

President, PM visit Vajpayee's memorial 'Sadaiv Atal'; pay tributes

Atal Bihari
Vajpayee was born in Gwalior on this day in 1924 and died in New Delhi on August 16, 2018, with the government observing his birth anniversary as Good Governance Day.

New Delhi .(Agency)
President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President C P Radhakrishnan and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were among the dignitaries who attended a prayer ceremony at 'Sadaiv Atal', the memorial of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, on Thursday to pay tributes to him on his 101st birth anniversary. Former vice president M Venkaiah Naidu, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Union Ministers J P Nadda, Nirmala Sitharaman, NDA ally JD-U leader and Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh, several other ministers, MPs, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, and BJP working president



Nitin Nabi were among those who attended the event. The prime minister said he had the privilege to pay tributes to Vajpayee by visiting his memorial 'Sadaiv Atal' in Delhi on his birth anniversary.

"His life, dedicated to public service and service to the nation, will always continue to inspire the people of the country," PM Modi said. He said Vajpayee's personality, work and leadership will continue to be a guiding light

for the all-round development of the nation. He said Vajpayee dedicated his entire life to good governance and nation-building." He will always be remembered as a brilliant orator as well as a spirited poet. Vajpayee's personality, work and leadership will continue to be a guiding light for the all-round development of the nation," PM Modi said in a message earlier.

Vajpayee was born on this day in Gwalior in 1924 and passed away in New Delhi on August 16, 2018. The government observes his birth anniversary as Good Governance Day.

The BJP marked the day with

its leaders commemorating Vajpayee's legacy in nationwide events. Its chief ministers, Union ministers and MPs, besides organisational leaders, are part of these programmes held across the country. Vajpayee, India's 13th prime minister, served the country for three terms between 1996 and 2004. He is known for his valuable contribution to India's economic growth. The 'Operation Vijay,' commonly known as the Kargil War, was fought against Pakistan and won during his tenure as prime minister. He made India a nuclear weapons power. He had a distinguished four-decade parliamentary career, was

elected nine times to the Lok Sabha and twice to the Rajya Sabha.

Rising from humble beginnings in Gwalior (Madhya Pradesh) to the post of prime minister, he received the Padma Vibhushan in 1992 for his selfless dedication to the nation and was conferred with Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, in 2015. Vajpayee championed democratic ideals, women's empowerment, and social equality.

As prime minister, he prioritised good governance and economic development, building national highways, rural roads, expanding telecom, and improving infrastructure.

Nitin Gadkari recalls close encounter with Hamas leader before his assassination

Iran confirmed that Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh was killed on July 31, 2024, inside a military facility in Tehran, with his bodyguard also killed. The exact method of the attack remained unclear.

New Delhi .(Agency)
Union minister Nitin Gadkari recently disclosed that he came face-to-face with Hamas political chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran just hours before the latter was assassinated inside a heavily guarded Iranian military facility, an incident that later exposed major security lapses in Iran and rattled the region. Gadkari made the revelation while speaking at a book launch, where he described his visit to Iran to attend the swearing-in ceremony of President Masoud Peshkhan in July 2024. The minister said he travelled at the request of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to represent India at the event.

Recounting the timeline, Gadkari said global leaders and dignitaries had gathered at a five-star hotel in Tehran ahead of the inauguration. Among them was Haniyeh, despite the Hamas leader not holding any formal state position.

"All the heads of various nations were present, but one person who wasn't a head of state was Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. I met him. I saw him heading to the

swearing-in ceremony along with the President and the Chief Justice," Gadkari said.

The situation changed dramatically in the early hours after the ceremony. Gadkari said he had returned to his hotel when, at around 4 am, the Iranian ambassador to

1.15 am on July 31, 2024 while staying at a highly secured military facility in Tehran overseen by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). His bodyguard also died in the attack.

According to Gadkari, the precise method of the assassination remained unclear. "Some

people say he was killed because of using his mobile phone. Some say it happened in some other way," he told the audience.

During the same address, Gadkari also spoke about global power dynamics, arguing that national strength determines security. Referring to Israel, he said that if a country is strong, "no country can lay a hand on it," citing its technological and military capabilities despite its small size.

The IRGC has officially stated that the building where Haniyeh was staying was struck by a short-range missile. However, an investigation reported by The Telegraph has offered a contrasting account. The report claimed that Israel's intelligence agency Mossad recruited Iranian security personnel to carry out the assassination by planting explosives inside the facility.

India approached him and informed him that he needed to leave immediately. "When I asked what had happened, I was told that the Hamas chief had been assassinated. I was shocked. I asked how it happened, and the answer was, 'I don't know yet,'" he said. Iran later confirmed that Haniyeh was killed at approximately

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News box

2 attack doctor with scissors at his clinic in Gurgaon, snatch cash

Faridabad.(Agency)

Two men were arrested on Wednesday for allegedly entering an eye clinic, assaulting a doctor with scissors and looting cash from the clinic in SGM Nagar. Police recovered Rs 70,000 from the accused so far. The incident occurred on Dec 21, when the doctor, Rahul, was present at his clinic near Sharma Chowk. Police said two youths — Sunil Chaudhary alias Sonu and Robin Sharma alias Ganju, both residents of SGM Nagar — entered the clinic and began abusing him. When Rahul objected, Robin allegedly picked up a pair of scissors lying on a table and attacked him, while both accused assaulted the doctor. The duo then allegedly looted Rs 1.10 lakh from the clinic's cash drawer and fled. Following the complaint, an FIR was registered at the SGM Nagar police station. During interrogation, police found that Sunil's father had earlier asked the doctor to help sell his house, and Rahul had been sending prospective buyers to their residence. However, Sunil was opposed to selling the property, which led to a dispute. Police said Sunil first came to the clinic and argued with the doctor. He later called Robin, and the two then allegedly carried out the assault, with Robin attacking Rahul with scissors and Sunil looting the cash. Both accused were produced before a court and remanded to two days of police custody for further interrogation.

Fake crypto investment racket busted in Gurgaon, 3 held

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Three men were arrested for allegedly cheating people by luring them into fake cryptocurrency investment schemes through social media platforms. The accused used advertisements promising high returns on investments and also targeted people by promising them work-from-home jobs. The accused were identified as Vijender (23) of Kankariya village in Dausa district; Dilkhush (21) and Vivek Kumar (18), both residents of Bagdi village in the same district. The fraud came to light following a complaint filed on March 7. Our mobile phones were recovered from their possession, said police, adding that the main bank account holder, Vijender, along with his two associates were nabbed. It was found that Rs 73,556 from the cheated amount was transferred into Vijender's bank account. Investigators revealed that he sold his bank account to Dilkhush for Rs 10,000, who in turn sold it to Vivek for Rs 20,000 to facilitate the fraud.

2 held for playing loud music in residential area in Gurgaon

Noida.(Agency)

A security guard and a senior manager working for Elan Group were arrested for allegedly playing loud music in a residential area beyond the permitted time and without mandatory permission, causing disturbance to residents. Police said that around 11pm on Monday, an emergency response vehicle (ERV) team alerted Sector-50 police station about extremely loud music being played at a realty project on Sohna Road, located in a residential neighbourhood. A police team reached the spot and found the DJ music being played at a high volume. The music was immediately stopped, and organisers were asked to produce permission documents, which they failed to do, assuring officers they would submit them the next morning. However, no permission letter issued by any competent authority was produced on Tuesday. Police said the music was played after 10 pm in violation of court orders and noise pollution norms, disturbing public peace. A case was subsequently registered at Sector-50 police station under relevant sections of BNS.

TOI contacted Elan Group. However, the company has denied the allegations. The accused were identified as Amarjeet (55), a resident of Mundka in Delhi, and Keshav (30), a resident of Tatarpur village. Police said Amarjeet had been working as a security head with the firm for 15 years, while Keshav was employed as a senior manager for around one-and-a-half years. Both accused have been formally joined in the investigation.

Sun and relief from 'gas chamber' after 13 days

Noida.(Agency)

Noida: A welcome atmospheric change brought the sun out and gave residents relief from a long spell of hazardous air. While AQI on Wednesday was still 'poor' at 273, it was a significant improvement from 426 (severe) a day earlier and broke a 13-day spell of 'very poor' and 'severe'. The bad air spell goes back much further, to Nov 7. Since then, Noida's AQI has not been 'severe' or 'very poor' for just four days, on Nov 30, Dec 9, 10 and Wednesday. During the same period, Greater Noida recorded eight days in the 'poor' category, while Ghaziabad saw just four 'poor' days. With an AQI of 244 on the day, Ghaziabad also saw 11 'severe' air days this winter. On Tuesday, the city's AQI was on the cusp of severe at 393. Parts of the city, including Vasundhara (301), continued to witness 'very poor' air. Monitoring stations at Sanjay Nagar and Loni recorded 'poor' AQIs at 266 and 225, respectively.

Indirapuram was significantly better at 186 ('moderate'). Greater Noida's air quality also improved, from 388 a day earlier to 259. Knowledge Park V station recorded 275 and Knowledge Park III 243, both in the 'poor' category. In Noida, air quality improved across most areas, with sectors 116, 125 and 62 recording AQI levels between 235 and 273 in the 'poor' category. Only Sector 1 remained 'very poor', at 315. Delhi's AQI at 4pm was 271, against 412 a day ago. Officials attributed the improvement in air quality to strong northwesterly winds, which touched 20 kmph.

City shows caring side as chill hits most vulnerable

Noida.(Agency)

In a city better known for its glass towers and gated enclaves, a quieter response to winter has been unfolding after dark. As temperatures drop across Noida and Greater Noida, residents and small social groups have begun stepping out at night to help those sleeping on pavements, bus stops and under flyovers survive the cold. Some carry flasks of tea and packets of biscuits to night shelters. Others move through neighbourhoods with bundles of blankets, woollens and basic medicines. Over the last week, members of Jeevan Arpan Social Service (JASS), a motley group of young professionals, have been moving through central Noida, stopping wherever they find people sleeping on the medians or bus stops. The volunteers usually gather late in the evening, after work hours, distributing blankets and checking if anyone needs medical attention. "We started this drive around



Dec 20," said Nishu Upadhyay, a member of the group. "The idea was simple. No one should suffer or die because of the cold." Over the past few days, the team has distributed 15 to 20 blankets across sectors, including 42, 43, 18 and 37. Similar efforts are playing out across the city. Pawan Yadav, a resident of Sector

100, has been organising food and clothing for homeless people in his area, while Balraj Goel, a resident of Sector 12, is focusing on medical assistance and shelter. Goel is a volunteer at Apna Ghar, a shelter home in Sector 34, where he often brings people found sleeping on the streets. A few days ago, Goel and his wife, Bhati said.

Shalu, found a woman in her forties sitting at a bus stop in Sector 27. She told them she was the Prime Minister and was waiting for an official trip. "We realised she was not mentally stable," Shalu said. The couple helped move her to the Sector 34 shelter, which is run largely by volunteers. Another elderly woman, around 65, was rescued from a street in Sector 37 last week. On Wednesday, volunteers from the shelter also distributed blankets at Kanchanjunga market in Sector 53. In Greater Noida, residents have also stepped in. Harinder Bhati, who lives in Beta 1, has been arranging tea, biscuits and sweets for people staying at the Pari Chowk night shelter. The Greater Noida Authority operates several such shelters during winter, but residents say community participation remains critical. "This works only when people come together," Bhati said.

Spat over water spirals out of control, man opens fire at neighbour in Gurgaon

Gurgaon.(Agency)

A man was arrested on Wednesday for allegedly opening fire at his neighbour following a dispute over water flowing onto the street from his house in Bar Gurjar village. Police said the accused, Dinesh alias Dhanni, first threatened the victim, Jayveer Rathi, a building material supplier, over the phone around 9pm on Tuesday, warning him to stop the water leakage or face consequences. "The caller told him, 'I will shoot you,'" an officer said.

About an hour later, the accused allegedly arrived at Rathi's house in a black Thar SUV and opened fire while Rathi was standing outside his house. Rathi ran inside to save himself, after which the accused allegedly fired three to four more rounds, damaging two parked cars — a Maruti Brezza and a Swift — before fleeing. Police said the vehicle's registration number could not be noted. Police from Bar Gurjar police post under Kherki Daula police station reached the spot. A crime scene team inspected the area and collected evidence. Based on Rathi's complaint and a preliminary probe, a case was registered under Section 109 (attempt to murder) of BNS and sections 25, 54 and 59 of the Arms Act at Kherki Daula police station. Dinesh was arrested on Wednesday evening by a team from the Manesar crime branch. A preliminary interrogation revealed that the accused, a farmer, had repeatedly asked Rathi to divert the water flowing onto the street, leading to frequent disputes between them. "Frustrated, Dinesh, along with his accomplices, carried out the firing," the officer said. "The accused is being interrogated to identify and trace his accomplices, as well as to recover the weapon and the vehicle used in the crime," the officer added.

A relative of the complainant said both families share the same compound and had argued earlier in the evening over water flowing from Rathi's house onto the road. "Later that night, he called and threatened to kill him," the relative

Secondary pollutants drive a third of PM2.5 load in Haryana, says study

Gurgaon.(Agency)

Secondary pollutants, particularly ammonium sulfate, contribute to one-third of PM 2.5 load in most districts of Haryana, including Gurgaon, a new analysis by Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) has revealed. According to the district-level data, ammonium sulfate concentrations range from 12 to 20 micrograms per cubic meter, accounting for 29% to 34% of the total PM2.5 mass. Faridabad is the most-affected area, with ammonium sulfate contributing 34% to PM2.5 levels at an average concentration of 20 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. Similarly, Gurgaon, Sonipat, and Palwal report a 33% contribution each with concentrations nearing 19 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. Rohtak and Jhajjar also record high levels, with ammonium sulfate comprising about 32% of PM2.5. The findings support earlier state-level research indicating that nearly one-third of Haryana's annual PM2.5 pollution is secondary, formed in the atmosphere rather than emitted directly. Even districts with lower overall pollution levels exhibit a large volume of secondary components. For instance, Panchkula and Yamunanagar report

average ammonium sulfate concentrations of 12 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, making up 30% of PM2.5. In Ambala, the contribution increases to 31%, while Sirsa records a slightly lower share of 29%. Central and western Haryana districts, including Hisar, Fatehabad, Karnal, Kaithal, Jind, and Nuh, display a consistent pattern, with ammonium sulfate contributing between 31% and 32% of PM2.5 mass. Mahendragarh, Bhiwani, and Charkhi Dadri also fall within this range, despite variations in local sources and population density. The data underlines that fine particle pollution in Haryana is not solely driven by local dust, traffic, or construction activities.

