lined up, sir," I replied. The IED exploded. "You should show that squash racket up where the sun doesn't shine, young man! No one — no one — rejects an invitation from the Governor, you idiot. It's not an invitation — it's an ORDER! Got it?"

## New Bill dilutes rural jobs as a right, burdens state finances

### The G-Ram-G Bill weakens job guarantee as a right and takes demand flexibility away from job seekers

A fresh controversy has been triggered by a new Bill that seeks to replace the fairly successful, two-decades-old rural jobs scheme. First, the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill proposes to extend to 125 the number of days of work guaranteed every year, from 100 under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Second, it alters the funding pattern from a full central payout to 60:40 sharing between the Centre and most states; the ratio for the northeastern and northern hill states is 90:10. MGNREGA was enacted in 2005 as an answer to crushing rural poverty. It aimed to boost rural incomes and create durable infrastructure like water bodies and roads. It was a revolutionary move that made rural employment a right. It's odd of the current government to tinker with the success story when rural jobs are hard to come by. The scheme serves not only as a safety net during droughts and other crises; it also empowers rural communities because the funding is demand-driven, with the planning left to local bodies like panchayats. Neither can it be explained



by the NDA government's penchant for renaming old

schemes. Why drop Mahatma Gandhi's association with a rural jobs scheme? The G-Ram-G Bill's proposal to increase the days of employment is a gain. But under the existing scheme, work is to be provided for "not less than 100 days", leaving it to the states to raise the cap when necessary. The more consequential new feature is about sharing the financial burden of the 786,000-crore scheme with the states. At the proposed ratio, cash-strapped states will have to bear about 250,000 crore of the projected cost next year. Another setback is the scheme's suspension for 60 days every year during peak agricultural seasons. This weakens job guarantee as a right and takes demand flexibility away from job seekers. The current scheme is far from perfect—for one, it insists on providing only unskilled work. There is also as much as 9,746.39 crore due at present in wages, material payments, and administrative costs. However, these can be set right by improving the old law. Why throw out the baby with the bathwater?

# A vagabond in the enriching world of words

**The words were there, but for the images to match them, we had to use our heads. Our All!**



the world of words. There was no desire or aim to be uplifted; or to be edified, or inspired, or informed. It was reading for the sake of reading. For the heck of it, if you will. If any of the afore-mentioned wonderful things happened, that was fine. If they did not, that was fine too. In the dentist Dr Sharma's waiting room, one read past issues of Reader's Digest and the one periodical of that era that seemed to be in every doctor's waiting room: Soviet Woman. In other waiting rooms, one found old newspapers and magazines that had seen better days.

Even folders of assorted medicines with simple names, but tongue-twisting formulae.

Then, one day, we were almost grown-up. Some three dozen of us in the same class became the last batch of the Indian School Certificate syllabus in India — the old Senior Cambridge exam. Our reading list in both English and Hindi was carefully, even brilliantly, curated. From that time long gone, one recalls the writings of Thomas Hardy and the sheer power of his descriptions of rural England; without ever having been there, one fell in love

with the countryside. At the same time, for mathematics and Hindi, there were two options — a 'higher', advanced syllabus and then, a simpler one. As far as maths was concerned, I had already been informed that 'the rest of the class would pass, my chances were left to God'. Given that my mother was a professor of Hindi, 'Higher Hindi' was 'a given' and no invocations or interventions of the heavenly sort could intervene. Here, the book that has remained embedded in my mind is Munshi Premchand's extraordinary classic, 'Gabon'. This portrayal of weak morality and social pressures set in the years of colonial rule was in sharp contrast to any literature that chose to glorify this period.

In a phrase: both the sweet and the sour had been served. The choice to choose was handed to the reader. This may not have been the purpose of all that haphazard reading, but it wove together the immensity of varied cultures, traditions and random facts that could embellish equally random conversations — or even writings like this. By the process of reading and learning in a language that was not my mother tongue, one stood exposed to the vast world beyond my language, my culture and my traditions. That exposure could have worked like a blast of chill on a cold winter's day and knocked one over, but all it did was increase one's immunity. This was something of a vaccine that kept one grounded and allowed one to look at the rest of the world on equal terms. This was our AI. The words were there, but for the images to match the words, we had to use our heads. Each person's image of the same sentence could be substantially different. What we read, what we watched, what we listened to, is what we may have well become.

## SP creates ruckus in UP Assembly over Codeine syrup scandal

Lucknow. (Agency)

Members of the Samajwadi Party, the main opposition group disrupted proceedings in Uttar Pradesh's state assembly Monday, demanding immediate discussion over a codeine syrup scandal and questioning why authorities have not taken stronger action against those accused.

Leader of the Opposition Mata Prasad Pandey raised the issue as the assembly convened, with party members questioning why "bulldozers," a reference to the government's tough enforcement tactics, were silent on the accused. Members of the Samajwadi Party trooped into the well of the house raising slogans against the government.

Speaker Satish Mahana refused to allow an immediate discussion on the matter. State Parliamentary Affairs Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna accused the opposition of spreading rumors and negativity.

Khanna said the government has taken strict action and registered more than 122 criminal cases. He contradicted reports of deaths linked to the codeine syrup and assured lawmakers the government was ready to answer any questions during the appropriate time.

The pandemonium lasted about 10 minutes before the Speaker agreed to hear Samajwadi Party members during zero hour, a period set aside for raising urgent matters.

Before the assembly session began, Samajwadi Party members staged a sit-in protest outside the building over the scandal.

## Severe cold wave and dense fog grip Uttar Pradesh, 100 trains delayed

Lucknow. (Agency)

A severe cold wave and dense fog disrupted transport and forced school closures across Uttar Pradesh on Monday, with more than 100 trains delayed and visibility dropping to 10 meters in some areas.

Temperatures in Uttar Pradesh plunged below those of popular mountain hill stations like Nainital and Shimla following snowfall in the Himalayas. Sultanpur recorded the state's lowest temperature at 4.7 degrees Celsius (40 degrees Fahrenheit) over the past 24 hours, according to the state weather office.

According to weather office here, the minimum temperature during the last 24 hours in UP, Sultanpur was the coldest with 4.7°C. The mercury was recorded at 4.8°C in Barabanki, 5°C in Ayodhya, 5.1°C in Bareilly and 5.5°C in Shahjahanpur district. Several people are reported to have died due to the extreme weather, but no official confirmation has been received.

Dense fog blanketed 40 districts, including the capital Lucknow and the cities of Kanpur, Barabanki, Ayodhya and Sultanpur. Streets remained largely deserted as residents huddled around bonfires or stayed indoors.

Road, rail, and air traffic have been severely disrupted due to the extreme cold and dense fog. Over 100 trains in Uttar Pradesh are running late, while flights from major airports, including Lucknow and Varanasi, are departing behind schedule.

Meanwhile, the state government has issued alerts and taken preventive measures. Schools have been closed in Rae Bareli, Sultanpur, Ambedkar Nagar, and Unnao, while school timings have been adjusted in cities such as Lucknow and Bareilly.

State government has appealed people not to leave their homes unnecessarily. The speed limit on highways has been reduced to between 60 and 80 km/h.

Farmers reported the cold weather has helped wheat crops but damaged vegetables and pulses including potatoes, peas and lentils.

Atul Kumar Singh, a senior scientist at the Lucknow weather office said, "Two western disturbances have become active in Uttar Pradesh."

## Himachal launches polio drive targeting 11,000 children

Dharamshala. (Agency)

Health officials launched a mass polio immunization campaign Sunday in Himachal Pradesh's Shahpur constituency, aiming to vaccinate more than 11,000 children under age 5. Kewal Singh Pathania, a state legislator and deputy chief whip, inaugurated the Pulse Polio drive at the Primary Health Centre in Chadi by administering drops to children. The campaign is running simultaneously across the state.

Officials deployed 204 teams comprising 408 health workers and 20 supervisors across 102 booths to reach 11,324 children in the zero to 5 age group.

Pathania said, "To ensure the successful implementation of the drive in the Shahpur Assembly segment, 102 booths have been set up and 204 teams have been constituted. These teams comprise 408 members, supported by 20 supervisors."

Pathania urged parents to bring their children for vaccination, saying teams would conduct door-to-door visits on the second and third days of the campaign to reach any children who miss the scheduled immunization day.

Health workers will survey 30,521 households during the drive to ensure complete coverage in the target age group.

"I appeal to parents to extend full cooperation," Pathania said, adding that he expected all health workers to perform their duties with dedication. Block Medical Officer Dr. Kavita Thakur briefed the deputy chief whip on campaign preparations at the launch event.

## Panchkula air turns 'very poor', fourth worst in country; Chandigarh improves to 'poor'

According to data released by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) at 4 pm on December 21, based on the 24-hour average, Panchkula recorded an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 339, triggering serious public health concerns.

Panchkula. (Agency)

Air quality in Panchkula deteriorated sharply on Sunday, pushing the city into the 'Very Poor' category and making it the fourth most polluted city in the country. According to data released by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) at 4 pm on December 21, based on the 24-hour average, Panchkula recorded an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 339, triggering serious public health concerns.

Only Delhi at 377, Ghaziabad at 364 and Singrauli at 341 reported worse air quality than Panchkula. The city was followed closely by Rohtak at 337 and Baddi at 334, underlining the widespread pollution across north and central India.

Other cities reporting 'Very Poor' air quality included Balasore at 333, Greater Noida at 329, Gurugram at 328, Noida at 327, Dharuhera at 326, Jind at 322, Angul at 318, Gummidi poondi at 316 and Karna at 302.