A major portion is secondary PM2.5, formed from precursor gases like sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and ammonia, which undergo chemical reactions in the atmosphere. Ammonium sulfate emerges as a dominant component.

CREA's analysis coincides with the Centre's consideration of revisions to National Clean Air Programme. Experts have consistently criticised the programme's focus on PM10 and visible

dust, arguing that it inadequately addresses secondary PM2.5, which transcends district and state boundaries. Manoj Kumar, an India analyst at CREA, stated, "What the district-level data from Haryana shows clearly is that secondary pollution, especially ammonium sulfate, is not a marginal or seasonal issue but a structural driver of PM2.5. In most districts, it accounts for nearly one-third of fine particulate pollution, with places like Faridabad, Gurgaon, and Sonipat seeing contributions of 33–34%. This kind of pollution is formed in the atmosphere from precursor gases, mainly sulfur dioxide, which means focusing only on visible dust or PM10 will not deliver sustained air quality improvement. India remains the world's largest emitter of sulfur dioxide, with coal-fired power plants being the primary contributors. CREA has warned that unless SO2 and other precursor gases are strictly controlled, including through stringent norms for power plants, PM2.5 levels in Haryana and broader NCR are unlikely to see sustained reductions, even if measures to control local dust and traffic improve."

Unfinished wall, 'porous' passenger area: What's delaying Noida airport; PMO to decide inauguration date

NOIDA.(Agency)

Calendar year 2025 is almost up and the answer to whether Noida International Airport (NIA) will become operational this fiscal, which is by March 31, 2026, should be known on Christmas.

Union aviation secretary Samir Sinha will on Thursday hold a review of the status of the airport — which still has some key elements, including the critical perimeter wall, unfinished — with all agencies involved, based on which its readiness for inauguration will be decided. After formal inauguration, at least 45 days are required for an airport to become operational.

A source close to developments told TOI, "NIA's perimeter wall was not ready till very recently. In its absence, watch towers have been set up at regular intervals on the perimeter that require proper illumination.



Passenger flow areas for arrivals and departures are porous at some points, due to which there is a potential for mix-ups happening, like arriving flyers passing on to departing ones and vice-versa. This needs to be plugged. Besides, bomb disposal equipment at the airport is yet to be certified by Central Industrial Security Force. The aviation ministry, meanwhile,

has taken up the issue of the NIA CEO, Christoph Schnellmann, being an expat with the home ministry.

They are learnt to have pointed out that the CEOs of both Air India and IndiGo are foreign nationals as well. "We expect to resolve this issue, too," a source said. Schnellmann is an old India hand and was involved with the construction of Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport in 2007-08. Foreign CEOs for greenfield airports need security clearance from the home ministry. Secretary Sinha on Thursday will meet senior officials of agencies like Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS), CISF and Directorate General of Civil Aviation, apart from executives of NIA. Once these issues are resolved, an inauguration date will be sought from the Prime Minister's Office.

Festive cheer! Excise dept issues 176 booze permits

NOIDA.(Agency)

Noida: The excise department has issued 176 occasional party licences in the city so far for Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day, as authorities gear up to regulate alcohol service during the festive season. Each licence is valid for 12 hours on the specified date. According to officials, 56 licences were issued for Dec 24, and 59 for Christmas Day. With year-end celebrations approaching, 33 licences have so far been issued for Dec 30 and another 28 for Dec 31. The number of licences for Dec 30 and 31 is expected to rise further as applications continue to come in, officials said, adding that licences can be also obtained on the same day through the department's online portal. Of the total licences issued across the four days, around 80% — approximately 140 licences — have been issued to RWAs and gated housing societies planning community celebrations where alcohol will be



served. The remaining licences have been issued to restaurants, banquet halls and other establishments that do not hold permanent bar licences but intend to serve alcohol during Christmas and New Year parties. For such commercial venues, the cost of an occasional bar licence is Rs 11,000 for 12 hours.

Under the Uttar Pradesh Excise Policy for 2024-25, the state introduced separate categories of occasional licences for house

parties and for events organised by RWAs and housing societies. Earlier, both were clubbed under a single category. For individuals hosting private house parties with no commercial or profit-making activity.

THE SIKH TIMES

Edited, Printed, Published
Owned by Simmi Babbar

N-31, Dr. Mukherjee Nagar

Delhi-110009

Printed at Qaumi Patrika Printing
Press, A4/A-144, Tronica City
(Loni), Ghaziabad (Uttar Pradesh)

Corporate Office:

5, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg,

Press Area, ITO, New Delhi

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RNI No. DELENG/2008/25465

1st-yr engg student dies by suicide in Gr Noida hostel

NOIDA.(Agency)

A first-year engineering student allegedly died by suicide at a private hostel in Greater Noida on Tuesday evening. The 19-year-old was pursuing his degree from Delhi Technical Campus (DTC) in Knowledge Park, and stayed at SNH Residency hostel, located near the college. According to police, on Tuesday evening, when the youth had not stepped out of his room for a long time, hostel staff and fellow students grew suspicious. "Repeated knocks and calls went unanswered, following which the door was opened. He was found hanging inside the room, prompting the hostel authorities to inform the police," a senior officer said, adding that the student's roommate was not present at the time. A police team reached the spot and took the body into custody. During a search of the room, police recovered a suicide note in which the student reportedly mentioned that he was under immense academic pressure and mental stress. In the note, he stated that no individual was

responsible for his death and requested that no action be taken against anyone, cops added.

A senior officer said preliminary investigation suggests it is a case of suicide. "The suicide note is being sent for forensic examination. We are also questioning the student's friends, hostel warden, and college authorities to understand the circumstances that led to this step," he said. The student's family has been informed about the incident.

Robbery gang busted after encounter, Hunt on for absconding accused

The Sikh Times
Manoj Pal

Muzaffarnagar: Police have cracked a sensational robbery case reported from the Khatauli area following an encounter. In a joint operation by the SOG and Khatauli police, two hardened robbers were arrested in an injured condition after a brief exchange of fire. Cash looted in the crime, gold and silver jewellery, illegal weapons and the motorcycle used in the incident were recovered from their possession. The incident took place on December 5, when armed miscreants barged into a house in Mohalla Lal Mohammad under Khatauli police station limits and looted cash and valuable jewellery at gunpoint. Taking the gravity of the crime into account, an FIR was promptly registered and a joint team comprising the SOG and police from three stations was constituted. During the investigation, CCTV footage from the crime scene and suspected escape routes was continuously analysed. On Thursday, police received specific information that

the accused involved in the robbery were attempting to flee through the Ganga canal route under Khatauli police station limits. Acting on the tip-off, police teams launched a checking opera-

Laddawala, Muzaffarnagar. Both are continuously active in criminal activities. Both were arrested on the spot and admitted to hospital for treatment. Addressing a press conference, SSP Sanjay

from more than 700 CCTV cameras. The arrested accused were found in possession of Rs 1.58 lakh in cash, a large quantity of gold and silver jewellery, country-made pistols and cartridges, and the motorcycle used in the robbery. During interrogation, the accused confessed to committing the robbery along with their associates. Their criminal antecedents are also being verified. The operation was carried out by teams led by Khatauli SHO Dinesh Baghel, Mansurpur SHO Anand Dev Mishra and Budhiana SHO Subhash Atri, with significant support from the SOG. Police said that four accused are still absconding, and efforts are on to dismantle the entire robbery network. For successfully

cracking the case, the team was awarded Rs 50,000 and commendation certificates by ADG Meerut Bhau Bhaskar, while SSP Muzaffarnagar announced an additional cash reward of Rs 25,000 for the police personnel involved.

walnut for carvings, and chinar wood for ceilings and interior wall panels. Windows will feature cedar sash frames with glass panes, while columns, railings, arches and exterior walls will have intricate Persian

doors will ensure safety and durability, while interiors will follow the carved-wood theme throughout. Unlike traditional houseboats, this one will be permanently fixed to the ground. The DDA expects the struc-



Punjab recognised as "Top Achiever" in Ease of Doing Business by Government of India

Contd.....Front page

The Minister said that the Government has launched RTB Act 2.0 on the Punjab Invest portal, further enhancing ease of doing business by enabling consolidated approvals starting from as early as 5 days. He added that the compliance burden has been significantly reduced by simplifying, digitising, de-criminalising and rationalising 833 G2B and 1,702 G2C compliances. Amendments to the Punjab Right to Business Act, 2020 now allow eligible enterprises to commence or expand operations based on self-declaration, with In-Principle approvals issued within 5 to 18 days. About 2,000 units have already been granted such approvals. The CLU process has also been simplified by removing the requirement for standalone industries in permissible zones. The Minister further stated that 24 specialised

Sectoral Committees have been constituted to ensure robust industry consultation for the upcoming sector-specific industrial policy. Each committee is chaired by a prominent industrialist from the respective sector. All committee reports have been submitted, and a new, robust Industrial Policy is on the anvil and will be released by January 2026. He added that the Government launched the "Rising Punjab - Suggestions to Solutions" series across Mohali, Bathinda, Amritsar, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Gobindgarh and Khanna, enabling direct industry participation in policy formulation. Outreach delegations led by the Chief Minister were conducted in New Delhi, Gurugram, Bengaluru, Chennai and

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I, hitherto known as BHAUTI W/O KAJOURDAYA R/o Flat No-731, B-Block, Resettlement Colony, Khyla, Tilaq Nagar, West Delhi, Delhi-110018 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as BHOTI.

NAME CHANGE

I, hitherto known as BHAUTI W/O KAJOURDAYA R/o Flat No-731, B-Block, Resettlement Colony, Khyla, Tilaq Nagar, West Delhi, Delhi-110018, by virtue of Regd. GPAATS & Will dated 09.01.2025, executed by Mr. Nitin Dagar S/o Mr. Umed Singh, and same to be sold to Mrs. Shivani and same to be finance by SMFG India Home Finance Company Ltd., General public hereby informed that if anybody has any charge/interest/title in the said property or any kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present.

Rahul Raj, Advocate,

SG Associates (Law Firm)
B-01, Plot no. 20,
Koushambi Near HDFC Bank,
U.P.
E-MAIL:
sgassociatespl@gmail.com
Ph: 0120-4968888, 8130309204

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I, hitherto known as GOLU alias SONU PRASAD S/O RAJESH PRASAD residing at : 7 NO-261, Neharip, Rohini, Ray Pur, Kalan, North West Delhi, Delhi-110085 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as SONU PRASAD

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NEWS BOX

"Radical Left Scum": Trump Derides Rivals In Christmas Message**United States . (Agency)**

US President Donald Trump seized on the occasion of Christmas Eve to assail opposition Democrats, branding them "radical left scum" as he sent out holiday greetings. From his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, the Republican spent the day before Christmas spreading some yuletide cheer. He participated in NORAD Santa tracker calls and sent Christmas greetings to American troops worldwide. Trump did not share that same bonhomie with rival Democrats. "Merry Christmas to all, including the Radical Left Scum that is doing everything possible to destroy our Country, but are failing badly," Trump said on his Truth Social platform.

"We no longer have Open Borders, Men in Women's Sports, Transgender for Everyone, or Weak Law Enforcement. What we do have is a Record Stock Market and 401K's, Lowest Crime numbers in decades, No Inflation, and yesterday, a 4.3 GDP, two points better than expected," he added. Trump lashed out at the opposition, which has criticised his administration over its handling of the cost of living, a day after Commerce Department data showed the economy had grown by 4.3 percent in the third quarter -- the highest GDP in two years.

But the report also showed the price index for domestic purchases rose 3.4 percent -- a much higher inflation reading compared with 2.0 percent in the second quarter. In the week before Christmas, Democrats had criticised the Justice Department over its slow release and heavy redaction of thousands of records from the investigation into convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, once a friend of Trump. Trump also sent greetings to troops worldwide, including those who are part of a major US naval buildup in Caribbean waters, where Washington has mounted a campaign to pressure Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro to leave office.

Khaleda Zia's Son Tarique Rahman Returns To Bangladesh: A Look At His Time In Exile**NEW YORK . (Agency)**

Tarique Rahman, the eldest son of Bangladesh's former President Ziaur Rahman and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, has returned to the country after nearly 17 years in self-imposed exile. Rahman and his family were welcomed at Dhaka airport by thousands of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) supporters carrying placards and banners.

BNP supporters and party activists marched on foot toward the Dhaka airport along Banani Airport Road to mark the return of Rahman to Bangladesh. Earlier, images of him departing for Dhaka from London's Heathrow Airport with his wife, Zubaida Rahman, and daughter, Zaima Rahman, went viral on social media, with his party preparing for what they call an "unprecedented" gathering of more than five million people in the capital to welcome them. On the way back to my motherland, Bangladesh!" Zaima Rahman wrote on her Facebook page, sharing pictures from inside the aircraft, with her father and mother smiling beside her.

BNP's Mega Welcome Plan

BNP has planned to rally 5 million supporters from Dhaka Airport to Rahman's reception venue, to welcome their exiled leader, demonstrating its strength as he emerges as a top contender for prime minister in the February elections. This will be a defining political moment," senior BNP leader Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said, adding that security arrangements are being closely coordinated with authorities to ensure order.

Israel Accuses Hamas Of Violating Gaza Truce, Says "Will Respond"**World . (Agency)**

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Hamas on Wednesday of violating the Gaza ceasefire agreement after a military officer was wounded by an explosive device in Rafah, and Israel vowed retaliation. His office said in a statement that Hamas must fully uphold the October agreement, noting that it envisaged the militant group being removed from power in Gaza as well as demilitarisation and deradicalisation of the territory.

"Israel will respond accordingly," the statement added. The Israeli military earlier said that an explosive device had detonated against a military vehicle in the southern Rafah area of Gaza and that one officer had been lightly injured. Violence has subsided but not stopped since the Gaza truce took effect on October



10, and the sides have regularly accused each other of violating the ceasefire. Gaza's health ministry says Israel has killed more than 400 people in the territory since the ceasefire went into effect.

A 20-point plan issued by US President Donald Trump in September calls for an initial truce followed by steps towards a wider peace. It ultimately calls for Hamas to disarm and have no governing role in Gaza and for Israel to pull out of the territory, which remains in ruins after two years of war.

After missing deadline, US DOJ says it may need 'few more weeks' to finish releasing Epstein files

The announcement came amid increasing scrutiny on the DOJ's staggered release of Epstein-related records, including from Epstein victims and members of Congress.

WASHINGTON . (Agency)

The US Justice Department (DOJ) said Wednesday that it may need a "few more weeks" to release all of its records on the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein after suddenly discovering more than a million potentially relevant documents, further delaying compliance with last Friday's congressionally mandated deadline. The Christmas Eve announcement came hours after a dozen US senators called on the DOJ's watchdog to examine its failure to

meet the deadline. The group, 11 Democrats and a Republican, told Acting Inspector General Don Berthiaume in a letter that victims "deserve full disclosure" and the "peace of mind" of an independent audit. The DOJ said in a social media post that federal prosecutors in Manhattan and the FBI "have uncovered over a million more documents" that could be related to the Epstein case — a stunning 11th hour development after department officials suggested months ago that they had undertaken a comprehensive review that accounted for the vast universe of Epstein-related materials. In March, Attorney General Pam Bondi told Fox News that a "truckload of evidence" had been produced after she ordered the FBI to "deliver the full and complete Epstein files to my office." She issued the directive after saying she learned from an unidentified source that the FBI in New York was "in possession of thousands of pages of documents." In July, the FBI and Justice Department indicated in an unsigned memo that they had

undertaken an "exhaustive review" and had determined that no additional evidence should be released — an extraordinary about face from the Trump administration,



which for months had pledged maximum transparency. The memo did not raise the possibility that additional evidence existed that officials were unaware of or had not reviewed. Wednesday's post did not say when the DOJ was informed of the newly uncovered files. In a letter last week, Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche said Manhattan federal prosecutors already had more than 3.6 million records from sex

trafficking investigations into Epstein and his longtime confidant Ghislaine Maxwell, though many were copies of material already turned over by the FBI. The DOJ said its lawyers are "working around the clock" to review the documents and remove victims' names and other identifying information as required by the Epstein Files Transparency Act, the law enacted last month that requires the government to open its files on Epstein and Maxwell. "We will release the documents as soon as possible," the department said. "Due to the mass volume of material, this process may take a few more weeks."

The announcement came amid increasing scrutiny on the DOJ's staggered release of Epstein-related records, including from Epstein victims and members of Congress. Republican Rep. Thomas Massie, of Kentucky, one of the chief authors of the law mandating the document release, posted Wednesday on X: "DOJ did break the law by making illegal redactions and by missing the deadline.

King Charles III picks Westminster Abbey as the site of his Christmas Day broadcast**LONDON . (Agency)**

King Charles III has chosen Westminster Abbey as the site of his Christmas Day speech on Thursday, reflecting the idea of pilgrimage that is expected to be a theme of the annual address to the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. The central London landmark, known for the lavish coronations and royal weddings it has hosted for more than 1,000 years, is also the focus of an annual pilgrimage to the tomb of Edward the Confessor, which lies at the heart of the church. Edward, a monk-like monarch, was canonized as a saint in 1161.

The monarch's annual holiday message is watched by millions of people in the UK and across the Commonwealth, a voluntary association of 56 independent nations, most of which

have historic ties to Britain. The prerecorded speech is broadcast at 3 p.m. (1500 GMT), when many families are enjoying their traditional



personal experiences. This year's address comes just two weeks after Charles made a deeply personal television appearance in which he said "good news" from his doctors meant that he would be able to reduce his treatment for cancer in the new year. The king was diagnosed with a still undisclosed form of cancer in early 2024. Buckingham Palace said that his treatment is now moving to a "precautionary phase" and his condition will be monitored to ensure his continued recovery.

Charles recorded last year's speech at Fitzrovia Chapel, which was once part of the now demolished Middlesex Hospital. During that address, he honored care workers around the country and gave a special thanks to the doctors and nurses who supported him after his cancer diagnosis.

North Korea displays apparent progress in construction of nuclear-powered submarine

→ A nuclear-powered submarine was one item on a long wish list of sophisticated weaponry that Kim announced during a major political conference in 2021 to cope with what he called growing US-led military threats.

SEOUL . (Agency)

North Korea on Thursday displayed apparent progress in the construction of a nuclear-powered submarine, with state media photos showing a largely completed hull, as leader Kim Jong Un condemned rival South Korea's push to acquire the technology.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said Kim visited a shipyard to inspect the construction of what the North describes as an 8,700-ton-class nuclear-propelled submarine, which the leader has called a crucial step in the modernization and nuclear armament of North Korea's navy. The North has indicated it plans to arm the submarine with nuclear weapons, calling it a "strategic guided missile

submarine" or a "strategic nuclear attack submarine." During the visit, Kim described South Korea's efforts to acquire its own nuclear-powered submarine, which have been backed by US President Donald Trump, as an "offensive act" that severely violates the North's security and maritime sovereignty. He said that the South Korean plan further underscores the need to advance and nuclear-arm North Korea's navy, and claimed that the completion of his nuclear-powered submarine would be an "epoch-making" change in strengthening its nuclear war deterrent against what he called enemy threats. The agency did not specify when Kim visited the shipyard but released photos showing him inspecting a huge, burgundy-

colored vessel, coated with what appears to be anti-corrosion paint, under construction inside an assembly hall with senior officials and his daughter. It was the first time North Korean state media had released images of the submarine since March, when they mostly

showed the lower sections of the vessel. It was not immediately clear

how close North Korea is to completing the vessel. But because submarines are typically built from the inside out, the release of what appears to be a largely completed hull suggests that many core components, including the engine and possibly the reactor, are already in place, said Moon Keun-sik, a submarine expert at Seoul's Hanyang University. "Showing the entire vessel now seems to indicate that most of the equipment has already been installed and it is just about ready to be launched into the water," said Moon, a former submarine officer in the South Korean navy, who believes the North Korean submarine could possibly be tested at sea within months.

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Zelenskyy open to 'demilitarised zone' in Ukraine's Donbass region if Russia also withdraws troops

Zelenskyy said the US proposed the creation of a "free economic zone," which he said should be demilitarized. But it was unclear what that idea would mean for governance or development of the region.

KYIV . (Agency)

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he would be willing to withdraw troops from the country's eastern industrial heartland as part of a plan to end Russia's war, if Moscow also pulls back and the area becomes a demilitarized zone monitored by international forces. The proposal offered another potential compromise on control of the Donbas region, which has been a major sticking point in peace

negotiations. Zelenskyy said the US proposed the creation of a "free economic zone," which he said should be demilitarized. But it was unclear what that idea would mean for governance or development of the region.

A similar arrangement could be possible for the area around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, which is currently under Russian control, Zelenskyy said. He said any peace plan would need to be put to a referendum. Zelenskyy spoke to reporters Tuesday to describe an overarching 20-point plan that negotiators from Ukraine and the US hammered out in Florida in recent days, though he said many details are still being discussed. Russia offers no hint it will agree to withdrawal. Russia has given no indication that it will agree to any kind of withdrawal from land it has seized. In fact, Moscow has insisted that Ukraine relinquish the remaining territory it still holds in the Donbas — an ultimatum that Ukraine has rejected. Russia has captured most of Luhansk and about 70% of Donetsk — the two areas that make up the Donbas. Asked about the plan, Kremlin

spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Wednesday that Moscow would decide its



position based on information received by Russian presidential envoy Kirill Dmitriev, who met with US envoys in Florida over the weekend. Peskov declined to share further details. American negotiators have engaged in a series of talks with Ukraine and Russia separately since US President Donald Trump presented a plan to end the war last month — a proposal widely seen as favoring Moscow, which invaded its neighbor nearly four years ago. Since then, Ukraine and its allies in Europe have worked to pull the plan closer to Kyiv's

position. Zelenskyy said figuring out control of the Donbas region is "the most difficult point." Meanwhile, on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the US has proposed creating a consortium with Ukraine and Russia, in which each party would have an equal stake. Zelenskyy countered with a proposal for a joint venture between the US and Ukraine, in which the Americans would be able to decide how to distribute their share, including giving some of it to Russia. Zelenskyy acknowledged that the US has not yet accepted Ukraine's counter-proposals. "But we have significantly brought most of the positions closer together," Zelenskyy said. "In principle, all other consensus in this agreement has been found between us and them." Zone would require difficult discussions. Creating the demilitarized economic zone in the Donbas would require difficult discussions on how far troops would be required to move back and where international forces would be stationed, Zelenskyy said, adding that it should be discussed at the leaders level.

NEWS BOX

Keslapur Nagoba Jatara to begin on January 18 in Telangana's Adilabad district

ADILABAD. (Agency)

The Keslapur Nagoba Jatara will begin on January 18, 2026, at Indervelly mandal in the district. Members of the Meshram community and temple authorities held prayers and meetings at the Nagoba temple and finalised the dates and programmes to be conducted ahead of the jatara.

As part of the preparations, the prachara rath (campaign bullock cart) was flagged off. Priests Meshram Hanumanth Rao Patodi and Dadi Rao travelled in the bullock cart to seven villages to inform people about the jathra schedule and puja requirements.

The rath first visited Sirikonda mandal headquarters, where orders were placed for pots required for abhishekam using water from the Godavari river. It later covered other villages and is scheduled to return on December 29. On December 30, members of the Meshram community will undertake a 70-km padayatra to the Godavari river at Hasanmagudu in Jainoor mandal to collect holy water for the abhishekam of the snake deity on the opening day of the jatara. Community members said the practice has been followed for generations as part of their tradition and culture.

Sundargarh district Jail inmates resort to hunger strike over 'mismanagement'

ROURKELA. (Agency)

Inmates of Sundargarh district jail launched a hunger strike on Wednesday morning alleging mismanagement in the prison. Around 545 convicted and undertrial prisoners (UTPs) lodged in the jail refused to eat their breakfast demanding immediate removal of the prison superintendent. They accused the jail administration of violating the guidelines which allow prisoners to meet their relatives, friends and others. They claimed the jail authorities were deliberately cutting down the visiting time and placing unwarranted restrictions in violation of the prison manual. The agitating prisoners further alleged that despite the biting cold condition, the jail administration was not providing necessary facilities to them. Besides, there were issues with quality and serving of food. Alleging violation of their human rights inside the prison, they demanded removal of the jail superintendent.

Due to the protest, the scheduled production of about 100 UTPs in courts was cancelled on the day. On being informed about the strike, senior officers of Sundargarh police district rushed to the jail along with the local sub-collector. Efforts to restore normalcy failed.

A senior police officer said normalcy was restored in the jail at around 6 pm following prolonged discussion with the authorities of the Prisons directorate. Sambalpur-based DIG of Prisons Gariba Sahu along with other officers of Directorate of Prisons and Correctional Services, Odisha reached the jail to take stock of the situation.

3.6 lakh farmers in Tamil Nadu to get Rs 290 crore in compensation for crop damage

CHENNAI. (Agency)

Agriculture Minister MRK Panneerselvam on Wednesday announced that the state government has sanctioned Rs 289.63 crore from the State Disaster Response Fund as input subsidy relief assistance to farmers who have lost their standing crops due to the northeast monsoon and unseasonal rainfall in 2024, as well as gale wind in January 2025. A GO has been issued in this regard on December 23.

According to assessments, crops over 4.90 lakh acres and horticultural crops over 76,132 acres were affected. Hence, relief assistance amounting to Rs 289.63 crore has been sanctioned from the disaster response fund to 3.60 lakh farmers. Of this, Rs 254.38 crore has been sanctioned for 2.80 lakh farmers affected by heavy rain, and Rs 35.25 crore for 80,383 horticulture farmers. The minister said the relief assistance would be directly credited to the bank accounts of the farmers.

The GO issued by the revenue and disaster management department said damages to agriculture and horticulture crops in 31 districts were assessed due to the northeast monsoon in 2024 and unseasonal rainfall in 2025. Similarly, due to heavy rainfall during the northeast monsoon in 2024, gale wind and unseasonal rainfall during January 2025 damaged horticulture crops in 24 districts.

An official release said that when agricultural and horticultural crops cultivated over 5.66 lakh acres were damaged due to the unseasonal rain in November-December 2024 and January 2025, revenue and agriculture department officials conducted joint field assessments in the affected districts, as per the directions of Chief Minister MK Stalin. Areas with crop damage exceeding 33% were identified, and based on this, proposals seeking relief assistance were obtained from the district collectors and examined.

The event was also attended by the Foundation's Treasurer, Rushikesh Atre, Director of Mission Rupali Shinde-Agashe, and Deputy Director of Mission, Tanmayee Khire, among others.

In Gujarat, dy mamlatdar held in PMLA case; collector booked, shifted

ACB books 4 including Surendranagar district collector Rajendrakumar Patel under anti corruption law

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

THE ENFORCEMENT Directorate (ED) on Tuesday late evening arrested a deputy mamlatdar posted at the Surendranagar district Collectorate, Chandrasinh Mori, on charges of running a money laundering racket and collecting bribes through "systematic extortion" from the office of the collector, to expedite the process of Change of Land Use applications in the district. In a related development, the Gujarat State Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) registered an offence against Surendranagar Collector Rajendrakumar Patel, Mori, and two other staff members from the collector's office on the basis of a complaint by the central agency.

Later in the day, the state government transferred Patel out, placing him at the disposal of the General Administration Department, and gave additional charge of collector to District Development Officer (DDO) K S Yagnik "until further orders." Searches by the ED have recovered Rs 67.50 lakh in cash from the residential premises of Mori, who will be

investigated under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to find the source of this money, top government sources told The Indian Express.