In contrast, neighbouring Chandigarh witnessed a marginal improvement. The city recorded an AQI of 217, placing it in the 'Poor' category, an

limits.

Environmental experts attributed the high pollution levels across the region to cold weather conditions, low wind speed, temperature inversion and the absence of rainfall, which together trap pollutants close to the ground.

Dr Ravindra Khaiwal, Professor, Community Medicine and School of Public Health, PGIMER, said fog and smog were preventing the dispersion of pollutants. He advised people, especially sensitive groups such as the elderly, children, pregnant women, those with underlying health conditions or those who have recently undergone surgery, to take precautions.

"They should avoid pollution hotspots such as areas with heavy traffic or high vehicle density and refrain from early morning walks. Light exercise should be done only when weather conditions improve," he said.

improvement from Saturday when air quality had slipped into the 'Very Poor' range. Despite the improvement, pollution levels in Chandigarh continue to remain well above safe

## Northeast Frontier Railway named Locomotive in Honour of Kirti Chakra Awardee Captain Sunil Kumar Chowdhary

The Sikh Times

Maligaon, 22nd December:

Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has paid tribute to the supreme sacrifice and valour of Captain Sunil Kumar Chowdhary, Sena Medal and Kirti Chakra (Posthumous) awardee of 7/11 Gorkha Rifles, by rechristening WDP4B Locomotive No. 40024 at the Siliguri Diesel Locomotive Shed in his honour. Captain Sunil Kumar Chowdhary epitomised the finest traditions of the Gorkha Regiment—bravery, discipline and unwavering commitment to duty. During counter-insurgency operations in Assam, he displayed exceptional courage and leadership, for which he was awarded the Sena Medal. For his conspicuous gallantry beyond the call of duty and supreme sacrifice, he was posthumously con-

firmed the Kirti Chakra. The conditions, resilience, endurance and serv-

ing this locomotive, NFR honours the courage and sacrifice of the Armed Forces and paramilitary personnel who safeguard the nation against internal and external threats. The dedication holds special significance for the North-Eastern region and the Siliguri Corridor, areas with a long and deep association with the Gorkha Regiments, whose role has been pivotal in safeguarding India's strategic frontiers and ensuring peace and stability in the region. Indian Railways, the lifeline of the nation and a vital enabler of connectivity in the North-East, proudly associates itself with this legacy of valour. As Locomotive No. 40024 moves across the railway network, it will stand as a moving tribute—reminding railwaymen and citizens alike of the supreme sacrifices made by the soldiers of the Indian Armed Forces.



stroke diesel locomotive, known for its consistent performance even under adverse operating

ice—values that resonate strongly with both Indian Railways and the Armed Forces. By dedicating

## Punjab Govt has been making strenuous efforts to raise standard of living of people in Punjab: CM Mann

Contd.....Front page

"Dreaming is everyone's right and not just that of the rich class due to which this government is providing benefits to ordinary people, not just to the wealthy," he asserted. In a fervent appeal to the newly elected Zila Parishad and Block Samiti Members, the Chief Minister said that the elections last for only 10-15 days but once elected, these elected representatives belong to everyone. "The members represent everyone and even those who didn't vote for them, so it is their bounden duty to serve the people with missionary zeal. Work must be done for the well being of all, so that Punjab can progress and become frontrunner in every arena," he affirmed. Replying to another query, the Chief Minister said that the state government has adopted a zero tolerance policy against the menace of corruption due to which several reforms have been initiated. Citing the example of property registrations, he said, "The process is very easy nowadays as people don't have to visit the offices for mutation or deed verification as online facilities are available. People have to just visit the sub-registrar office only for a quick photo and within

## Major administrative reshuffle in Capital

New Delhi: In an administrative reshuffle, the Delhi Government has reassigned the responsibilities of 39 senior officers, including 22 IAS and 17 Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands Civil Service (DANICS) officers, with immediate effect, it said on Wednesday. According to the official order, IAS officer Nandini Palwal, currently posted as Commissioner, Trade & Taxes, will also hold the additional charge of Secretary, Services Department. IAS officer Shailendra Singh Parikh has been appointed as District Magistrate of Shahdara, replacing Rishita, who has been transferred to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. Senior IAS Prashant Goyal, serving as the Finance Commissioner, will now oversee the Food & Supplies Department as well, while IAS Surveer Singh has been entrusted with the dual charge as the Finance Secretary and Development Commissioner. Divisional Commissioner Neeraj Semwal will also handle the Land & Building and Power Departments, while IAS Vijay Kumar Bidhuri has been made the Secretary, Urban Development, and Excise Commissioner Ravi Jha will additionally serve as the Special Secretary, PWD. At the sub-divisional level, Anuja Trivedi has been posted as SDM, Kapashera; Jarad Prateek Anil as SDM, Narela; and Piyush Kumar as SDM, Saket. In addition to this, 17 DANICS officers have also been reassigned.

NORTHERN RAILWAY (E-Auction Notice)		
Sr.Divisional Commercial Manager/PS, Northern Railway Delhi Division invites bids through e-Auction through IREPS ( <a href="http://ireps.gov.in">http://ireps.gov.in</a> ) for the allotment of under mention contracts at following Railway stations/locations:		
E-Catalogue No	Date & Time of bidding	Railway Stations/Locations/Lots
Parking-53-2025	05.01.2026 at 11.00 Hrs	Kurukshetra (1st Entry), Kurukshetra (2nd Entry), Modi Nagar = Total 03 Sites
Website particulars where complete details of E-Auction can be seen		<a href="https://ireps.gov.in/">https://ireps.gov.in/</a>
All contractors who intend to participate in the e-auctions conducted through E-Auction Leasing module of IREPS should fulfil following mandatory requirements before they can submit their bids:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Registration on IREPS for E-Auction Leasing Module -Active IREPS User Account for E-Auction Leasing Module</li> <li>Payment of One Time Registration Fee</li> <li>Current Account in State Bank of India</li> <li>Integration of SBI Bank Account with IREPS Account</li> <li>Lien Marking of Funds</li> <li>Updation of Turnover Details</li> <li>Contractors who do not have IREPS account for any module of IREPS can submit their online request for registration by clicking on New Vendors / Contractors (E-Tender/E-Auction Leasing) link on IREPS Home page.</li> </ol>		
Railway Authority to contact, in case of any query		Divisional Railway Manager's Office, Commercial Branch, State Entry Road, New Delhi 110055. Email:pkg.delhidivision@gmail.com Tel: 011-23743084
No. 23AC/393/E-Auction/pkg/2025 Dated: 22.12.2025		3954/2025
Serving Customers With A Smile		

### AWARDING OF RAIL DISPLAY NETWORK CONTRACT AT RANGIYA DIVISION

E-Auction for awarding of Rail Display Network Contract at Rangiya Division. Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee. Trips/Days: 1096.

Auction Catalogue No. ADVT-NBQ-OSN

Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Description
AA/1	ADVT-RNY-NBQ-OSN-213-25-2 (Advertising - On Station Premise (Non-Digital))	Rail Display Network contract for display of advertisements (non-digital) at inside and outside the station premises of New Bongaigaon station, measuring total area 1000 sq. ft. for a period of three years.
AA/2	ADVT-RNY-NBQ-OSN-187-25-1 (Advertising - On Station Premise (Non-Digital))	Awarding of Rail Display network contract (Non-digital) for display of advertisement inside and outside the station premises (i.e. at Platform shed, Pillar, booking office, second class Waiting Hall, Station building, circulating area, Foot-over bridge, Entry/Exit gate etc) measuring total area 2500 sq. ft. for a period of three years.

Auction Start Date & Time: At 12.00 hrs. & Closing at: 12.40 hrs. of 31-12-2025. Initial Cooling off period is 30 minutes. Lot wise closing time can be viewed in e-Auction module of IREPS.

Note: Prospective bidders are requested to visit E-Auction Leasing Module on IREPS website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) for more details.

Divisional Railway Manager (C), Rangiya

## UP: Three suspected suicide cases reported in Mathura

Mathura.(Agency)

Mathura district witnessed three separate incidents of suspected suicide, police said on Monday.

In the Sadar police station area, a young man, the only son of a local property dealer, was found dead inside his room on Sunday evening. Family members alerted the police after the incident. The body was sent for a post-mortem, and officials said the cause of death is under investigation.

Mukesh, a resident of Nainapuram Colony in the Sadar police station area, worked in the real estate business. His wife had passed away about three years ago. He lived at home with his son, Rohit. Twenty-five days ago, in November, he had celebrated his son's wedding with great fanfare. On Sunday at 5 pm, Rohit shot himself in the temple with a pistol in his room.

He died on the spot. Hearing the gunshot, family members rushed to the room, where they screamed upon seeing Rohit lying in a pool of blood. Sadar police station in-charge Ashwani Kumar, along with his police team, arrived at the scene, took the body into custody, and sent it for post-mortem. The station incharge stated that the cause of death is being investigated.

In another case, the body of a contractor was found hanging from a tree within the premises of a municipal boys' inter college.

The deceased, identified as Kamlesh, a resident of Madhya Pradesh, was working on a construction project at the college on a contract basis. On Sunday at 8 am, a tea vendor spotted the body hanging from the tree. Station House Officer Ajay Kaushal said that preliminary findings suggest the contractor died by suicide. The matter is being investigated.

In the last incident, the body of Hariya alias Harishchandra was found hanging from a tree in the forest near the Hashanand Gausala in Akrur village, under the jurisdiction of the Jaint police station. His family cremated the body without informing the police. Jaint Station House Officer Umesh Chandra Tripathi said that an investigation is underway.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform you that Ms. Dolly Shibu / Mr. Shibu Thomas intends to purchase the entire Second Floor, built on Plot No. X-60, measuring 124 sq. yds. out of Khasra Nos. 111 and 112, situated at Green Park, New Delhi, from Shri Shiv Kumar Sharma. The original owner of the property was Smt. Devki Devi, who purchased the entire property from The Urban Improvement Company Pvt. Ltd. through two separate Sale Deeds dated 06.11.1961 and 25.05.1972. Thereafter, Smt. Devki Devi Sharma expired on 24.08.2003, leaving behind her legal heirs, namely Ms. Mehta Sharma, Mr. Mohit Sharma, and Mr. Shiv Kumar Sharma. Thereafter, Ms. Mehta Sharma and Mr. Mohit Sharma relinquished their respective shares in favour of Mr. Shiv Kumar Sharma through a Relinquishment Deed dated 24.11.2025. Accordingly, Mr. Shiv Kumar Sharma is now the absolute owner of the aforementioned property. Please note that the said property is proposed to be financed by Bajaj Housing Finance Ltd., Kaushambi Branch, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh. If any person(s) object(s) & regarding subject property, then kindly submit his/her objection within 07 days from the date of the Notice in writing. The said objection may be kindly sent to the undersigned by way of the Registered Post on the address given below and by E-mail, failing which, the claim as per aforesaid shall be treated as null and void in respect of the subject property.

[ASHWANI KUMAR] Advocate  
Chamber No. 122,  
Tehsil Compound, Ghaziabad, U.P.

# Decoded: The Aravalli Hills controversy and what's at stake

**The Supreme Court introduced a new height-based definition for the Aravalli Hills, triggering widespread concern about ecological risks. Environmentalists and opposition leaders warn this may lead to increased mining and irreversible damage to the region's fragile ecosystem.**

**New Delhi.(Agency)** The Aravalli Hills, among the world's oldest mountain ranges and a fragile ecological shield for north India, are at the centre of a raging controversy after a new legal definition by the Supreme Court. It fanned fears of large-scale mining, set off a political firestorm, and stoked a huge outcry online. What the Centre calls a technical clarification, activists see as a slow-motion ecological unravelling. At the heart of the storm is a question that sounds deceptively simple: what exactly qualifies as the Aravalli Hills?

**SUPREME COURT REDEFINES ARAVALLI HILLS**

The controversy traces back to a weeks-old Supreme Court observation asking for a clearer, scientific definition of the Aravalli Hills and Aravalli Range. The top court noted that over the years, inconsistent descriptions had complicated environmental regulation, land-use planning, and enforcement against illegal mining.

The court cited globally accepted geological standards, including the definition attributed to geologist Richard Murphy, which considers a landform with a rise of 100 metres from the surrounding ground as a hill or mountain. In its quest for precision, the court accepted a criterion pushed by the Centre.

projects.

## WHY THE ARAVALLI MATTERS

Stretching across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi, the Aravalli range is far more than a geological relic.

It acts as a natural barrier against desertification, slows the eastward march of the Thar Desert, recharges groundwater, and moderates air pollution in the National Capital Region, which has been choking on toxic air for weeks.

Environmentalists point out that the Aravallis are already battered by decades of legal and illegal mining. Any dilution in protection, they argue, could accelerate biodiversity loss, worsen air quality in Delhi-NCR, and deepen the water crisis in an already parched region.

"It will be a total disaster. If the Aravallis go, then the entire NCR and other areas in Punjab and Haryana will not be liveable anymore, there will be no human or any other kind of habitation,"

filmmaker and Aravalli Bachao founding member Chandramouli Basu told.

The Aravallis are a life-support system, and any further ecological damage here would be irreversible.

SaveAravalli GOES VIRAL



## Mute spectators: Supreme Court slams Uttarakhand over forest land encroachment

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

The Supreme Court on Monday slammed Uttarakhand authorities for sitting like mute spectators over the grabbing of forest land in the state by private entities and initiated a suo motu case. A bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant came down heavily on authorities concerned for their failure to take against the land-grabbers for illegally grabbing thousands of acres of land and sitting like mute spectators when forest land is being grabbed in front of their eyes.

"What is shocking to us is that the State of Uttarakhand and the authorities are sitting like mute spectators when forest



land is being grabbed in front of their eyes. We initiate a suo motu case," the bench said.

The Supreme Court directed the

chief secretary of Uttarakhand and principal conservation secretary to form a fact-finding committee and submit a report before it. It also stopped any construction activities on illegally grabbed land and stopped private parties from creating any third party rights. It further directed the authorities concerned to take possession of the vacant land other than residential houses.

"Private parties are stopped from creating any third party rights and no construction shall take place. Vacant land other than residential houses shall be taken into possession by the forest department," the bench said in its order while posting the matter on reopening on Monday.

## Government may waive pending traffic challans: Sources

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

Vehicle owners in the capital could soon get relief from years of unpaid traffic challans as the Delhi government may soon bring an amnesty scheme to waive all challans.

The one-time waiver scheme may offer up to 80% reduction on challans to clear long-pending dues and improve revenue collection. The proposal aims to provide relief to vehicle owners by scrapping fines issued by the Delhi Police and the Enforcement Department. Once cleared, the amnesty scheme will benefit thousands of vehicle owners registered in the city who have accumulated unpaid fines over the years due to procedural delays, non-service of notices, and pending court appeals.

Sources aware of the matter claimed that the proposal file has been sent to Lieutenant Governor (LG) V K Saxena for approval and could be placed before the Delhi Cabinet for clearance in the coming days. Once approved, the scheme would cover all traffic challans issued so far by enforcement agencies in Delhi.

According to the sources, the proposal has been drafted by the Delhi government's Transport Department which will offer up to 60% waiver on challans issued to personal and commercial vehicles in the last 10 years, a 70% waiver for Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) buses, and 80% waiver for all two-wheelers and three-wheelers.

According to the reports, nearly 50 million traffic challans have been issued in the past decade. However, only around 2.7% of them have been realised so far, while nearly 97% still pending.

The Transport Department reported that of the 1.7 million challans generated in the past decade, 24.8% have been paid while 75% remain unsettled. The government believes the amnesty drive will help clear a significant portion of the backlog while unlocking non-tax revenue. If approved, the scheme will likely run for a limited window of 45 to 60 days, during which vehicle owners can settle their pending fines either online or through government's transport portal.

## Learn Hindi or leave: BJP councillor filmed threatening African man in Delhi park

**A BJP councillor in Delhi has sparked controversy by threatening an African football coach to learn Hindi within a month or leave the city. The incident has ignited widespread debate on language, identity, and intolerance in public spaces.**

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

A video showing a BJP councillor threatening an African national to learn Hindi within a month or leave Delhi has sparked outrage online, with critics accusing the leader of intimidation and xenophobia in a public space. The footage, widely circulated on social media, shows BJP councillor Renu Chaudhary confronting a group of people in a park. Speaking loudly in Hindi, Chaudhary is seen questioning why the man had not learnt the language despite living in India and warning of consequences if he failed to do so.

In the video, Chaudhary tells the man that if he does not learn Hindi within a month, the park should be taken away from him. She also accuses the group of not taking her seriously and insists the issue is not something to laugh about. At one point, she says those earning



any criminal activity would make them responsible. The clip triggered sharp reactions on social media, with users condemning the councillor's conduct.

Several commenters described the behaviour as bullying and unbecoming of an elected representative, while others said the incident reflected growing intolerance over language and identity. One user wrote that such confrontations showed how low public discourse had fallen, while another accused the councillor of seeking power through public drama. Others said the episode undermined constitutional values and respect for diversity. Renu Chaudhary represents Ward No 197 in Patparganj, East Delhi, as an elected councillor of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. There has been no official response from the BJP or civic authorities as of now.

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## Supreme Court grants temporary relief from disqualification to Manikrao Kokate

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

In a temporary relief to Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) (Ajit Pawar faction) leader Manikrao Kokate, the Supreme Court stayed his conviction in a 1995 cheating and forgery case to the extent that he shall not face any resultant disqualification as a member of the Maharashtra legislative assembly. A bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi, while staying Kokate's conviction in the 1995 cheating and forgery case, also issued notice to the Maharashtra government and sought its response.

"Issue notice. In the meanwhile, the conviction of petitioner (Kokate) shall remain stayed to the extent that there shall be no resultant disqualification as a member of the legislative assembly,"

the bench said.

The bench also clarified that the Kokate shall not hold any office of profit.

Kokate moved the Supreme Court challenging an order of the Bombay



High Court suspending his sentence but refusing to stay conviction in the cheating case, observing that the office Kokate occupies is not merely titular but is a solemn obligation to uphold the

rule of law and safeguard the collective interest of the citizens.

Kokate moved the High Court seeking a stay on his conviction, urging the court to consider his request for stay on his conviction as an exceptional circumstance as he could be disqualified as an MLA if not granted the relief, and it would cause an irreparable loss to him.

The High Court, however, refused to consider it as an exceptional circumstance.

Kokate resigned as a minister for sports and youth affairs after he failed to get relief from the High Court.

The Nashik District and Sessions Court recently upheld a

magisterial court order

convicting and sentencing Kokate and his brother to two years' imprisonment

for fraudulently acquiring flats under the Economically Weaker Section

(EWS) quota.