According to the sources, the ED had placed Rajendrakumar Patel, an IAS officer of the



2015 batch posted in Surendranagar since February, "under watch", after a complaint was registered by a private individual, who alleged that a bribe was demanded from him in lieu of converting a piece of agricultural land to Non-Agricultural (NA). Gujarat ACB sources told The Indian Express that Collector Patel, his

personal assistant Jayrajsinh Jhala, a clerk in the collector's office Mayursinh Gohil and Dy Mamlatdar Mori, have been booked under section 13 (criminal misconduct by a public servant) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, on the basis of a complaint by an ED officer. Meanwhile, after his arrest, Mori was on Wednesday produced before a special PMLA Court in Ahmedabad that sent him to ED custody till January 1, 2026.

As per the details available, the ED officials – in connection with another case registered by it – carried out a search and seizure operation at Mori's residences on Tuesday evening. In its application seeking Mori's custody for 14 days, the ED said, "...during investigation under the provisions of PMLA, 2002, it has been revealed that large-scale corruption and generation of proceeds of crime through systematic extortion, demand and collection of illegal gratification by public servants in the Office of the District Collector, Surendranagar, Gujarat in connection with grant and processing of applications for CLU (Change of Land Use) and related statutory permissions under the Saurashtra Gharkhad Tenancy Settlement and Agricultural.

Mumbai: 29-year-old sentenced to 10-year jail for illegal sale of cough syrup

Mumbai. (Agency)

A special NDPS court sentenced a 29-year-old man to ten years rigorous imprisonment for the possession and intended sale of a commercial quantity of codeine-based cough syrup.

Bablu Gupta was arrested on the night of Dec 31, 2021, when a team from the Anti-Narcotics Cell (ANC) was on patrolling duty. Cops spotted Gupta standing near the BMC Udanchand Kendra on Sant Savta Marg, holding a blue-and-yellow striped nylon bag and appearing to be waiting for someone. When the police team surrounded him, Gupta attempted to flee with the bag but was quickly apprehended. A search of the bag, conducted in the presence of independent panch witnesses, led to the recovery of 136 bottles of "Morcerex" syrup. Each 100 ml bottle contained 10 mg of Codeine Phosphate, a narcotic substance falling under the NDPS Act.

The prosecution established an unbroken chain of custody for the seized evidence. Samples were forwarded to the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) in Kalina, where chemical analysis confirmed the presence of codeine.

While Gupta's alleged accomplice, Asha Lingam, was discharged earlier in the proceedings, the court found the evidence against Gupta to be " cogent and reliable". Before the final sentencing, Gupta, a father of two, pleaded for leniency, stating he was the sole breadwinner for his family. "The accused is neither habitual offender nor hardened criminal. In such circumstances, the minimum sentence will suffice the purpose... Imposing minimum sentence serves as a deterrent and upholds the legislative intent to curb the drug abuse," the judge said. Gupta has also been fined Rs 1 lakh.

More than a manger: How Mumbai's Christmas cribs speak to the present

Mumbai. (Agency)

Each Christmas, the city's churches, homes, and gaonthan squares are temporarily sublet to the Holy Family. Depending on the available real estate, they appear either as a compact nuclear unit — Baby Jesus, Mother Mary, and St Joseph — or accompanied by a sprawling entourage of angels, shepherds, cattle, and kings. Space also determines scale — from finger-sized figurines to life-size tableaux housed in custom-built sheds.

While Christmas staples like the tree, the Advent wreath, and the star have remained largely unchanged in form and function, the Nativity scene has evolved with the times. Many contemporary cribs go beyond the familiar mise-en-scène of a hay-strewn manger beneath a star-lit roof to articulate messages that speak to present-day social and environmental realities, and occasionally, political ones.

The Nativity scene at St Pius X College, Goregaon, is a diptych titled "Persecuted Peacemakers". It features on the one side

Christians targeted and killed for their missionary work and campaigns for social justice, such as Fr Stan Swamy, Sr Rani Maria, Graham Steines, and members of Manipur's Kuki-Zo community persecuted for their faith. And on the other, Christians who forgave their attackers, such as Pope John Paul II. The crib, says the concept note, serves as a reminder that "faith grows even in the midst of trial, and that from the wounded community seeds of reconciliation and peace can be born". Baby Jesus, at the centre of the scene, is the beacon of peace.

"The theme is inspired by Pope Leo's prayer intention for December 2025 'for Christians in areas of conflict,'" said Fr Prashant Padu, director of Propaedeutic Year (leading the foundational year for men studying to become priests). The conception and execution of the crib is assigned to the first-years, who settle on a theme after a month of brainstorming, research and reflection. "We think up a couple of ideas and pray over them for at least two days. This is followed by another round of

discussions to shortlist themes," explained Fr Padu. The themes 'Christian persecution' and 'love for the poor' ran neck and neck this year. He asked the young candidates to research both, but Pope Leo's message on persecution tipped the scales in its favour.

Interestingly, unlike most cribs that are unveiled on Christmas Day itself, the one at St Pius was inaugurated on December 19, a day before the seminarians went home for the holidays. At St Pius X Church in Mulund, the Nativity sets Jesus, a symbol of hope, against a distinctly modern idol of pleasure and promise: the cellphone. The tableau is dense with symbolism. On one side, solitary figures bent over their phones inhabit a cityscape of blue-tinted skyscrapers; on the other, communities gather in fellowship on green lawns. A bionic hand rises from the ground to point towards the cellphone, while a human hand descends from the sky to gesture at the manger — both hands a span apart, framing a choice between tech-driven dreams and God-given hope.

HMDA to deploy additional amphibious excavator to tackle plastic waste at Hussainsagar

HYDERABAD. (Agency)

With plastic waste piling up along the shoreline of Hussainsagar, the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) has decided to procure an additional amphibious long boom excavator to strengthen cleaning operations at the lake.

The shoreline is covered with polythene bags, plastic cups, thermocol, food wrappers, cloth bags and other debris, much of it entering the lake through both point and non-point pollution sources. Domestic sewage continues to flow in through Balkapur, Banjara, Kukatpally and Picket nalas, while industrial effluents mixed with sewage enter via the Kukatpally nala. Solid waste dumping into nalas



and litter from commercial establishments along the lakefront further add to the pollution load. Non-point sources include puja material, dried flowers and garlands, idol immersions and litter left behind by visitors and tourists. HMDA officials said large quantities of solid waste are being carried into the lake through nalas and surrounding activities, making regular cleaning increasingly difficult. To

address this, the authority has decided to engage an agency to supply and commission a hydraulic-operated amphibious long boom excavator, along with two years of comprehensive operation and maintenance at Hussainsagar.

The excavator will have a minimum digging depth of seven metres from either side, a bucket capacity of 0.5 cubic metres, a cold-start system and compliance with the latest pollution emission norms. It will be capable of operating on land, shallow water and deep-water zones of the lake.

The selected agency will be responsible for collecting floating vegetation, debris, trash and accumulated silt from the lake and its shoreline, and transporting the waste to designated disposal points identified by HMDA. At present, HMDA is implementing several works under the Hussainsagar Lake and Catchment Area Improvement Project, including floating material and shoreline cleaning, interception and diversion of sewage inflows, setting up of sewage treatment plants and dredging of sediments.

Odisha carries out satellite tagging of Olive Ridley sea turtles

KENDRAPARA/BHUBANESWAR (Agency)

The Forest department in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun has recently fitted satellite transmitters, also known as Platform Transmitter Terminals (PTT), on six Olive Ridley turtles at Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary in Kendrapara.

The tagging, carried out between December 21 and 24, includes three males and three females, and aims to track the turtles' nearshore movement patterns and gather critical ecological information.

Principal chief conservator of forests (Wildlife) Prem Kumar Jha said, "Large

numbers of Olive Ridleys are now mating in the sea. We tagged three mating pairs to study their movement patterns. This research will help the government formulate conservation policies for Olive Ridleys and benefit all stakeholders, including local fishing communities. We will also tag nine turtles at

Rushikulya soon."

Previously, Olive Ridleys were tagged with flipper tags to identify returning turtles during mass nesting. However, this method did not provide data on their actual movement paths or other essential details. Satellite telemetry studies,



first instituted in Odisha in the early 2000s, marked a significant advancement from beach-based monitoring to ocean-scale ecological research. These studies, undertaken by WII in collaboration with the Forest department, track long-distance movement patterns and inform conservation strategies.

Going beyond crackdown on peddlers | Counselling for drug users & parents: How Surat police unit freed 165 from addiction in its first year

Surat SOG's Anti-Narcotics Unit, the only such unit run by police in Gujarat, identifies drug users and counsel them by involving their families with the help of 84 psychiatrists and six rehabilitation centres

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

"Do you know what your son has been up to lately?" The question came as a bolt from the blue for 47-year-old Surat businessman when officials of the Surat city police's Special Operations Group (SOG) came calling for his 21-year-old son, earlier in January. The anti-narcotics unit of the SOG landed up at the home of the Surat businessman after a drug peddler caught had named his son as among his "regular clients". Shocked and embarrassed, the family has attempted to make sense of the information. The Surat city police later began counselling and rehabilitation sessions for the 21-year-old, keeping the family in the loop.

Six months later, with multiple counselling sessions carried out by the Surat city police, the youngster has been "rehabilitated". He is among the 165 individuals, who have been sobered in the last one year by the Surat

SOG's Anti-Narcotics Unit, the only such unit run by the police in Gujarat, says Surat Police commissioner Anupamsingh Gahlaut.

In a radical shift from the traditional approach of law enforcement, the Surat SOG anti-narcotics unit not only apprehend drug peddlers and question them about their suppliers, but also actively procures the names of all their customers, who are then contacted for sustained counselling sessions by police officials as well as psychologists— family members of youngsters aged up to 25 years are part of the sessions "by default". Not just that, post-counselling work requires families to keep a check on their wards and if necessary, even conduct basic tests for substance abuse — for which, the police

have been training families.

This SOG unit, comprising 25 trained police personnel and headed by a Police Inspector, was created for the purpose of counselling



and rehabilitation of individual 'consumers' of narcotics, in a drive to crack down on drug abuse.

Inaugurated in December last year by then Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi, the unit has come as a "saviour" for families who have been unaware about their children being addicted to drugs.

Speaking to The Indian Express, the 47-year-old Surat businessman said, "When we attended the counselling sessions with the police officials, we could see that they encouraged and helped my son to quit the addiction through professional counsellors as well as police personnel, who explained the long term consequences of drug abuse and how it could devastate his family... My son turned a new leaf and rejoined our family's manufacturing business. It has been a tough task and we decided to support my son instead of blaming him... We knew somewhere, we missed the signs and made a mistake of not keeping a check on the company he kept..."

Why bigger may not be better for brands in 2026

Year 2025 is coming to a full stop in just a few days. An old year has passed and a new one dawns soon. Time to take a 'comma pause' and think of what 2026 might have in store in terms of marketing and branding. And why marketing and branding alone? Simply because marketing touches all our lives all the time.

In this view of the world, there are just two types of people. One are those who market to others, and the other are those marketed to. The truth: none of us can do without brands of one kind or the other. Every step you take, and every breath you take, a brand touches you. We are brand-polluted folk.

Let me ask questions then. Many of them. Is branding going to be back?

The year almost past saw the near-decimation of brandcraft in more ways than one. It remained one totally devoted to technology. 'MarTech' or marketing technology became a phrase on its own. Technology-led companies had the old world of brand-thinkers in a twirl. Technology led and brands had to follow meekly.

Most of those who believed in the prowess of MarTech, with its ability to crunch numbers—both at the macro and micro level—and deliver results, seem to be doing a big rethink now as the year ends. Brand delivery on the basis of data and numbers have taken companies and their promoters onto a different track altogether. Phrases such as hyper-personalisation, customer data platform, growth-hacking, and actionable analytics have become popular with the new proponents of new industries.

The startup founder has precious little time for branding. At best, branding is seen as a service. Very few think of the brand as the product itself. In the bargain, brand thinking took a back seat and the ecstasy-play with numbers became the new passion. Is branding going to be back in the boardroom once again as a cutting- and bleeding-edge differentiator in a world that is progressively getting flat in terms of the differentiated offering? I do believe it will. Brand managers and brand-thinkers will be in demand again. Startups of every kind will realise the ability of a brand that helps their offering stand apart from the rest. As technology brands took the route of being transactional in 2025, the year ahead promises to bring back relationships. Not yours and mine, which soured last year, but the relationships that define the umbilical connect between the brand and you as an individual user. A relationship status that shuns the transactional and moves more towards that end of the brand spectrum where companies invest in what moves people.

The recent fracas that IndiGo Airlines went through in December—where users did a quick flip from being ostensibly loyal brand-users to being very ardent, unforgiving and vitriolic critics in five days flat—is a clear case in point of the transactional brand being a weak thing to be.

For the customer then, this is good news. Brands are going to, once again, get a little more real than they have become. They will respect humans. Many will set up real call-centres once again with real people answering your real calls. The automated bots, that do little with limited interface today, are going to be relegated to a less important corner of competence. Till a self-aware and autonomous form of artificial intelligence arrives, of course. And that shall be a fun moment to wait for. The good news then: 2026 will see responsible companies of both the heritage and new-age kind re-embrace the art, science, and philosophy of branding. 'Long-termism' is going to be back. Startup 'now-termism' is going to have a few takers. Branding is going to be back with a whimper, if not a bang.

THE Modi government has pushed through Parliament the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill, 2025 (the G RAM G Bill) to replace the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA). One thing that the G-RAM-G Bill clearly achieves is the dismantling of the MGNREGA job guarantee. The primary rationale for the G-RAM-G Bill is the cocktail of a name, using completely unrelated notions of Viksit Bharat and Ajeevika Mission to give it a religious colour. The G-RAM-G Bill disturbs India's fiscal federalism and constitutional scheme of things by trading job guarantee for a vote-catching name. The Bill raises several questions. What does the G-RAM-G Bill have to do with Viksit Bharat and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin)? Is it diluting the employment guarantee or effectively disbanding it? What are the implications of the Central government reducing its obligations in funding guarantee expenditure and shifting it to the states? Does the centralisation of authority in the Central government and the shifting of responsibility to states sound the death knell for federal polity? The G-RAM-G Bill mandates states to compulsorily notify "Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin): VB-G-RAM-G Scheme" and use the same nomenclature in all documents. The full name is unwieldy and may not be understood in non-Hindi speaking states. No one understands what Viksit Bharat is; its roadmap has been languishing at NITI Aayog for years. The G-RAM-G Bill only offers poverty-line wage income for only 3-4 months to unskilled workers. Such a low wage safety-valve job programme cannot be equated with the vision of Viksit Bharat. The G-RAM-G Bill has nothing to do with Ajeevika Mission, a separate Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), either. The Modi government has only displayed unimaginativeness by including Viksit Bharat and Ajeevika Mission in the name of the G-RAM-G Bill.