## 'No other flower like rose': At annual flower show in Delhi, visitors explore 70 varieties

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

'Gemini', 'Baccardi', 'Christian Dior', 'Eternally Yours', 'Daily Post', 'Moody Dreams' and 'Bright Smile'. Visitors at the annual Winter Rose Show in New Delhi's Chanakyapuri over the weekend may have been reminded of the famous quote from William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet — "What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet" — as they came across 70 varieties of the flower.

Amid the winter chill, sun rays gleamed on hundreds of rectangular rose beds on Sunday afternoon that laid parallel to each other at the India-Africa Friendship Garden. The two-day flower show was organised by the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) and The Rose Society of India. Around 70 varieties of roses, categorised into 22 classes and over 175 sections, with approximately 1,250 exhibits, were presented at the event.

Each rose bed had a steel plate on which a unique name was engraved. These names, according to Dr Ajay Pal Singh (81), a

member of the Rose Society of India who

retired as a director of the Department of Floriculture and Landscaping at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), are said.

either given by the breeder or are based on the strengths the rose poses.

"I invented the Bhim rose variety in 1970, a cross breed of the Delhi Princess and Oklahoma. I chose the name as it blooms into a huge flower," he said, adding that he named around 89 varieties of roses in his tenure.

'Gemini', according to a gardener, has been bred in the United States and boasts of 25 to 30 petals.

Kuldeep Saddy (99), who served for 35 years in the Horticulture department of the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) and retired in 1985, now serves as the president of the Rose Society of India. "There is no other flower like rose — the

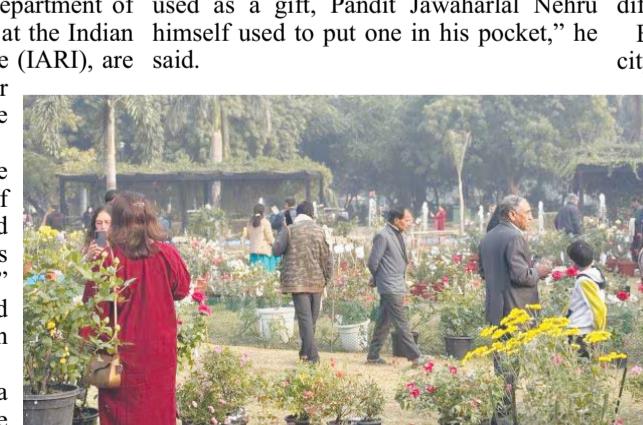
colour, fragrance is unmatched... it is still

were still in the same place, with just different roses planted in them."

Even as flower shows are common in the city, visitors were curious about the new varieties. "This is our first time coming to this rose show. We go to the Delhi Tulip Festival every year," said

Vikas Gupta (48) who came with his wife Preeti (47), "Such events allow us to experience nature during winters," said Preeti.

Another visitor during a video call to his mother went about the garden, showing the exhibits by institutions such as NDMC, Central Public Works Department, Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), among others. "Mom, we're at the rose garden. This place is just perfect for you," he said enthusiastically. According to Saddy, growing roses in Delhi is difficult as the soil is alkaline and water is salty. The preparations for this annual show started in October. But not all rose beds had flowers blooming.



Saddy said he was tasked to set up this garden when he was in service. However, his most cherished memory still remains of setting up a garden for former Vice President Zakir Hussain. "I went to the place 3-4 years after he died and I was surprised to see that the rose beds I had made 15-20 years ago

Social media erupted with the hashtag #SaveAravalli, as activists, lawyers and environmental groups accused the government of using legal semantics to legitimise exploitation.

With passionate call-to-action posts, AI-generated videos and profile picture changes, concerned netizens turned the Aravallis from a regional issue into a full-blown national flashpoint.

Several campaigners drew parallels with past regulatory rollbacks, arguing that environmental safeguards are often weakened quietly, through definitions rather than direct policy changes. Viral posts flagged fears of irreversible ecological damage and amplified the message: act now, or pay later. The digital uproar forced politicians across parties to take sides.

## OPPOSITION, BJP SPAR

Former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot emerged as one of the loudest political voices backing the Save Aravalli campaign. He claimed that the new definition would destroy 90 per cent of the mountain range in the state. Warning against "redefining hills to suit mining interests," Gehlot said weakening safeguards would be a betrayal of future generations and lead to disastrous consequences.

## Mumbai-Bound Air India Boeing Returns To Delhi As Engine Oil Pressure Drops, Probe On

**New Delhi.(Agency)**

An Air India flight from Delhi to Mumbai was forced to turn back shortly after take-off on Monday after the crew detected a technical issue involving engine oil pressure, officials said. The aircraft made a precautionary landing safely in Delhi, and all passengers and crew disembarked without injury. According to the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the Boeing 777-300ER aircraft, registered as VT-ALS and operating flight AI-887, experienced a problem during flap retraction after take-off.

"The flight crew observed low engine oil pressure on Engine No. 2 (right-hand engine). Shortly thereafter, the engine oil pressure dropped to zero," the ministry said.

Following standard safety procedures, the crew shut down the affected engine and returned to Delhi, the ministry added, noting that inspection and rectification work on the aircraft is currently in progress. The incident will be investigated by Air India's Permanent Investigation Board under the supervision of the Director of Air Safety (Northern Region) of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

The Ministry has also sought a detailed report from Air India, and the airline has also been instructed to provide all necessary assistance to passengers and accommodate them on subsequent flights. "Passenger safety remains paramount," the ministry said.

An Air India spokesperson said the decision to return was taken in line with established safety protocols.

"The crew operating flight AI887 from Delhi to Mumbai on 22 December decided to return to Delhi shortly after take-off due to a technical issue as per standard operating procedure," the airline said in a statement.

The airline said the aircraft is undergoing mandatory checks and that support teams are assisting affected passengers. "Our ground team at Delhi is providing immediate assistance to the passengers and alternative arrangements have been made to fly them to their destination shortly," the spokesperson said.

"The place is just perfect for you," he said enthusiastically. According to Saddy, growing roses in Delhi is difficult as the soil is alkaline and water is salty. The preparations for this annual show started in October. But not all rose beds had flowers blooming.

## NEWS BOX

**Bazball died in Adelaide: How Australian media covered England's Ashes nightmare**

CHENNAI . (Agency)

Australian media have mocked the England cricket team by giving a twist to the famous Ashes obituary, which originally led to the birth of cricket's oldest rivalry between the two teams in 1882. England succumbed to their fourth successive Ashes series defeat in Australia following their loss in the third Test by 82 runs at the Adelaide Oval.

In the aftermath of the defeat, England have been criticised by both fans and experts alike, having failed to live up to their lofty claims about the team. As the Ben Stokes-led side once again capitulated on the fast and bouncy tracks of Australia, the local media left no stone unturned in tearing into the English side. The West Sport newspaper even mocked England by giving a twist to the famous obituary published in 1882 in a British



newspaper, The Sporting Times, which led to the birth of the Ashes. With the utter failure of England's batting in Australia, the newspaper announced the death of 'Bazball', the term used to describe England's aggressive batting style. "The affectionate remembrance of Bazball, which died at the Oval on 21st December 2025. Deeply lamented by Brendon McCullum and Ben Stokes, but basically no one else. R.I.P. Australia win the Ashes, beating woeful Poms in just three matches and 11 days of cricket," read the mock obituary. Australia began the series with a thumping eight-wicket win in the first Test, which ended within two days in Perth. The hosts further claimed another eight-wicket victory in the day/night pink-ball Test in Brisbane. Having been bolstered by the return of their captain, Pat Cummins, for the third fixture in Adelaide, Australia were once again up to the task and registered another clinical victory despite a strong fightback from England. The visitors are now staring at an ignominious 5-0 series whitewash with two more games remaining.

**I was shocked: Former captain says he didn't expect India to drop Shubman Gill**

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Former India captain and former chairman of selectors Kris Srikkanth said he was "very shocked" by India's decision to drop vice-captain Shubman Gill for the T20 World Cup, admitting he did not expect such a bold call from the selection committee. However, while expressing his surprise, Srikkanth also heaped praise on the Ajit Agarkar-led selection panel for picking what he described as a "fantastic" 15-member squad, adding that Gill would need to wait for his chance in T20 cricket. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced a 15-man squad for the upcoming five-match T20I series against New Zealand as well as the T20 World Cup, which begins on February 7 and will be held in India and Sri Lanka. While many expected a routine squad featuring familiar names, the selection panel dropped a bombshell by omitting vice-captain Gill and



recalling Ishan Kishan from the cold. Gill, who was handed the Test and ODI captaincy earlier this year, was brought back into the T20 fold during the Asia Cup. Returning to the side after a year, he was immediately elevated to the role of vice-captain, underlining the faith the team management placed in him. However, Gill struggled to live up to expectations in T20Is, managing 291 runs in 15 matches at a strike rate of under 140. His inclusion also came at a cost, with India forced to break up the successful opening combination of Sanju Samson and Abhishek Sharma to accommodate the star batter at the top. Despite India failing to consistently replicate the high-risk, high-tempo approach that had made them one of the most feared T20I sides in the world, the team management continued to back Gill. Eventually, however, the selectors made a significant U-turn, withdrawing their support and dropping him on the eve of a major tournament — a move rarely seen in Indian cricket.

**Defiant Broad sticks to 'worst Australian side since 2010' swipe despite Ashes loss**

**Stuart Broad has refused to backtrack on his pre-Ashes assessment, insisting he has "no regrets" about branding this Australia side the worst since 2010 despite England losing all three completed Tests of the five-match series.**

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Former England fast bowler Stuart Broad has refused to backtrack on his bizarre claim that the current Australian team is the "worst since 2010", insisting he has "no regrets" despite England's crushing defeat in the Ashes 2025-26 series. Broad's comments, made ahead of the tour, have come back to haunt England after Australia sealed the Ashes inside just 11 days, racing to an unassailable 3-0 lead with emphatic wins in the opening three Tests. The hosts made a point of referencing the England great during their celebrations in Adelaide, turning Broad's words into fuel for their party. The Ashes had begun with optimism for an England cricket team led by Ben Stokes,

especially with Australia missing key personnel. Pat Cummins sat out the first two Tests, Josh Hazlewood was unavailable through injury, and Steve Smith missed the third Test in Adelaide. England, however, failed to capitalise, as Australia dominated proceedings to retain the urn yet again. Broad had famously declared before the series that this Australian side was at its weakest point in 15 years, since England last won the Ashes Down Under in 2010-11. At the time, he insisted it was "not an opinion" but "a fact", arguing Australia were in transition and dealing with selection uncertainty. Those remarks were not forgotten. After the third Test in Adelaide, Marnus Labuschagne referenced Broad's claim in an interview, while Travis Head added to the trolling by posting a photo of himself with Cummins on social media, captioned: "Is it 2010 yet?" followed by laughing emojis. Yet Broad has doubled down. Speaking on his For The Love of Cricket podcast, the former seamer said England's failure, rather than Australia's quality, explained the lopsided scoreline. "Do I regret saying that? No," Broad said. "I

did say Australia would have to play very badly and England would have to play very well. Australia haven't played very badly and England haven't played very well."

Broad argued that circumstances had, in fact, favoured England, pointing to Cummins'

they've done.

"Do I think the 2013-14 Australian team man for man was better? Yes, probably. I don't think individually they are better than any other team since 2010-11, but they've been relentless in the pressure they've managed to put on England." Asked to assess this Australian side in comparison to teams of the past 15 years, England captain Stokes offered a blunt verdict after the Adelaide defeat: "Better than us." Australia's celebrations rolled on, with former players invited into the changeroom, music blaring and injured spinner Nathan Lyon even casting aside his crutches during the festivities. But the hosts insist their work is not finished, despite likely missing Lyon and Cummins for the fourth Test in Melbourne.



absence early in the series, Hazlewood missing the Ashes and Usman Khawaja battling back spasms. "From England's point of view, what would they have liked coming into this series?" he said. "A lot of things have gone England's way. But England haven't been good enough ultimately. Australia have been relentless in what

is special (winning an Ashes)," said Mitchell Starc. "With a lot being made outside the groups, whilst we don't pay too much attention to it, things get heard and things get sent around. There will be a lot of pleasure with being in the situation where we are. But we want to win the next two Tests."

**Man United's Bruno Fernandes sidelined with injury, adding to squad woes ahead of festive fixtures**

MADRID. (Agency)

Manchester United have suffered a major setback with captain Bruno Fernandes set to miss a run of matches after picking up a hamstring injury during Sunday's 2-1 defeat to Aston Villa. The blow deepens United's injury concerns at a demanding point of the Premier League season, with the festive fixture pile-up looming.

Fernandes sustained the problem shortly before half-time at Villa Park and, although he initially tried to continue, did not return for the second half. While the full extent of the soft-tissue injury is yet to be confirmed, manager Ruben Amorim confirmed the midfielder will miss the Boxing Day clash against Newcastle United, and admitted there is uncertainty over his availability beyond that. "It's a soft tissue. I think he's going to lose some games," Amorim said after the match. "I don't know for sure, so let's see." The United boss highlighted the unpredictable nature of injuries this season, while stopping short of offering a timeline. "You never control these things, so we'll see. He is a guy who is always fit, so he can recover quite well, but I don't



know." Fernandes' absence compounds United's midfield problems. England international Kobbie Mainoo was already ruled out of the Villa game with a calf issue and is also likely to miss the Newcastle fixture, further limiting Amorim's options in the centre of the park.

"I will see what we are going to do," Amorim

said. "I think Kobbie Mainoo is out, Bruno is out, so we will see. We are going to find solutions. No excuses. We need to win the next game, and we will try to win the next game." United's selection issues extend beyond midfield. Casemiro is available again after suspension, but Bryan Mbeumo, Amad Diallo and Noussair Mazraoui are away at the Africa Cup of Nations, while Matthijs de Ligt and Harry Maguire remain sidelined. The growing list of absences has inevitably fuelled talk of reinforcements in the January transfer window. Amorim, however, struck a cautious note on recruitment, stressing the need for clarity rather than panic. "We need to deal with that," he said. "What we cannot do is reach January and try to do everything in urgency and make mistakes. I'm not going to say we need a lot of players because we have a plan. If we have to suffer, the club comes first." He concluded by underlining his focus on internal solutions and results. "Of course, we are in a moment where we need points, but we need to find solutions, and we are going to continue with our plan."

**Autograph on iPhone: Virat Kohli makes net bowler's day in Alibaug training session**

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Former India captain Virat Kohli made the net bowlers' day by obliging with photographs and autographs during his training session in Alibaug, a coastal town south of Mumbai. Rithwick Pathak, a budding fast bowler from Jharkhand, shared a video in which Kohli was seen signing on the back of his iPhone and also flaunted a signed cricket ball on Sunday, December 21. In the video shared on Instagram, Kohli can also be seen signing the iPhone as the net bowler recorded the moment using the back camera of his phone. "The phone might not last forever but the video shall remain," Pathak wrote as the caption to his post, which has garnered a lot of attention on social media. Kohli also took time out to pose for photographs with the net bowlers who helped him sharpen his batting over the weekend in Alibaug. Once in a lifetime till it happens twice. Three days of hard and fast bowling to @virat.kohli was an experience like no other. Grateful for every opportunity that comes my way," he added. Kohli has been training in Alibaug in the lead-up to his return to the Vijay



Hazare Trophy. The 36-year-old has been named in Delhi's squad for the premier domestic 50-over tournament, which begins on December 24. Kohli is expected to play for Delhi in at least two matches at the BCCI Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, although neither the Delhi & District Cricket Association nor Kohli have confirmed which of the two fixtures he will feature in. The group stage of the Vijay Hazare Trophy runs from December 24 to January 8, with the knockout rounds scheduled to begin on January 12. Kohli and his senior national team teammates will not be available for the knockout stage of the domestic 50-over competition due to their international commitments. India are set to take on a visiting New Zealand side in a three-match ODI series from January 11 to 18.

**NZ vs WI: Jacob Duffy's 5-wicket haul sets up 2-0 series win for NZ with 323-run win**

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Jacob Duffy took 5-42 as New Zealand bowled out the West Indies for 138 on a deteriorating fifth-day pitch to win the third test by 323 runs Monday and take the three-match series 2-0. Duffy surpassed Richard Hadlee's New Zealand record of 80 wickets in a calendar year and finished the series with 23 wickets at an average of 15.4 including three five-wicket hauls. He bowled more than 154 overs as the workhorse of the New Zealand attack in the three tests. "I saw that list at lunchtime and there were some cool names on there, so to be up there on any sort of list with those sort of names was special," Duffy, who was voted Player of the Series, said of his bowling record.

**Conway, Latham pile up runs**

New Zealand's win ended a series in which



Duffy became New Zealand's pace spearhead after injuries sidelined Matt Henry, Will O'Rourke, Ben Sears, Kyle Jamieson, Nathan Smith and Blair Tickner.

The third test was a feast for statisticians. Devon Conway made 227 and Tom Latham 137 in a 323-run opening stand in New Zealand's first innings of 575-8 declared.

Conway then made 100 and Latham 101 in a partnership of 192 in the second innings before New Zealand declared at 306-2, leaving West Indies a target of 462 to win after being bowled out for 420 in the first innings. Conway was the 10th test player and first New Zealander to score a double-century and a century in the same match and he and Latham were the first openers to score centuries in both innings of a test. Latham and Conway accumulated 515 runs across two innings, a record total for an opening pair. Latham also followed his father, Rod, by featuring in opening partnerships of more than 100 in both innings of a test.

**Pakistan learning from India Ex-coach hints at analysing India's success model**

**Latham and Conway became the first pair in tests to achieve a triple century and century partnership in the same match.**

New Delhi. (Agency)

Pakistan are keeping a close eye on India's success in limited-overs cricket in an effort to revive their team's fortunes at the international level, senior Pakistan selector and National Cricket Academy head Aaqib Javed has said. Pakistan's performances have witnessed a downward curve since 2022, having suffered first-round exits in the last three ICC events. The Men in Green have endured embarrassing defeats against

Zimbabwe, Afghanistan and the USA, with their outdated batting approach proving costly on multiple occasions. Recently, Aaqib Javed stressed the importance of producing quality talent at the grassroots level as the cornerstone of any successful cricketing nation.

"I have looked at India's success and have tried to execute plans for the betterment of Pakistani cricket. Any cricket nation's success is based on the quality of its talent. I think we fell away from doing the basic things correctly in our cricket system. No matter who you appoint as captain, coach or selector, unless you have quality talent, nothing changes," Aaqib said on the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) podcast. He highlighted the importance of developing strong infrastructure and a robust system to unearth exceptional talent. Javed also expressed optimism about Pakistan's chances in the upcoming T20 World Cup



2026. Quality of talent can be assured by increasing bench strength and competition, and this is only possible with proper infrastructure and a well-defined system. Indications are all there. We have good players, they have combined well and,

importantly, there is now a choice of players available. If the World Cup had been in Australia or South Africa, I would have thought differently. But this is the best time for the team to do well," he added. Pakistan recently beat India in the Rising Stars Asia Cup and the Under-19 Asia Cup and emerged champions of both tournaments. Meanwhile, Pakistan have been placed in Group A alongside Namibia, the Netherlands, the USA and India.