The standout feature of the MGNREGA Act was the demand-based guarantee of 100 days' work to every rural household throughout the year. The G-RAM-G Bill dilutes it massively, while nominally raising it to 125 days. The G-RAM-G guarantee will not be available during at least a 60-day period every year, which all states will have to notify as "peak agricultural seasons of sowing and harvesting" in advance. During periods of natural calamities, unemployment stress deepens even during agricultural seasons. Even in such distressing times, the state governments would have to seek "specific relaxations", which the Centre may or may not grant or make it subject to conditions. The states/

G-RAM-G Bill dismantles a guarantee

Striking at India's federal compact, it shifts costs to states while centralising control

panchayats will no longer be able to provide work by creating local labour-intensive works, as all G-RAM-G works will have to be aligned to the "national vision of Viksit Bharat @2047." Further, as the G-RAM-G guarantee will have to operate within the normative budget allocated to states by the Central government, the guarantee may have to be suspended even during non-peak periods. The MGNREGA guarantee is substantially gone. The MGNREGA guarantee was a credible national guarantee only because it was backed by the Centre's commitment to bear 100% wage expenditure. The Central government would now foot only 60% of the wages bill, that too, if it is within the state-specific normative allocation. The Central share for the material

Over-centralisation in the G-RAM-G Bill reduces the states to the status of municipalities, which have many statutory obligations but no ability to raise funds. The Bill provides the Central government with enormous authority to impose statutory obligations on unwilling state governments. The state governments would have to formulate the job guarantee scheme consistent with the provisions of the G-RAM-G Bill. All works shall have to originate in Viksit Gram Panchayat plans, prepared in line with the provisions of the Bill, consolidated at block, district and state levels and finally aggregated into the Viksit Bharat National Rural Infrastructure Stack. The Central government shall specify wage rate(s) which the states will have to implement without question. The Centre will also have the authority to give any directions to the states. The G-RAM-G Scheme will be implemented as a CSS, allowing the Centre considerable leeway in scheme formulation, choice of works, funds flow, naming, etc. The Central government has no constitutional authority to interfere in the exercise of the states' executive authority in the State List subjects or to impose any statutory obligations on them. Article 282 allows the Central government to make grants on state subjects and nothing more. No statutory obligations can be imposed under Article 282. The CSSs derive their legitimacy from Article 282. As the G-RAM-G scheme is a CSS, no statutory obligations can be imposed on the states. The Bill strikes at the root of the federal character, which constitutes a basic structure as well. The G-RAM-G Bill is ultra vires of the Constitution. It must be

challenged in the Supreme Court. The states would be the principal losers if they implemented the G-RAM-G guarantee as a subordinate instrumentality of the Central government. To keep their existence and relevance intact, the states must think of providing the extant MGNREGA guarantee, without any dilution. For this, they may consider, until the Supreme Court decides, implementing the MGNREGA guarantee, using provisions of Section 30 of the G-RAM-G Bill, which allows better state schemes to continue. In the longer run, the federalist forces must join hands and respond by faithfully implementing the MGNREGA guarantee while the Centre dismantles it.

BJP tightens its hold on Maharashtra

The Tribune Editorial: The Maha Vikas Aghadi, already grappling with leadership ambiguities and internal contradictions, appears unable to counter the BJP's narrative of development and decisiveness.

The BJP's strong showing in Maharashtra's long-delayed civic body elections marks more than a routine local victory; it signals a steady consolidation of power at the grassroots in a state known for fractured mandates and shifting loyalties. Emerging as the single-largest party across several municipal councils and nagar panchayats, the BJP-led Mahayuti has managed to replicate, in miniature, the political template that delivered success in the recent Assembly elections. Local body polls are often dismissed as second-order contests, but in Maharashtra, they carry deeper political meaning. After nearly a decade without civic elections, these polls offered the first real test of organisational strength below the Assembly level. The BJP's ability to convert governance narratives—roads, welfare delivery and administrative stability—into votes suggests that its cadre network has matured beyond election-time mobilisation. Equally significant is the verdict's impact on the Opposition. The Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), already grappling with leadership ambiguities



and internal contradictions, appears unable to counter the BJP's narrative of development and decisiveness. Traditional Congress pockets in regions such as

Marathwada and parts of Konkan have shown visible erosion, underlining the party's continuing struggle to revive its local leadership base. For Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, the results offer complementary political dividends. Shinde can claim that his rebellion did not weaken the Shiv Sena's administrative appeal. Fadnavis can reassess his role as the BJP's principal strategist in the state.

Yet, caution is warranted. Civic victories do not automatically translate into urban, Assembly or parliamentary dominance. Municipal governance brings its own challenges of service delivery, finances and public accountability, where voter patience is thin. If expectations raised during campaigns are not met, electoral goodwill can evaporate quickly.

Time to strengthen military cadets' moral compass

When religiosity is permeating the armed forces like never before and rigid discipline is at odds with shorter attention spans, it's essential for young soldiers to toughen their moral compass. Having mentors—like Ronnie Pereira was at the National Defence Academy—would help, as would the NDA cadets' old prayer

As someone who spent four decades in uniform, I sometimes wonder why, while leadership as a subject is taught at Indian military academies, the idea of having a military vision of self is not stressed well enough. One might well say that having a vision is part of leadership training and is the same as having an aim. However, that's not so. In these times of the omnipresent social media, religiosity is being linked with one's nationalism and the apolitical fabric of the armed forces is being severely tested—with senior leadership being photographed with politicians and spiritual heads in religious places outside cantonments. The recent Supreme Court ruling upholding the dismissal of a young Army lieutenant for not attending the 'mandir parade' of his battalion has brought the armed forces officer cadre on the front-burner of national consciousness. In such a challenging environment, a personal vision can act as a moral compass to steer one's career in uniform with aplomb, and more importantly, in the spirit of what the Constitution expects from an officer. Having a vision is having 'an acute sense of the possible'. A vision is aspirational—a dream that subsumes multiple aims that are stepping stones to realising one's own vision. There is an inherent element of an aching for attaining something, best expressed by the blind entrepreneur Srikanth Bolla, who said on TV, "You do not need eyesight to have a vision." The exposure to TV and social media has made the present-day armed forces recruits different from those of yesteryears. Today's youth have an attention span of 10 minutes between commercials. However, real life is very different and is specially so in uniformed services where the daily routine is rigidly structured—reveille, go to work, follow a schedule, sleep and repeat the next day.

This is replicated over years, resulting in the atrophy of thought and enquiry, and a reduction in the excitement and novelty quotient. The antidote to this withering of individual and professional development is having a personal vision to work towards. This achieves three objectives. First, it helps an officer to strive for excellence. Consequently, there would be an elevation in their professional status. And third, seeing them as a focused individual raises his standing in the eyes of the organisation. It must be remembered that an officer is the most transparent person in a military formation, as their actions are evaluated by subordinates round the clock. "Does my sahab walk his talk?" is the unwritten evaluation metric. But how does one assess whether one is on the right track? While external mentors help, there is a very harsh critic within oneself who can give true feedback. Melodramatic as it may sound, but that person is the one in the mirror staring back every morning since they represent all of their subordinates looking up to them for leadership. A truthful answer to his questioning gaze on whether one lived up to the standards expected of a military personnel, would act as a personal guardrail in the endeavour to achieve one's vision. Since vision has an osmotic effect on compatriots and juniors alike, role models help in framing one's own. Ask any service officer who was a cadet in the National Defence Academy in the early 1970s when Commodore (later Admiral) Ronald 'Ronnie' Pereira was the deputy commandant. He was a disciplinarian to the core who would dish out punishments very liberally. He was the



most admired, too, because of his insistence on professionalism—one accompanied with a heart of gold when it came to looking after the wellbeing of cadets. Ronnie has been a role model for many, including this writer, and helped mould numerous young minds as they were launched into the roller-coaster of military life. In the 1970s and earlier, the NDA prayer was recited by cadets at the morning squadron muster. A line in that prayer has special significance in the present times of restructuring of social mores and the intrusive role that politics has started playing in daily functioning. Besides

asking the almighty to "help keep our bodies physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight", the prayer also asks to "awaken our admiration for honest dealing and clean thinking, and guide us to choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong". The gaze of that person, staring back every morning from the mirror, has been asking—and will continue to ask—whether that harder right path has been traversed or the easier wrong track taken for illegitimate

gain. Indian military academies have their work cut out—to drill in this sentiment of right and wrong in the formulation of a personal 'vision' of every cadet under training, especially in these turbulent social media times. It would help greatly if the leadership, both military and civilian, leads by example. The bearers of stars on military epaulettes and office-holders in the political arena must remember that they are role models for the boys and girls starting their careers in the military in a resurgent India; they deserve only the best.

Congress seals deal with Dhingar leader Jankar's RSP

Shimla. (Agency)

In a move that could provide boost to Congress in the upcoming Zilla Parishad polls in several Western Maharashtra regions, State Congress on Wednesday announced an alliance with the Rashtriya Samaj Paksha (RSP) led by Dhingar community leader Mahadev Jankar for upcoming Municipal Corporation and Zilla Parishad elections.

The announcement was made by Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) President Harshvardhan Sapkal following a meeting with Jankar at Tilak Bhavan.

Sapkal said, "Mahadev Jankar is a promising voice for the Bajrang community. At a time when the Bharatiya Janata Party is undermining democracy and the Constitution, like-minded parties must unite. While a formal alliance was not declared during the Municipal Council and Nagar Panchayat elections, we successfully contested together in Satara, Sangli, Marathwada, and Vidarbha. We are now formalizing this partnership to move forward together in the upcoming elections."

Jankar was earlier the part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis between 2014 and 2019. A prominent Dhingar community leader, he was known to be close to BJP leader late Gopinath Munde. In 2014, he had contested the Lok Sabha election unsuccessfully against undivided NCP's Supriya Sule from Baramati. In 2024, the NDA gave him ticked from Parbhani seat which he lost against Shiv Sena - UBT. Being sidelined in the alliance with emergence of BJP's Dhingar leaders, Jankar had found himself neglected after which he had decided to snap ties with the NDA. For Congress, the addition of Dhingar community leader could be a boost for the upcoming Zilla Parishad polls in areas such as Solapur, Satara, Sangli, Parbhani and parts of Pune.

CM Majhi orders probe, announces Rs 10 lakh relief in Bhadrak girl's rape-murder; BJD seeks resignation

BHUBANESWAR. (Agency)

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Wednesday expressed serious concern over the alleged rape and murder of a 10-year-old girl in Baligaon village of Bhadrak district and directed police to conduct a thorough investigation into the incident.

The chief minister instructed the authorities to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice and awarded the strictest punishment under the law. He also announced an ex gratia of 10 lakh from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to the victim's family.

Meanwhile, the Opposition lashed out at the government for failing to control crime against women and children in the state. BJD president and leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik alleged that the image of the state, once recognised for women's safety and a strong rule of law, had been completely tarnished. Criticising the BJP government, he questioned the delay in taking decisive steps to ensure safety and security for women and children. "How many more innocent lives must be lost before the government wakes up?" he asked.

Protests were held during the day by youth and students' wings of BJD in front of the official residence of the chief minister, demanding his resignation over the incident. BJD media coordinator Priyabrata Majhi alleged there was a complete breakdown of law and order under BJP rule. Criminals were operating with impunity due to the failure of law and order machinery in the state. Despite the Home department being under the chief minister, the law and order situation had deteriorated, Majhi alleged.

NTR police to roll out smart CCTV monitoring

VIJAYAWADA. (Agency)

In a major push towards technology-driven and smart policing, the NTR district police are preparing to roll out an advanced Device Health Monitoring System (DHMS), a first-of-its-kind initiative aimed at ensuring the uninterrupted functioning of nearly 10,000 CCTV cameras installed across the district.

The domain-based DHMS will bring all CCTV cameras under a single centralised platform, enabling real-time synchronisation and data transfer to a central dashboard. This facility will allow police officers to closely monitor public movement across the limits of 28 police stations, significantly enhancing crime prevention, detection, and investigation capabilities.

Explaining the functioning of the DHMS, NTR district Commissioner of Police (CP), SV Rajashekhar Babu, said, "The new system would act as a force multiplier, offering instant access to video evidence and historical footage during investigations. By preserving CCTV footage for longer periods, the DHMS addresses one of the key challenges faced by investigating officers, loss of visual evidence due to limited storage or malfunctioning devices. This helps in reducing the burden on the police." Another key feature of the DHMS is its ability to monitor the health of surveillance devices on a real-time basis. "Using Internet of Things (IoT) technology and a binary checking coding mechanism, the system automatically checks the operational status of each camera 1,440 times a day, ensuring early detection of faults such as power failure, connectivity issues, or hardware malfunction," he added.

'Can't play with citizens' lives,' HC orders monitoring committee for Kanjuramarg dumping site, seeks stringent measures to mitigate foul odour

The court directed that a monitoring committee be formed for Kanjuramarg dumping site and take appropriate measures within a week after visiting it.

Mumbai. (Agency)

Observing that authorities and contractors cannot play with the lives of citizens, the Bombay High Court directed the state government to implement within a week, immediate and stringent short-term measures to redress issues concerning disposal of municipal solid waste at the Kanjuramarg dumping site.

The court directed that a monitoring committee be formed for Kanjuramarg dumping site and take appropriate measures within a week after visiting it.

A division bench of Justices Girish S Kulkarni and Aarti A Sathe was hearing a PIL filed by NGO Vanashakti and other pleas challenging environmental clearances for use of the Kanjuramarg site as a dumping ground and raising concerns over handling of municipal waste. Additional Government Pleader (AGP) Jyoti Chavan for the state government submitted an affidavit by Vidya Ramappa Hampayya, joint secretary, Urban Development Department, enumerating

short-term measures to mitigate foul odour emanating from the dumping ground, as suggested by high-level committee headed by chief secretary that visited and inspected Kanjuramarg dumping site.

monitoring units. "You're playing with lives of people like this. These 4-5 things are nothing but lip-service by contractor... We want immediate mitigating measures. Today, our entire endeavour is to ensure everyone breathes fresh air," Justice Kulkarni remarked.

The court then directed that a committee similar to Deonar dumping monitoring committee along with experts from IIT-B and others be appointed to visit the site.

"In this view of the matter, we order immediate short-term measures, as also any other measures which the committee has suggested, be implemented without any further delay as also the monitoring committee be constituted at the earliest. The monitoring committee is directed to visit the site and direct implementation of the appropriate measures, which be undertaken within one week from today in view of the emergent situation," the HC order said. The bench emphasised that an immediate scientific approach needs to be adopted by the committee for short-term measures since the petitioners' complaints were that their sufferings for years have never come to an end.



The short-term measures include improving soil covering on inactive landfill cells, enhancing bio-enzyme spray frequency and coverage, deployment of additional misting cannon with fine droplet size and strengthening complaint redressal mechanism with mobile odour

No mining in Aravalli hills in Gujarat, will never grant nod in future too: Minister

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

Amid raging controversy over new definition of Aravalli mountain range in various parts of the country, Gujarat Environment and Forest Minister Arjun Modhwadia Wednesday said that the state government had never given sanction to mining in Aravalli mountain ranges and its forest areas spread over various districts and would never grant such permission in future too.

The Aravalli mountain ranges, the minister said, serves as a natural barrier preventing the advance of the desert and is extremely important for groundwater recharge.

Modhwadia said this in an official statement released by the state government. Modhwadia's clarification came a day after tribal leader and AAP MLA Chaitar Vasava alleged that the BJP government at the Centre had rolled out a red carpet for the mining mafia and invited them to mine in the Aravalli region by changing the

definition of the mountain ranges.

In the statement, Modhwadia expressed the state government's firm resolve for the conservation of Aravalli mountain ranges and sustainable development and added that the state government is committed to saving the state's forest areas and environmentally sensitive regions.

Quoting Modhwadia, the statement said, "As per the directives of the Supreme Court, the

Government of Gujarat is implementing all aspects related to the new definition and conservation of the Aravalli hills. As per this, all landforms having a height of 100 metres or more above the local ground level have been defined as 'mountains', so that there are no legal loopholes. In addition, all areas up to 500 metres between two or more mountains with a height of more than 100 metres will also be considered an integral part of the Aravalli mountain range.

"Mining will be completely prohibited by the state government in 'core and inviolate' zones such as protected areas, eco-sensitive zones, reserve areas, wetlands, and CAMPA plantation sites across the state. The primary objective of the state government is to ensure environmental conservation alongside development, so that future generations inherit a safe and green Gujarat. The Aravalli mountain range is not merely a heap of stones, but serves as a natural barrier preventing the advance of the desert and is extremely important for groundwater recharge," the minister said.



Gujarat Confidential: Deja Vu for IAS officer

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

FOLLOWING THE transfer of 26 senior IAS officers on Tuesday, the state government modified the transfer order of 1998 batch IAS officer Mohammad Shahid. Interestingly, this is the second time Shahid has been transferred within days of a reshuffle. In its 'partial modification' of its December 23 notification, the state government on Wednesday transferred Shahid from the Social Justice and Empowerment Department to Cottage and Rural

further orders. In July 2018, a similar reshuffle of three IAS officers within a week of their transfers on July 12, 2018 had raised eyebrows. Sources close to this development had revealed it was the "side effect" of a critical detail that the government had reportedly "overlooked" in the case of 1998 batch IAS officer Mohammad Shahid, who was transferred on July 12 in 2018 with 20 other IAS officers, from commissioner of fisheries to vice chairman and chief executive officer of Gujarat Maritime Board, replacing Ajay Bhadoo.

Shahid was posted back to his original department as Principal Secretary, Agriculture, Farmers Welfare and Co-operation Department, an additional post he was holding. The reason for Shahid being posted back was his perceived proximity to former Congress Chief Minister of Uttarakhand Harish Rawat. After a few months of appointment of Harish Rawat as the CM in February 2014, Shahid was sent on an inter cadre deputation from Gujarat cadre to Uttarakhand for a period of two years in July 2014, when he served as private secretary to Rawat. Even before this appointment, he had also served as the Personal Secretary to Rawat when he was the Union Minister for Water Resources in the then UP government. But, within a year, the Uttarakhand government was forced to relieve Shahid and send him back to the Centre from where he was later repatriated to his home state Gujarat in August 2015. What comes as a surprise is that the Gujarat government was not briefed about this case history back then in July 2018 and is again retracting its orders in a few days.



Industries as Commissioner including the charge as Principal Secretary, Cottage and Rural Industries, Industries and Mines Department.

On Tuesday, Shahid was transferred from the Social Justice and Empowerment Department to the Tribal Development Department, relieving Shahmeena Husain of this additional charge. However, after Wednesday's abrupt change, Husain will continue to hold additional charge of the post of Principal Secretary, Tribal Development Department, until

Teaching doctors posted in remote areas want special allowance

HYDERABAD. (Agency)

Doctors working as teaching faculty in colleges located in remote areas in the state have renewed their long-pending demand for a special allowance.

Referring to the 167th report of the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare, which was recently tabled in the Rajya Sabha, the doctors pointed out that the panel underscored the need for special incentives to attract and retain faculty in distant locations. These include housing support, educational facilities for children and a rural service allowance.

The teaching doctors said such an allowance is crucial to motivate faculty members to take up and continue postings in remote and underserved regions.

Dr Kiran Madhala, secretary general of the Telangana Teaching Government Doctors' Association (TGGDA), told that there are 32 medical colleges located outside the GHMC limits, where faculty members face a pay disparity of Rs 15,000 to Rs 30,000 compared to

those working within GHMC areas. "This gap is expected to widen to nearly Rs 60,000 under the 8th Pay Revision Commission. Both the National Task Force of the National Medical Commission and the Parliamentary Standing Committee have recommended the implementation of AIMS pay scales along with a rural service allowance for faculty serving in non-GHMC, rural and semi-urban areas," he said, adding that almost every state in the country provides some form of allowance to retain teaching doctors, barring Telangana.

Teaching doctors expressed disappointment over the lack of response despite several representations made to the Health Department — from the previous government to the present one — saying the continued neglect has demotivated faculty from accepting postings in rural and remote areas.

Dr Kiran further said government teaching doctors should be recognised as a special category, as their responsibilities extend beyond teaching to include clinical care and research.

Baby trafficking gang held in Telangana; 10-day-old infants rescued

Police said the accused allegedly purchased babies for amounts ranging between Rs 3 lakh and Rs 4 lakh and sold them for Rs 6 lakh to Rs 7 lakh, depending on demand.

HYDERABAD. (Agency)

The Miyapur police, along with the Special Operations Team (SOT), Shamshabad, arrested 11 members of an interstate human trafficking gang and rescued two newborns, both aged 10 days.

Police said the accused allegedly purchased babies for amounts ranging between Rs 3 lakh and Rs 4 lakh and sold them for Rs 6 lakh, depending on demand.

The arrested accused were identified as Vemula Babu Reddy (49), Venkippal Gangadhar Reddy (39), Daram Laxmi (28), Ram Hari Roy (37), Kumari Harsha Roy (31),

Sangeeta Debi (33), Gudepu Sujatha (40), Suraboina Anuradha (55), Esarapu Jyothi (35), V Madhavi (28) and Pothula Sobha (44).

Madhapur DCP Ritiraj said that Harsha Roy was also accused in the Srushti surrogacy and baby-selling racket — in which about 50 couples were cheated — and had resumed his activities after securing bail.

One of the rescued infants was from Ahmedabad in Gujarat, while the other was from Siddipet district. Police said the gang targeted vulnerable families, identified

pregnant women, and entered into illegal agreements for the sale of newborns.

According to the DCP, the accused operated as an organised network. They allegedly identified poor families across different parts of the country who were unable to meet basic needs and induced them to sell their infants by offering money. The babies were then sold to affluent childless couples through a chain of middlemen.

Dammaiguda in Kapra, works as an IVF agent. He was previously arrested in cases registered by the Alwal police and the Devarakonda police in Suryapet district. Vemula Babu Reddy, a resident of

Gangadhar Reddy, a resident of Mettugadda and native of East Godavari district, is reportedly involved in 18 cases across the Cyberabad, Rachakonda and Hyderabad commissionerates. Newborns bought from Ahmedabad, Siddipet

In the present case, police said Gangadhar Reddy contacted his associates, including Daram Laxmi, Sangeeta Debi and Harsha Roy, and procured an infant from Ahmedabad by paying the biological parents through middlemen with the intention of selling the child in Hyderabad.

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Safe City Project: 10,000 AI cameras with distress detection technology to watch over Delhi soon

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Delhi Police is currently working on a "real-time information generation-based system", 'Safe City Project', under which, the city will be covered by 10,000 Artificial Intelligence-enabled cameras. Once developed, the police control room (PCR) can receive information about any incident without the need for a PCR call — as the cameras will be equipped with features such as face recognition system and distress detection technologies, capable of identifying sounds and facial expressions associated with emergencies.

The project, started in 2018, had its deadline extended multiple times. It is now expected to be launched in 2026. According to senior officers, the Delhi Police has set up a team at the Police Headquarters to work on the Safe City Project, with officers of DCP and Joint CP ranks supervising its implementation.

Three technology companies have been awarded tenders for the project. It is being funded by the Centre under the Nirbhaya Fund — the estimated cost being around Rs

800 crore.

A senior police officer said that at least 32 data sets — including those from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), criminal dossiers, the VAHAN portal, and ZIPNET — are being integrated into the Safe City system. Besides, two mobile command and control vehicles will be deployed under the project.

At least 88 Prakhar Vans equipped with mobile data terminals, communication devices, body-worn cameras, vehicle-mounted cameras, and a global positioning system (GPS) are also part of this project.

The officer said that the installation of CCTV cameras is almost complete, while the integration of all databases and real-time testing are currently underway.

"The system will be designed in such a way that whenever a person in distress makes a sign, gesture, or sound, the AI technology will detect it and immediately raise an alarm at the control room, which we have named the C4i (Command, Control, Communication, Computing and



Intelligence) Centre," the officer said. Explaining the delay, the officer said that new technological upgrades are introduced every few months. "However, we hope to complete the work in the next few

months, and the project may be launched next year," the officer added.

The installation of cameras began in the riot-affected Northeast district and was later expanded to cover the entire city, the officer

further said.

The police are also working on ITMS (Intelligent Traffic Management System) to improve the traffic condition in real time. The police department is also working on the installation of 500 ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) cameras at major intersections across the city. The ITMS may be rolled out in a few months, another officer said.

Projects in pipeline

There are 26 other infrastructure projects in the pipeline aimed at strengthening the police force. In October this year, the Union Home Ministry sanctioned Rs 653.46 crore for these projects.

The approved projects include the construction of 18 police station buildings, 7 police posts, 1 women's hostel and 180 staff quarters. These projects aim to provide modern, well-equipped and gender-sensitive facilities to improve the working and living conditions of police personnel. All these projects will be executed by the Central Public Works Department.

One-third of Delhi's annual PM2.5 pollution is secondary ammonium sulfate

New Delhi.(Agency)

Nearly one-third of Delhi's annual Particulate Matter 2.5 (PM2.5) pollution is made up of secondary ammonium sulfate, resulting from coal plants, industries and agriculture, with the chemically-formed pollutant dominating the city's air during its worst pollution periods, according to a new analysis conducted by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), a Finland-headquartered think-tank.

Ammonium sulfate is a secondary inorganic aerosol formed through the oxidation of sulphur dioxide (SO₂) into sulfate. This reacts with ammonia emissions from agriculture and other sources. Its formation is enhanced under humid conditions, linking coal-based power generation, industrial activity and agricultural ammonia to elevated PM2.5 levels in Delhi and across the National Capital Region (NCR). This is particularly alarming, as at 11.2 million tonnes, India is the biggest emitter of SO₂ globally, and ranks second only to China, an analysis by CREA published earlier this year had flagged.

Its latest analysis found that ammonium sulfate accounts for 49% of PM2.5 pollution in Delhi during the post-monsoon period and 41% in winter, compared with just 21% in summer and monsoon. This indicates that the Capital's most severe pollution episodes are driven largely by region-wide SO₂ emissions and secondary chemical formation in the atmosphere, rather than only local primary sources.

Secondary particulate matter is a core driver of PM2.5 pollution in India, with up to 42% of the country's PM2.5 burden being chemically formed in the atmosphere from precursor gases such as sulphur dioxide and ammonia, CREA said.

At the national level, the highest annual contribution of ammonium sulfate to PM2.5 mass was observed in coal-fired power plant-dominated states.

Chhattisgarh recorded the highest share at 42%, followed by Odisha (41%), as well as Jharkhand and Telangana (40% each). High secondary PM2.5 contributions were also observed in Bihar (39%), Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal (38% each), as well as Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh (37% each). "The current regulatory framework has exempted approximately 78% of coal-fired thermal power plants from installing flue gas desulphurisation systems, weakening sulfur dioxide control at source. Reinstating 2015 emission norms notification is therefore critical for mandatory installation of flue gas desulphurisation to reduce secondary ammonium sulfate formation and PM2.5," the analysis said.

18-year-old killed by friends over relationship dispute, body dumped in Outer North Delhi canal; two held

According to the police, on November 22, a PCR call reported that a body was floating in the Munak Canal near Haiderpur Water Treatment Plant.

New Delhi.(Agency)

An 18-year-old boy was killed by two of his friends and his body was dumped in the Munak Canal in Outer North Delhi over a personal dispute stemming from the deceased being in a relationship with a cousin of the accused, officers said. The accused, Ashish (23) and Vishal Dhilod (23), both residents of Northwest Delhi's Tikri Kalan area, were arrested following an intensive probe by the staff of the Samaypur Badli police station, DCP Hareshwar Swami stated. According to the police, on November 22, a PCR call reported that a body was floating in the Munak Canal near Haiderpur Water Treatment Plant. The body was recovered with hands and feet tied with shoelaces, a handkerchief around his neck, and three sharp injuries on the head, officers said. An FIR under Section 103(1) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) was registered at Samaypur Badli police station.