They will begin their campaign on February 7 against the Netherlands in Colombo, where they are scheduled to play all of their group matches. Pakistan last won an ICC title in 2017, when they defeated India by 180 runs in the Champions Trophy final. The Salman Agha-led side will be aiming to end their over-eight-year-long title drought in the upcoming event.

**Sensex opens 372 points higher, Nifty above 26,000; Infosys jumps 3%**

New Delhi.(Agency)

Benchmark stock market indices opened higher, after seeing weeks of losses, rallied by IT, metal, and banking stocks. The S&P BSE Sensex was up 491.74 points to 85,421.10, while the NSE Nifty50 added 157.75 points to 26,124.15 as of 9:29 am.

Dr. VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said that it appears that the market is heading for a year end rally. Two factors that can accelerate this rally are the sharp reversal in the rupee and the FIIs turning buyers in the cash market. These two factors which are mutually reinforcing can trigger short covering in the market helping the benchmark indices to scale higher highs. The Goldilocks domestic economic set up and the potential uptrend in earnings growth can provide the fundamental support to the possible market up move. However, the high valuations will restrain the rally and keep the bulls in check," he added. Markets opened on a positive note on Monday, with most Sensex stocks trading in the green in early deals. Infosys led the gains, rising 2.28%, followed by Tata Steel which was up 1.66%. Tech Mahindra gained 1.17%, Trent climbed 0.99%, and HCL Technologies advanced 0.87%, reflecting buying interest in IT and metal stocks at the start of trade. On the downside, losses were limited, but UltraTech Cement was among the biggest laggards, slipping 0.15%, while Power Grid Corporation fell 0.11%. Most other Sensex stocks were trading higher, showing a firm opening tone for the market, with no major sell-off visible in the early minutes of trade.

**Indian-origin Amazon veteran Anand Varadarajan named Starbucks CTO**

HOUSTON.(Agency)

Starbucks has appointed Indian-origin technology executive Anand Varadarajan as its new executive vice president and chief technology officer (CTO), tapping a nearly two-decade Amazon veteran to lead its global technology operations. Varadarajan will take charge on January 19, join the company's Executive Leadership Team, and report directly to Chief Executive Officer Brian Niccol, Starbucks said. He succeeds Deb Hall Lefevre, who retired in September. At Amazon, Varadarajan spent close to 19 years building large-scale, customer-focused technology platforms, most recently overseeing technology and supply chain for its Worldwide Grocery Stores business. Earlier, he worked as a software engineer at Oracle and with several startups. Starbucks said Varadarajan brings deep experience in developing secure, reliable systems and scaling technology to support operational excellence while keeping customers at the centre. An alumnus of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Varadarajan holds a master's degree in civil engineering from Purdue University and a master's degree in computer science from the University of Washington.

Starbucks said Varadarajan's appointment is expected to accelerate its technology initiatives and strengthen digital capabilities across its global business.

**Bank Holiday January 2026: When And Where Branches Will Be Closed Dates And City Wise List**

New Delhi.(Agency)

New Delhi: Bank Holidays in January 2026 - Banks across the country will remain closed for a total of 15 days --including local holidays and that of weekends in January 2026. However, banking activities on mobile and internet will remain uninterrupted, though several bank branches will remain closed on account of bank holidays. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) bank holidays calendar list has given full details of states and days when bank branches will be closed in the month of January 2026. Furthermore, you must note that the banks will NOT be closed for all the days consecutively in all states or regions. This is the total number of days when banks in different parts of the country will remain closed for state-observed holidays. For instance banks will be



closed for Thiruvalluvar Day in Kochi, but in other states it will NOT be closed for the same reason. Reserve Bank of India places its Holidays under three brackets --Holiday under Negotiable Instruments Act; Holiday under Negotiable Instruments Act and Real Time Gross Settlement Holiday; and Banks' Closing of Accounts. However, it must be noted that the bank holidays vary in various states as well not observed by all the banking companies. Banking holidays also depend on the festivals being observed in specific states or notification of specific occasions in those states.

# India, New Zealand sign free trade deal to focus on innovation, investment

**The agreement, described by both sides as ambitious and mutually beneficial, is expected to enhance market access, promote investment flows, strengthen strategic cooperation, and create new opportunities for businesses, farmers, MSMEs, innovators, students and youth across sectors.**

New Delhi.(Agency)

India and New Zealand have concluded a landmark Free Trade Agreement (FTA), a move expected to significantly deepen economic ties and boost trade, investment, and cooperation between the two countries. The agreement, described by both sides as ambitious and mutually beneficial, is expected to enhance market

access, promote investment flows, strengthen strategic cooperation, and create new opportunities for businesses, farmers, MSMEs, innovators, students and youth across sectors. Negotiations for the FTA were initiated during New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon's visit to India in March 2025. The deal was finalised in a record nine months, reflecting strong political will and shared ambition to expand bilateral engagement. Building on the foundation of the agreement, both countries have expressed confidence that bilateral trade could double over the next five years. New Zealand is also expected to invest over USD 20 billion in India over the next 15 years.

Reacting to the development, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a post on X that the India-New Zealand partnership is set to scale new heights. He said the FTA "sets the stage for doubling bilateral trade in the coming five years" and added that India welcomes investment worth

over USD 20 billion from New Zealand across diverse sectors. Modi said India's talented youth, vibrant startup ecosystem, and reform-driven economy offer a strong



foundation for innovation, growth, and long-term partnership. He also noted that cooperation between the two countries continues to strengthen in areas such as sports, education and cultural linkages.

Calling it an important moment for bilateral relations, Modi said the agreement gives a strong push to trade and investment ties. He added that he and Christopher Luxon

had a "very good conversation" shortly after the conclusion of the FTA, and that the deal, concluded in just nine months, reflects strong political will and a shared ambition to deepen economic ties.

The Prime Minister said the FTA ensures enhanced market access, deeper investment flows, and creates numerous opportunities for innovators, entrepreneurs, farmers, MSMEs, students and youth. In a separate statement, New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said he had spoken with Modi following the conclusion of the NZ-India Free Trade Agreement and highlighted its economic impact for New Zealand. Luxon said the agreement reduces or removes tariffs on 95% of New Zealand's exports to India and is forecast to lift New Zealand exports by USD 1.1 billion to USD 1.3 billion per year over the next two decades. He said boosting trade would mean more jobs, higher wages and greater opportunities for New Zealanders.

**Foxconn's women-led iPhone plant hires 30,000 staff in record India ramp-up: Report**

New Delhi.(Agency)

Taiwanese contract manufacturer Hon Hai Precision Industry (Foxconn) has hired nearly 30,000 workers at its new iPhone assembly unit near Bengaluru in just eight to nine months, marking one of the fastest factory ramp-ups ever seen in India, reported The Economic Times.

The Devanahalli facility, which is primarily run by women and employs mostly first-time workers aged 19-24, reflects Apple's accelerating push to diversify its supply chain beyond China. Spread across 300 acres, the factory began test production in April-May with iPhone 16 models and is now assembling the latest iPhone 17 Pro Max devices, according to sources quoted in the report. More than 80% of the output is being exported, highlighting India's growing role in Apple's global manufacturing network. Around 80% of the workforce at the unit comprises women, many of whom are in their first jobs.

The company has built six large dormitories to house workers, several of which are already operational, with additional facilities under construction. Once the plant reaches peak capacity next year, it is expected to employ up to 50,000 people. With planned expansion, the Devanahalli facility is projected to house more women workers at a single location than any other government or private establishment in the country. Workers have migrated from neighbouring states, and the campus is expected to evolve into a mini township with residential, medical, educational, and recreational facilities. Workers receive free accommodation, subsidised meals, and earn an average salary of around Rs 18,000 per month, among the highest for women in blue-collar manufacturing roles.

Foxconn is investing nearly Rs 20,000 crore in the project, which is set to become India's largest factory by both employment and production capacity once fully operational. The facility is expected to eventually house up to a dozen iPhone assembly lines, compared with around four at present, and will surpass Foxconn's existing iPhone plant in Tamil Nadu. The expansion has been aided by India's production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme launched in 2021, as Apple steadily shifts a larger share of iPhone manufacturing to India amid global geopolitical uncertainties. All iPhone models are now assembled in India from the start of production and exported worldwide. Apple's India operations are supported by a supply chain of nearly 45 companies, spanning component manufacturing, sub-assembly, and logistics.

## Gold hits record high again. Should you buy at these levels

New Delhi.(Agency)

Gold prices have surged to fresh all-time highs in both global and domestic markets, extending a rally that has already made 2025 one of the strongest years for the precious metal in decades.

The big question for investors now is whether they should buy gold at these elevated levels, or wait? According to Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, the current rally is being powered by a mix of global uncertainty and structural demand. "Gold and silver opened firm today, trading near record highs and maintaining a strong bullish structure," Ponnudi said. COMEX gold is hovering near its lifetime high around \$4,425 an ounce, with the breakout firmly intact. He added that a sustained close above the \$4,400 level could open the door to a move towards the \$4,500-\$4,600 zone. On the downside, \$4,350-\$4,300 remains a key support area. Beyond technical levels, the broader drivers remain intact. Geopolitical risks continue to push investors toward safe-haven assets, while steady central-bank

buying, persistent investor inflows, and a relatively weaker US dollar are reinforcing gold's role as a long-term hedge.

**WHY ARE GOLD PRICES RISING?**

In the domestic market, MCX gold



futures are consolidating near lifetime highs around Rs 1,35,400 per 10 grams. Prices continue to hold a rising channel, suggesting strong underlying demand. Ponnudi notes that dips are still being bought into aggressively. "A decisive close above Rs 1,35,000 could accelerate the move towards Rs 1,37,000-Rs 1,40,000," he said. Immediate support is seen in the Rs

1,34,000-Rs 1,33,000 range. Gold's latest leg up also follows supportive global monetary cues. Rahul Kalantri, VP Commodities at Mehta Equities, said bullion prices gained further momentum after the US Federal Reserve delivered its third 25-basis-point rate cut of the year.

"Softer US CPI inflation at 2.7% year-on-year has strengthened expectations of more rate cuts next year," Kalantri said. He added that while the Bank of Japan raised rates by 25 basis points, its less-hawkish tone helped support precious metals. From a technical perspective, Kalantri sees gold support at \$4,320-\$4,285 and resistance at \$4,400-\$4,425. In rupee terms, gold has support around Rs 1,33,550-Rs 1,33,010 and resistance at Rs 1,35,350-Rs 1,35,970.

**SHOULD YOU BUY GOLD NOW?**

Experts broadly agree that gold's long-term outlook remains positive, but caution is warranted at record levels. Sharp rallies often bring volatility, and near-term pullbacks cannot be ruled out.

## Ready-to-Move vs Under-Construction home buying: Tax, GST, & Home Loan impact on your pocket

NEW DELHI.(Agency)

Buying a home is a big decision in life, but often buyers only look at the price and location. They ignore taxes and regulations. Several people get confused as to whether they should opt to purchase a ready-to-move-in flat or an under-construction one. Both GST, TDS and home loan tax benefits are completely different. In such a situation, let's try to understand by example that if you are thinking of buying a home, then which option will affect your pocket. Suppose a person from Bihar bought an under-construction flat worth Rs 85 lakh, while Mumbai's Saloni bought a ready-to-move house worth Rs 1.2 crore. Both have different tax obligations. Under-Construction Property: GST, TDS & Home Loan Tax Benefits If you buy an under-construction flat, the builder charges 5% GST on each installment (1% in

affordable housing). This GST increases your overall cost. Also, if the price of the flat is more than Rs 50 lakh, then it is necessary to deduct 1% TDS on each installment. This money has to



be deposited by the government through Form 26QB. TDS is not an additional expense, but non-time deposits may result in penalties.

Home loan and tax exemption in under-

construction The interest (pre-EMI) you pay on the loan taken from the bank before the construction is completed is not immediately tax-exempt. After getting

possession of the house, it can be claimed in 5 equal parts every year by adding full pre-construction interest. But keep in mind that every year a maximum exemption of Rs 2 lakh will be available (in the old tax system). That means the boundary remains the same. Ready-to-Move Property: No GST & Immediate Tax Benefits Ready-to-move flats that have a completion certificate do not attract any GST. This is a big relief for buyers. However, if the price is above Rs 50 lakh, then here too 1% TDS will have to be deducted and Form 26QB will have to be filed.

## Want safe returns This post office scheme can earn you up to Rs 2 lakh in interest

**Safe investments often mean modest returns, but that is not always the case. With the right amount and tenure, some secure schemes can generate meaningful interest over time.**

New Delhi.(Agency)

If you are looking for an investment option that keeps your money safe while offering steady returns, post office savings schemes are often a preferred choice. Backed by a government guarantee, these schemes are seen as low-risk and suitable for cautious investors. One such option is the Post Office Time Deposit Scheme, which allows investors to earn a sizeable

amount purely through interest over time.

### FLEXIBLE INVESTMENT TENURE FROM 1 TO 5 YEARS

The Post Office Time Deposit Scheme, also known as the National Savings Time Deposit Account, gives investors the freedom to choose how long they want to stay invested. You can put in a lump sum for one, two, three or five years, depending on your financial needs. The interest rate depends on the chosen tenure. A one-year deposit currently earns 6.9% interest, two years offer 7%, three years fetch 7.1%, while a five-year deposit gives the highest return at 7.5%. Because of this flexibility, investors can match the scheme with short-term or medium-term goals.

### POPULAR CHOICE IN SMALLER TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS

This scheme is open to all individuals and is widely used across the country. It is especially popular in rural and semi-urban areas where access to other investment

products may be limited. The simplicity of the scheme and the trust associated with India Post make it attractive to first-time and conservative investors. The minimum amount required to open an account is Rs 1,000, and there is no upper limit on how



paid annually. Each tenure has its own fixed rate, which remains unchanged for the duration of the deposit. This gives clarity and predictability to investors who prefer stable returns without market-linked risks.

The five-year time deposit is particularly popular because it also qualifies for tax deduction benefits under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act, subject to the annual limit.

### HOW YOU CAN EARN RS 2 LAKH ONLY FROM INTEREST

Earning over Rs 2 lakh purely through interest is possible if the investment amount and tenure are planned well. For example, if you invest Rs 4.5 lakh for five years at an interest rate of 7.5%, the total amount you receive at maturity will be around Rs 6.51 lakh. Out of this, roughly Rs 2.01 lakh comes only from interest. Even with a smaller investment, the returns remain meaningful. A Rs 2.5 lakh investment for five years can earn interest of about Rs 1.12 lakh, taking the maturity amount to around Rs 3.62 lakh.

Kriti Sanon To Replace

# Jacqueline Fernandez

## In Salman Khan's Kick 2? Here's The Truth

Salman Khan is currently busy finishing the shooting of Battle of Galwan, and now a report has come in that the superstar is all set to announce the sequel to his much-awaited film Kick 2 on his birthday. Along with the news of Kick 2, a report had suggested that Kriti Sanon might replace Jacqueline Fernandez in the sequel, but a new update states that this report is not true. As per a source close to the development, Bollywood Hungama was told, "All reports doing the rounds about Kick 2, including speculation around casting changes, are completely false and baseless. No official details have been planned, and the makers will share information only when the time is right."

### When Kick 2 Photoshoot Was Shared

In 2024, Sajid Nadiadwala had confirmed Salman Khan's Kick 2. The producer shared an image from Salman's photoshoot for the film. This shoot was conducted while Salman was already filming Sikander with

Rashmika Mandanna. Sajid took to the microblogging site X and wrote, "It was a great Kick 2 photoshoot Sikandar...!!! From Grand Sajid Nadiadwala." In the image, Salman had his back towards the camera. The actor wore a black ganji and stood in front of several cars. It was earlier reported that Sajid Nadiadwala is planning for a 2025 shoot. A report published in Mid-Day said, "He will have to figure out the timelines because he is also overseeing several productions under his banner. He wants to ensure the smooth functioning of the productions in order to dedicate his entire time to directing Kick 2."

Sajid had earlier mentioned that he wanted to make a sequel to Kick. "I launched myself as a director with Kick and that's my favourite IP. The moment I speak about Kick, I get messages from the industry, and even the digital world is flooded with questions about when Kick 2 will go on floors."

Now, I promise that there will be an extension to Kick. The subject is there on paper, it's completely written but needs time. We need a bigger scale and a better time for its release. We need to have cinema consumption back in fashion for us to make Kick. Once we are back to normal, I will be ready to take Kick 2 on floors," Sajid told Pinkvilla.



# Rasha Thadani

## Thanks Tamannaah Bhatia 'For Being My Person', Shares Unseen Photo On Her Birthday

Rasha Thadani marked Tamannaah Bhatia's birthday with a heartfelt note that quickly won hearts online. Taking to social media, she shared an unseen picture with Tamannaah and penned a sweet message thanking her "for being my person," giving fans a glimpse into their close bond. Taking to her Instagram stories, Rasha Thadani shared a photo from their Holi party and wrote, "Happy birthday, thanku for being my person. Forever. I love u @Tamannaahspeaks."

### Rasha Thadani Announces Telugu Debut In Ajay Bhupathi's Next

Rasha Thadani is all set to make her big Telugu debut in director Ajay Bhupathi's upcoming film. The news was confirmed on social media after she unveiled the first look poster. As reported that the film is an intense love story. Nothing much detail has been shared. But with the latest update, fans are super excited. Taking to her Instagram handle, Rasha Thadani shared the poster and wrote, "New beginnings, endless gratitude! Mee andariki prema tho, I'm stepping into Telugu cinema. Thank you @ajaybhupathi sir for this opportunity. Chala excited to start this journey! #AB4 #TeluguDebut Presented by #AshwiniDutt Produced by @geminikiran\_official , under the @ckpicturesofficial banner." 123 Telugu mentioned that Ajay Bhupathi recently announced his fourth

film, featuring Ghattamaneni Jayakrishna – Mahesh Babu's nephew and Ramesh Babu's son.

### Rasha Thadani, Abhay Verma Shoot Promotional Song For 'Laikey Laikaa'

Munjya Fame actor Abhay Verma and Raveena Tandon's daughter, Rasha Thadani, were recently spotted in Delhi, filming a promotional song for their upcoming movie 'Laikey Laikaa'. The film, directed by Saurabh Gupta, is set for a Summer



2026 release. The shoot took place at multiple locations, including Vijay Ghat, IG Colony, Lodhi Road and Connaught Place, according to a report by HT City. A source told the publication that the sequence was a romantic song featuring the two leads. The photos give fans a glimpse of her and costar Abhay Verma during the promotional song shoot in Delhi. The images suggest that the movie will likely feature youthful romance and lively sequences.