The deceased was identified as Ankit, a resident of Sadar Bazar, who had been reported missing from the Gulabi Bagh area since November 18, 2025, officials said. Investigation revealed the murder was motivated by a personal dispute. Detailing the motive behind the crime, DCP Swami said, "Ashish was enraged because Ankit was in a relationship with Ashish's cousin sister and refused to end contact despite multiple warnings. On how the murder played out, police said that the accused called Ankit to Tikri Kalan Metro Station, took him to a house in Gaddha Colony via scooter, drugged him, tied his limbs, and attacked him with a sharp-edged weapon. The body was loaded into a mini truck and thrown into the canal near Hanuman Temple, Bawana.

Delhi Metro connectivity boost for central govt staff, Union Cabinet greenlights three new corridors

Cabinet Minister Ashwini Vaishnav announced the Union Cabinet's go-ahead for the 16-km-long Phase V(A). The total estimated cost of building the new corridors, which are extensions of the Golden and Magenta Lines, is over Rs 12,000 crore.

New Delhi.(Agency)

As the Union Cabinet Wednesday approved three new corridors of the Delhi Metro network, among people who would draw the maximum benefit are employees operating from the new Central government offices at Kartavya Bhawans. The corridors will also be helpful for people travelling to Terminal 1 of the Indira Gandhi International Airport and to Noida from Gurugram and Faridabad.

Cabinet Minister Ashwini Vaishnav announced the Union Cabinet's go-ahead for the 16-km-long Phase V(A). The total estimated cost of building the new corridors, which are extensions of the Golden and Magenta Lines, is over Rs 12,000 crore.

The 10-km Central Vista corridor starts at RK Ashram Marg and loops below Shivaji Stadium, Central Secretariat, Kartavya Bhawan, India Gate, War Memorial — High Court, Baroda House and Bharat Mandapam to reach Indraprastha. It will push connectivity to all Kartavya Bhawans, a government statement said, adding that it will help reduce pollution and usage of fuels, enhancing ease of living. It is likely to benefit around 60,000 office-goers and two lakh visitors daily. It will also connect West, North and old Delhi with Central Delhi.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the approval of the three new corridors, saying the decision will give a major boost to the Capital's infrastructure. "Delhi's infrastructure gets a major boost! Cabinet's approval for three new corridors as part of Delhi Metro's Phase V(A) Project will expand our capital's metro network, thus boosting 'Ease of Living' and reducing congestion," PM Modi wrote on X.

Army Personnel Can Now Use Instagram, But There Are Conditions

New Delhi.(Agency)

The army has made a significant change to its policy on the use of social media: soldiers and officers are allowed to use Instagram for viewing and monitoring purposes only, sources said. They can't post, like, or comment as all other existing rules on digital activities for army personnel will remain in effect.

These instructions have been issued to every army unit and department, sources said, adding the aim is to allow soldiers to view and monitor content on social media for their own awareness and information gathering.

Soldiers will also be able to flag fake or misleading posts that they find to senior officers. The army has periodically issued guidelines on using social media platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and

Instagram. Restrictions were previously imposed on their use for security reasons.

These strict rules were implemented because in some cases, soldiers fell victim to honey traps set by foreign



agencies, leading to the unintentional leakage of sensitive information. Recently, Indian Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi mentioned the rules for social media use by army personnel at the Chanakya Defence

Dialogue. The question that was asked was: "Today's youth, Generation Z, wants to join the army. There seems to be a contradiction. The army essentially means staying away from social media. Is the new army thinking about integrating this in a new way? Because even the Commanding Officers must be facing a lot of difficulty deciding how much to allow and how much not to?"

General Dwivedi replied, "This is indeed a problem because when these young people come to the NDA [National Defence Academy], I'm told that the first thing they do is search their cabins to find where they have hidden their phones. It takes three to six months to convince the cadets that there is life without a phone. But is a smartphone a necessity today? I think it is an absolute necessity today."

Water Salute After First Landing As Navi Mumbai Airport Begins Flight Ops

New Delhi.(Agency)

It's Merry Christmas at the Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) as it commenced operations with the arrival of its first commercial flight. IndiGo flight 6E460, travelling from Bengaluru, landed at the Navi Mumbai International Airport at 8 am and was welcomed with the water cannon salute, a ceremonial aviation tradition in which fire trucks spray arcs of water over an aircraft as it taxis.

Ahead of the inaugural flight landing, the IndiGo staff were seen cutting a cake and breaking coconuts, an auspicious tradition. The landing was followed by the airport's first departure, IndiGo flight 6E882 to Hyderabad, which took off at 8:40 am.

Sharing real-time updates on social media, Adani Group wrote: "A new era for Indian aviation takes shape. After years of planning and execution, Navi Mumbai International Airport stands ready to welcome its first flight. Built

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developed the airport with City and Industrial Development Corporation of Maharashtra (CIDCO) under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP), aims to serve a wide range of travellers, from first-time flyers to frequent corporate passengers.

"The airport is here to cater to all passengers," Jeet Adani told Profit. "From the food to the art to the hospitality, everything has been carefully curated, keeping in mind our passengers," he added.

Navi Mumbai International Airport: 8-Year Journey

First conceived in 1997 by Maharashtra's city planning agency, City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO), Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the airport in 2018. The airport was inaugurated by the Prime Minister on October 8 this year.



to serve 90 million passengers annually by the final phase, NMIA is set to unlock new possibilities not just for Mumbai, but for the entire nation."

Adani Airports Holdings, which co-

supplements the Delhi School Education Act, 1973, and seeks to safeguard parents' interests while eliminating arbitrariness in fee fixation.

He emphasised that the law is not against schools or teachers but is designed to build a balanced and trustworthy system. "Long pending questions such as 'what will happen to school fees this year' will now have a permanent solution," he added. The Act will be implemented through a two-tier mechanism comprising school-level committees and district-level appellate bodies. Each SLFRC will comprise the school management as chairperson, the principal, three teachers, five parents and one representative from the DoE. Parent and teacher members will be chosen through a public draw of lots, with observers present to ensure fairness.

A waiting list of 10 additional members must also be prepared. To prevent conflicts of interest, only one parent per family can serve on the committee, and parents of

children admitted under EWS (Economically Weaker Section), DG (Disadvantaged Group), and CWSN (Children with Special Needs) categories —

who are exempt from fee payment — will not

be eligible.

For the 2025-26 academic session, schools must complete the draw of lots and publish the final list of SLFRC members by January 10, 2026. Fee proposals must be submitted to the committee by January 25, 2026, and a decision must be taken within 30 days. If the SLFRC fails to decide within the stipulated time, the matter will automatically move to the District Level Fee Appellate Committee, which has been empowered to adjudicate disputes and hear appeals.

The DoE has also barred school managements from influencing the draw process. The date, time and venue of the draw must be publicly announced at least seven days in advance through notices on the school board and the school's website. As per the order issued by DoE Director Veditha Reddy, the one time operational timeline was being prescribed to ensure proper redressal and disposal of fee related matters this year.

She noted that the directions were meant to provide clarity and uniformity, ensuring that parents and schools alike have a transparent mechanism to resolve fee issues without delay.

More than 1500 private unaided recognised schools will directly come under the ambit of the new law.

All Delhi private schools to set up fee regulation panels by January 10

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Delhi Directorate of Education (DoE) on Wednesday directed all private schools in the Capital to constitute School Level Fee Regulation Committees (SLFRCs) by January 10 next year under the Delhi School Education (Transparency in Fixation and Regulation of Fees) Act, 2025. The move marks the implementation of the new law to regulate fees charged by private schools from the current academic session and ensuring that fee hikes are reviewed transparently, giving parents a direct say in the process. As per the law, every school must place its fee proposals before its SLFRC, a body that includes parents, teachers and government representatives.

The step is crucial, as concerns on arbitrary fee hikes has been a longstanding issue, prompting hundreds of parents from top private schools in Delhi to take to the streets earlier this year.

Calling the measure a "historic step," Education Minister Ashish Sood said the legislation — notified on December 10 —

supplements the Delhi School Education Act, 1973, and seeks to safeguard parents' interests while eliminating arbitrariness in fee fixation.

He emphasised that the law is not against schools or teachers but is designed to build a balanced and trustworthy system.

"Long pending questions such as 'what will happen to school fees this year' will now have a permanent solution," he added. The Act will be implemented through a two-tier mechanism comprising school-level committees and district-level appellate bodies.

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NEWS BOX

What are the two ISL formats that AIFF have proposed and are they any good

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Indian football's top tier remains in limbo, but the All India Football Federation has at least placed two concrete ideas on the table. After weeks of uncertainty surrounding the Indian Super League's future, a three-member AIFF committee has presented clubs with two possible formats for the 2025-26 season. Both are shaped by urgency, financial reality and the need to keep the league running, even if compromises are inevitable. The panel was set up in the aftermath of the AIFF Annual General Meeting on December 20 and met select stakeholders in New Delhi earlier this week for its first round of talks. Notably, the proposals were shared in their original form, with no added explanation, placing the onus



on clubs to judge their feasibility independently. Both formats have been designed with cost efficiency as a central pillar. With the ISL currently without a commercial partner following the expiry of its agreement with Football Sports Development Limited, financial sustainability has taken precedence over ideal sporting structures. Centralised venues and reduced matchdays are viewed as necessary trade-offs in the short term.

Are they any good for Indian football?

In the short term, the logic behind the proposals is hard to miss. The biggest danger facing the ISL right now is silence. AIFF officials are wary that a prolonged pause could make sponsors, broadcasters and commercial partners drift away, perhaps permanently. Getting the league on the field, even in a trimmed-down version, is seen as better than disappearing altogether. That said, the footballing trade-offs are impossible to gloss over. Centralised venues may help balance the books, but they drain the league of home atmosphere and local identity. Shortened formats compress the season, leaving little room for storylines to breathe.

Real Madrid ask for full financial access in FC Barcelona's Negreira row investigation

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Real Madrid have taken another decisive step in the Negreira case by formally requesting unrestricted access to FC Barcelona's financial records connected to the long-running investigation. The move signals an escalation in what has become one of the most closely watched legal disputes in European football. The request was revealed by former top-flight referee Xavier Estrada Fernandez, who is participating in the proceedings as a private prosecutor. In filings submitted to a Barcelona court, Real Madrid have asked to review all audits, due diligence exercises and forensic financial assessments linked to payments made to Jose Mara Enriquez Negreira or companies associated with him over a prolonged period. Madrid's submission covers financial reviews carried out between 2010 and 2021 and specifically references work completed by major external firms,



including KPMG, PwC, Deloitte and Kroll. By seeking access to these documents, the club is aiming to piece together a detailed picture of how the payments were authorised, recorded and evaluated internally at Barcelona.

What Real Madrid want to see

Real Madrid's request extends well beyond external audits. The club has asked for access to more than 600 documents submitted by Barcelona to the court in July 2023, which form a substantial part of the evidentiary record in the case. These include financial explanations and supporting material provided by the Catalan club during the investigative phase. The filing also seeks disclosure of Barcelona's own internal investigation into the payments. Madrid have requested preliminary and final reports, records or summaries of interviews conducted during that process, and details of any internal compliance or governance checks carried out by the club. The aim is to determine not only the scale of the payments, but also how they were justified internally and whether established procedures were followed.

Don't think I've seen Starc bowl better: Ricky Ponting praises Ashes impact

Ricky Ponting has lauded Mitchell Starc for his outstanding performances in the ongoing Ashes, pointing to the clear evolution in his bowling. Starc's impact has been central to Australia establishing a commanding 3-0 lead over England.

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Former Australia captain Ricky Ponting has heaped praise on Mitchell Starc, describing the left-arm quick's performances in the ongoing Ashes as the finest he has seen across Starc's career. Speaking on the ICC Review Podcast, Ponting said Starc's impact with the ball has been decisive in Australia racing to an unassailable 3-0 lead in the 2025 series. Starc has been named Player of the Match twice in the first three Tests, underlining his central role in Australia's



dominance over England. "I don't think I've seen him bowl better," Ponting said. "It really has been quite outstanding what he's done with the new ball. He's always been known as a brand new ball bowler, and then someone that was a good bowler with the old ball, the ball that was reverse swinging. But he's added a few different dimensions to his

game, a few different skills which have made him a more complete bowler." Starc's numbers this year reflect that assessment. In 2025, he has taken 51 wickets in just 10 Test matches at an average of 17.15, making him the leading wicket-taker in the format this year. In the Ashes alone, he has already picked up 22 wickets at an average of 17.04,

repeatedly unsettling England's batting line-up across all conditions. Australia's reliance on Starc was heightened early in the series, with Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood unavailable for parts of the campaign. Starc responded by leading the attack, finishing the first half of the series as the highest wicket-taker with 22 wickets from six innings and setting the tone for Australia's bowling unit. Ponting also offered insight into the technical evolution that has elevated Starc's effectiveness. "He just doesn't rely on that big in-swinger now to a right-hander," Ponting explained. "He's got the wobble seam delivery that goes across the right-hander and gives him a lot more consistency. So he knows he can bowl that ball pretty much at will. He knows the line and length that it's going to be delivered at. And then his big strike weapon is still the fuller in-swinger ball to the right-handers." According to Ponting, the addition of a reliable wobble seam delivery has given Starc a crucial new option, allowing him to challenge right-handed batters with movement away as well as his trademark in-swinger.

Vada pav khaoge? Rohit Sharma's reaction to fan's hilarious question goes viral

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Batting great Rohit Sharma appeared to thoroughly enjoy his return to the Vijay Hazare Trophy after nearly eight years, delivering both entertainment and authority in Mumbai's emphatic win over Sikkim at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur on Wednesday.