**Sidharth Malhotra Gushes Over Kiara Advani's First Look From Toxic: 'I Know The Work That Went Behind This'**



**Y**ash starrer Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups is among the most highly anticipated upcoming films. Today, the makers unveiled the first look of Kiara Advani's character and introduced her as Nadia. Her look left fans mighty impressed and further heightened the excitement for the film. Now, Kiara's husband and actor Sidharth Malhotra has reacted to her first look and expressed his excitement for the film.

### Sidharth Malhotra Reacts To Kiara Advani's First Look From Toxic

Soon after Yash unveiled Kiara's first look as Nadia from Toxic, Sidharth Malhotra took to his Instagram stories to cheer for his wife. Re-sharing the intriguing poster, he wrote, "I know the work that went behind this... super excited for this one, Ki! Big love (red heart emoji) @kiaraaliaadvani #ToxicTheMovie." Check out his Instagram story below!

### Kiara Advani's First Look From Yash's Toxic

The first look of Kiara's character Nadia showed her dressed in a black off-shoulder gown with a thigh-high slit. She is seen standing in the spotlight on a dance floor, with tears streaming down her face. Toxic marks Kiara's first film since she embraced motherhood earlier this year.

Director Geethu Mohandas also reacted to Kiara's stunning first look from Toxic and wrote, "Some performances don't just belong to a film, they redefine an artist. What Kiara created on screen in this film is nothing short of transformative. As a director, I am deeply proud of her and for the performance she has delivered, and for the faith and heart she brought into our shared journey." Kiara replied, "Uff! Love you, captain."

### About Toxic

Written by Yash and Geetu Mohandas and directed by Geetu Mohandas, Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups has been filmed simultaneously in English and Kannada, with dubbed versions planned in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, and several other languages, underscoring its global ambition. Produced by Venkat K. Narayana and Yash under KVN Productions and Monster Mind Creations, Toxic is slated for a grand theatrical release on the long festive weekend of 19 March 2026, coinciding with Eid, Ugadi, and Gudi Padwa.

## Anupam Kher Bumps Into Kareena Kapoor On Flight, Recalls Her Debut: 'Amazingly Real Person'



**A** routine flight to Delhi turned into a moment of nostalgia for Anupam Kher when he ran into Kareena Kapoor Khan onboard. The chance meeting prompted the veteran actor to revisit their first interaction on the sets of Refugee in 2000, where Kareena made her Bollywood debut, and reflect on how she has grown over the years.

Taking to Instagram on Sunday, December 21, Kher recalled meeting Kareena for the first time during the film that launched her Bollywood career. Sharing his memories, Kher wrote, "First time I met #Bebo was on the sets of JP Dutta's #Refugee! Year was 2000! And It was her debut film. She was stunningly beautiful, confident yet vulnerable, restless to make it big (which she did) and amazingly real as a person! Over the years I have watched her grow into a very fine and elegant actress!"

The actor added that their recent meeting felt just as warm. During the flight, the two spoke at length, and Kher said he was struck by how unchanged Kareena remains even after 25 years in the industry. Reflecting on their conversation, Kher said that Kareena's curiosity and love for meaningful conversations stood out the most. He wrote that he was happy to see that, decades later, she continues to be someone who is real, enjoys conversations, and is still hungry for strong roles. Thanking her for the interaction, he added, "Thank you dearest #Kareena for your warmth and appreciation! Yes! I do look the same in all these years. May God keep you and your family happy and healthy! Love and prayers always."

Refugee marked the beginning of Kareena Kapoor Khan's journey in Hindi cinema, a career that has since spanned over two decades and seen her move seamlessly between commercial hits and performance-driven roles.

On the work front, Anupam Kher is set to appear in The India House, where he plays Shyamji Krishna Varma. The film, directed by Ram Vamsi Krishna, is set against the backdrop of India's freedom struggle and marks Kher's 542nd film. Kareena, on the other hand, will be seen in Meghna Gulzar's Daayra.

# How to pick the perfect Red rice

Red rice is considered a healthier option when compared to white rice and nutritionists-diетicians recommend this. However, when we go to the stores, more often than not, most of us are left confused with the number of options and variants of red/brown rice available. How do we know which one is the best? What do we need to look out for? We asked these questions to holistic nutritionist Luke Coutinho and nutritionist Dr Nupur Krishnan. They share how to pick the best red rice...

Look for a deep red colour, as this is regulated by the anthocyanin levels. This unpolished rice has

only its husks removed, thus retaining its vitamins and nutrients.

Both medium and long-grained red rice have a light nutty flavour and are not as rich in starch as white rice.

Himalayan Red Rice are long-grained rice varieties that feature bran with a red colour. The rice has a rich red colour and nutty flavour when it is cooked.

It has a firm texture making it a perfect option for salads and various other recipes.

Look for the ones that say '100 per cent wholegrain'. These are much higher in fibre, protein, vitamins and minerals.

Foods that go with it

Traditional Indian curries are best when paired with red rice. Luke says, "For example in Goa, the traditional Gaon fish curry tastes best with red rice. Vegetable stews also go well with red rice. You can make a cold or hot salad with it as well. Cooked red rice with added raw veggies for crunch, served cold or warm, enhances its flavours all the more."

**Benefits**

Red rice is packed with nutrients.

The antioxidant pigment present in red rice is called anthocyanins. This is beneficial in reducing inflammation, managing weight and even in preventing some cancers.

The B-vitamins present in it are essential for our body.

It also has iron, calcium and zinc.

Calcium is required for bone health, iron for blood supply and zinc for brain functions.

Eating red rice the right way

able broth.

You need to rinse the rice and keep it in a large bowl with enough water and let it soak for 30 minutes. Now, drain and set it aside. In a pan, heat a little bit of olive oil and sauté the garlic until it is soft. Now add finely chopped mushrooms and spring onions and let it sauté for some time till it turns golden. Next add the red rice in the pan along with spices and add a pinch of salt and the vegetable broth, while you stir all the ingredients properly.

Bring it to a boil over medium heat. Once you turn the heat, simmer the rice until it gets soft and thoroughly cooked. Garnish with coriander leaves and sprouts and serve hot.



## The water buffalo diet

When I mean a Water Buffalo Diet, I don't mean that you eat like one. I merely use this title as a way to classify — and to correct misconceptions of — diets that are high in liquid. What I call Water Buffalo Diets are those that make you wallow in water or other liquids, depriving you of essential nutrition.

You know how it starts. After a particularly unending weekend of binge eating and binge drinking, you decide to turn over a new leaf or compensate for all the indulgences. You then decide to take the extreme step - liquid diet. It is actually quite bad for you. It doesn't matter whether it's juices, soups or water.

I once had a client who came into my clinic after completing a liquid diet. It comprised lime water, reduced food intake and drinking more

than four litres of water every day. Needless to say, the weight she lost came right back, and then some more. I'll tell you what I told her: if you are on a liquid diet — no matter what that liquid may be — you will be almost completely starved of carbs, proteins and fats, all of which are crucial for your health. And, get this, crucial for long-lasting weight loss plans.

Fat burning is a high metabolic activity and one needs nutrition to sustain it. Without that, the weight will come back as quickly as you lose it, and in many cases, you may gain more than you lost.

As all liquid diets are crash diets — side-effects include hair loss, brittle or weak nails as well as weaker bones, teeth or digestive tracts. Then comes an irritable bowel. By drinking so much, you are essentially preventing your brain from sending out hunger signals. So even if you 'feel fine', your body will protest on its own way later. Other starvation side effects include dizziness, breathlessness, headaches, hallucinations, nausea, low blood pressure, palpitations and extreme fatigue.

## Way to fight choco cravings found



Intake of prebiotics — dietary fibers found naturally in foods like chicory, artichokes, raw garlic, leeks and onions — may help improve sleep and act as a buffer against the physiological impacts of stress, a study shows.

Prebiotics are certain types of non-digestible fibers that probiotic bacteria feed on, such as the fibers found in many plant

sources like asparagus, oatmeal, and legumes as well as in breast milk.

The findings showed that rats on the prebiotic diet spent more time in non-rapid-eye-movement (NREM) sleep, which is restful and restorative and is dreamless, than those on the non-prebiotic diet.

"We found that dietary prebiotics can improve non-rapid eye movement (REM)

sleep, as well as REM sleep after a stressful event," said lead author Robert Thompson, post-doctoral student at University of Colorado - Boulder.

"Given that sufficient NREM sleep and proper nutrition can impact brain development and function and that sleep problems are common in early life, it is possible that a diet rich in prebiotics started in early life could help improve sleep, support the gut microbiota and promote optimal brain/psychological health," added Monika Fleshner, Professor at University of Colorado - Boulder.

For the study, published in the journal *Frontiers in Behavioural Neuroscience*, the team fed three-week-old male rats a diet of either standard chow or chow that included prebiotics. They then monitored the rats' body temperature, gut bacteria and sleep-wake cycles — using EEG or brain activity testing — over time.

After being exposed to a stressor, the rats on the prebiotic diet also spent more time in rapid-eye-movement (REM) sleep.

REM sleep is believed to be critical for promoting recovery from stress — previously been shown to reduce healthy diversity of gut bacteria.

But rats on the prebiotic diet were buffered from the impact, maintaining a healthy and diverse gut microbiota and normal temperature fluctuations even after stress exposure, the study said.