Before Rohit went on to smash 155 off just 94 balls in Mumbai's successful chase, the spotlight briefly shifted to a lighter moment during Sikkim's innings. As Rohit patrolled the boundary, chants of "Rohit, Rohit" echoed around the ground, with close to 20,000 fans in attendance for his first Vijay Hazare Trophy appearance for Mumbai since 2016. Amid the noise, a fan jokingly called out, asking if he would eat vada pav. Rohit responded with a smile and a gentle wave of his hand, suggesting a polite refusal. The brief exchange was caught on camera and soon found its way across social media, spreading rapidly.



Online, the "vada pav" reference has been treated largely in good humour. For many fans, it reinforces Rohit's image as a cricketer deeply connected to Mumbai's culture and ethos — approachable, grounded, and comfortable engaging with supporters. Others have used the moment as meme material, playfully exaggerating a long-running joke rather than making any serious comment about his diet. That context matters, particularly given Rohit's renewed focus on fitness. Since returning to competitive action after a four-month break in October, the former India captain has been noticeably disciplined. Earlier this month, during a birthday celebration for Yashasvi Jaiswal following an ODI against South Africa, Rohit jokingly declined cake when Virat Kohli encouraged the youngster to feed him a slice. "Mota ha jaunga main vapas," Rohit quipped — a light-hearted line that nonetheless underlined the effort he has put into his conditioning.

Zinedine Zidane watches son Luca make Algeria debut at AFCON

Rabat. (Agency)

France and Real Madrid legend Zinedine Zidane had a front-row seat to a special family moment as his son Luca Zidane made his senior debut for Algeria in a comfortable 3-0 win over Sudan in the Africa Cup of Nations on Wednesday. The French football great was spotted in the stands at the Moulay El Hassan Stadium, drawing warm applause from fans whenever he appeared on the big screen. Algeria began their Group E campaign in style, with captain Riyad Mahrez scoring twice and young midfielder Ibrahim Maza finding the net to underline their status as one of the tournament favourites. While the goals took centre stage, there was quiet interest in goal, where Luca delivered a composed performance on his first international outing. The Granada goalkeeper was handed his chance after first-choice stopper Alexandre Oukidja was ruled out with injury. Having opted to represent Algeria, his grandfather's country, Luca looked assured between the

posts and showed little sign of debut nerves. Algeria struck early, with Mahrez opening the scoring in the second minute



after being set up by Hicham Boudaoui. Sudan briefly threatened on the counter, but Luca was alert to deny Yaser Awad and later stepped in again when Sudan found pockets of space despite being under sustained pressure. Sudan's task became tougher just before the interval when Salah Adil was sent off for a second yellow card following a foul on Rayan At-Nouri. With a numerical advantage, Algeria controlled proceedings

Zinedine Zidane watched proudly as his son Luca made his Algeria debut at AFCON. A composed display in goal capped a dominant win and added a memorable family moment to Algeria's campaign.

in the second half but had to remain patient before adding to their lead. Mahrez doubled his tally in the 61st minute, finishing off a clever cross from Mohammed Amoura. The win was sealed late on when substitute Ibrahim Maza reacted quickest after Baghdad Bounedjah's header to score his first international goal. As Algeria moved to the top of Group E with a convincing victory, the night also carried a personal touch. Zinedine Zidane's presence added feel-good subplot, as Luca Zidane marked his AFCON debut with a clean sheet and a memory that went beyond the result

Steve Smith cleared to captain in Boxing Day Test as Australia name all-pace attack

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

Steve Smith has been cleared to lead Australia in the Boxing Day Test after recovering fully from an inner-ear issue, but the hosts will wait until match morning to lock in their final XI for the fourth Ashes Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. With the Ashes already secured, Australia will walk into the marquee Test without regular captain Pat Cummins and injured off-spinner Nathan Lyon, opting instead to assess conditions before finalising their combination. Speaking after Australia's final training session on Christmas morning, Smith said the selectors wanted another close look at the pitch before making the final call. The surface, described by Smith as "quite fury" and carrying around 10mm of grass, is expected to offer plenty for fast bowlers, especially with cool and overcast conditions forecast for day one. "I had a few bad days before the



(Adelaide) Test and the first couple of days of the (match until) all my vestibular stuff settled down... It was a shame to miss that one, it looked like a pretty nice wicket for batting," Smith said. "I was watching in the hotel those first two days and wished I could have been out there, but I was it was the right call at that stage (because) I was struggling," he added. Australia XII: Travis Head, Jake Weatherald, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith (c), Usman

Khawaja, Alex Carey (wk), Cameron Green, Mitchell Starc, Scott Boland, Brendan Doggett, Michael Neser, Jhye Richardson.

Australia will go without a specialist spinner, putting Todd Murphy's hopes of a home Boxing Day Test on hold. Instead, Brendan Doggett, Michael Neser and Jhye Richardson are competing for the final pace spots alongside Mitchell Starc and Scott Boland. Richardson, returning from a long injury layoff, is edging closer to his first Test appearance in nearly four years. Smith was upbeat about Richardson's return, noting his proven impact at the highest level. The stand-in captain also confirmed that Australia have already settled on their 12, with the final XI to be chosen after a last inspection of the wicket on Thursday morning. Smith's return to the side has triggered a minor reshuffle in the batting order.

The Ro-Ko pull: BCCI deserve plaudits for bringing star power to domestic cricket

The first day of the Vijay Hazare Trophy saw the return of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli to the domestic circuit, and with it, the attention of the fans came back to the domestic circuit. The BCCI deserves plaudits for making it a mandate for stars to grace the domestic circuit with their presence; they have ensured that they have set up a foundation for bigger things.

NEW DELHI. (Agency)

It's the Christmas season, a time when festivities usually take centre stage and cricket often takes a backseat. But this year, all eyes were firmly fixed on the Vijay Hazare Trophy, with the buzz around the tournament reaching an all-time high. The BCCI were clear with their messaging ahead

of New Zealand's tour of India for an ODI series and five T20Is, just months before the T20 World Cup 2026 in February: go and play the Vijay Hazare Trophy. Many felt the cricket board was being a bit too strict with players who had just finished an international series against South Africa on December 19. But the message was unambiguous. The BCCI wanted India's stars to head back to the domestic circuit and grind it out alongside the rest of the domestic regulars. You may call it an attempt to end the superstar culture, but the board clearly wanted to refocus attention on India's domestic structure. Until the 2010s, it was common to see Indian greats like Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid turning out for their state sides. The Challenger Trophy, which pitted India's top stars against one another, was another highlight — competitive, intense and full of memorable moments. Who can forget a young Sreesanth trying to sledge Sachin Tendulkar? Over time, that culture faded. While young talents continued to rise through the ranks and break

into the national side, appearances by established superstars in domestic cricket



became increasingly rare. That changed this season. Jaipur was gripped by Rohit Sharma fever as thousands thronged the Sawai Mansingh Stadium to cheer for the former India captain. Some neutrals could have easily mistaken the venue for Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium. Rohit obliged the fans with a sensational hundred as Mumbai cruised to victory. Things were expected to be quiet in Bengaluru, where Virat Kohli was

scheduled to play behind closed doors at the BCCI Centre of Excellence. But Kohli's aura ensured otherwise. Fans climbed trees just to catch a glimpse of the star batter, who then went on to produce a brilliant hundred.

MORE EYES ON DOMESTIC

There has never been any doubt about the depth of talent in Indian cricket. The opening day of the Vijay Hazare Trophy itself witnessed breathtaking centuries from Vaibhav Suryavanshi, Sakibul Gani and Ishan Kishan, with records tumbling across venues. Bihar smashed 574 for six against a hapless Arunachal Pradesh, while Karnataka pulled off a magical chase to stun Jharkhand.

All that was needed was attention to the product. When players like Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli return to the domestic circuit, fan interest naturally skyrockets. Earlier this year, when Kohli played a Ranji Trophy match, the scenes outside the Arun Jaitley Stadium were enough to underline his enduring popularity.

Coupage Data Leak: Presidential Office To Hold Emergency Meeting

New Delhi.(Agency)

The presidential office was set to hold an emergency meeting with relevant government officials later on Thursday to discuss a recent data breach at e-commerce giant Coupage, informed sources told Yonhap news agency. "There is widespread understanding within the government about the seriousness of the breach," a source said, asking not to be identified. "Given the gravity of the issue, the meeting will take place even on the holiday." Kim Yong-beom, presidential chief of staff for policy, was set to chair the meeting, which will also be attended by Science Minister Bae Kyung-hoon, Personal Information Protection Commission Chair Song Kyung-hee, Korea Media Communications Commission Chair Kim Jong-cheol and Fair Trade Commission Chair Ju Biung-ghi. Officials from investigative agencies, such as the National Police Agency, are also expected to attend, according to the source. Notably, Foreign Minister Cho Hyun and officials from the National Security Office are said to be attending the meeting, indicating they may look into Coupage's lobbying activities in the United States. Other sources close to the issue noted the fact that the meeting will be held on a holiday suggests how seriously President Lee Jae Myung takes the issue. During a briefing by the finance ministry on Dec. 11, Lee criticized the U.S.-listed e-commerce giant, saying, "Those people are not afraid of punishment at all." Earlier, South Korea launched an interagency task force (TF) to carry out an investigation into the recent data breach at U.S. e-commerce giant Coupage that affected 33.7 million users.

Crypto market correction: Is this the time to enter for equity investors Giottus CEO explores

Kolkata .(Agency)

Though investing in crypto currency is frowned upon in India by the finance ministry and Reserve Bank of India authorities, many individuals invest in this asset and in growing numbers. Recently there has been a decline in the crypto market. Vikram Subburaj, CEO at Giottus explores the question, whether this dip offers an opportunity for investors to enter the crypto market which can provide a diversification strategy, especially when the equity markets are back near their peaks. He tries to answer the question why the decline in crypto prices and sums up the year 2025 for the asset. For details, please read on. South Asia is emerging as the fastest-growing region for 2025 and India frequently tops global indices and domestic reports also show a remarkable surge in crypto SIPs this year." Subburaj points out, Giottus is a fully compliant, FIU-registered Indian exchange serving over a million customers. Q: The crypto market correcting to a half-year low while equities remain at record highs, is this the right time to enter and consider a diversification strategy? A: This kind of dislocation is the time when diversification starts to make sense, provided investors stagger entries and manage risk. Bitcoin is trading around the high-\$80K to low-\$90K band after falling roughly 30% from its October all-time high above \$126,000. The broader market has shed over \$1 trillion in value. This has taken the total crypto capitalisation from above \$4.2 trillion to near \$3.2 trillion. Equities, meanwhile, are hovering around record levels. So, investors are effectively buying crypto on sale versus stocks at a premium. At the same time, global crypto ownership and penetration have continued to rise in 2025.

Why India is likely to miss the \$1 trillion export mark: GTRI assessment

CHENNAI.(Agency)

India's ambition of exporting goods and services worth \$1 trillion by the end of FY26 is increasingly looking difficult to achieve, according to an assessment by Global Trade Research Initiative. The analysis highlights a growing disconnect between policy targets and prevailing economic conditions, shaped by a weak global trade environment and unresolved structural challenges at home.

The \$1 trillion export goal has been projected as a key milestone in India's push to expand its presence in global trade and strengthen its role in international supply chains. While services exports, led by information technology and business services, have continued to grow at a steady pace, merchandise exports have struggled to regain momentum. Sluggish demand in major markets such as the United States and Europe, along with geopolitical uncertainty and supply chain disruptions, has constrained growth in goods exports. The assessment by GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava notes that global trade conditions remain unfavourable for a rapid expansion in exports. High interest rates, persistent inflation and fiscal tightening in advanced economies have weighed on consumption and investment, limiting import demand. At the same time, rising protectionist measures, including non-tariff barriers and stricter regulatory standards, have increased compliance costs for exporters from emerging markets, including India. Domestic factors have further complicated the outlook. High logistics costs, fragmented manufacturing bases and regulatory complexity continue to undermine export competitiveness. Although initiatives such as production-linked incentive schemes have encouraged investment in select sectors, their impact on export volumes has so far been gradual rather than transformative. The analysis also questions the assumptions underlying the \$1 trillion target. Achieving such a figure within a short timeframe would require sustained double-digit growth across both goods and services at a time when global trade growth itself remains subdued.

8th Pay Commission: How inflation could shape salary and pension revisions

As discussions around the 8th Pay Commission gather pace, the debate around pay hikes has already begun. Inflation may be under control on paper, yet higher rents and household expenses are shaping expectations from the next salary and pension revision.

New Delhi.(Agency)

As the year draws to a close, expectations for the 8th Pay Commission have become more realistic. With the 7th Pay Commission ending on December 31, 2025 and the new panel given an 18-month timeline, revised salaries and pensions are now unlikely before late 2027 or early 2028. Once implemented, the 8th Pay Commission is expected to

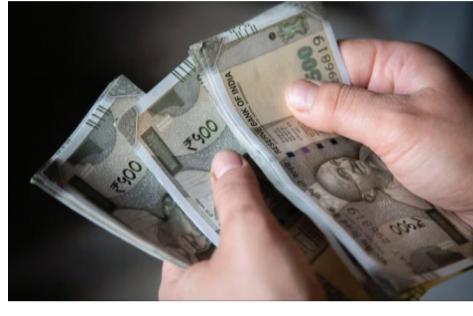
revise pay and pensions for over 50 lakh central government employees and nearly 69 lakh pensioners. While the final implementation date and funding details are yet to be confirmed, one factor is already emerging as central to the discussions, i.e., inflation and the rising cost of living.

WHY INFLATION MATTERS THIS TIME

Unlike earlier pay revisions, the cost structure for households has changed sharply in recent years. Even though headline inflation remains largely under control, everyday expenses, especially in cities, have gone up steadily. Housing has become one of the biggest pressure points for working families. Shashank Gupta, Director at RPS, points out that inflation will play a key role in the commission's thinking. "Inflation and cost of living issues will be an important factor for consideration by the 8th Pay Commission, especially with the nature of

expenses having undergone a radical transformation in the last few years," he says.

HOUSING COSTS UNDER STRAIN



According to Gupta, housing expenses are where the strain is most visible. Rents, home loan EMIs, maintenance charges and electricity bills have all risen, particularly in urban centres. "As far as housing costs are concerned, the squeeze on working-class families is pretty clear,

even as headline inflation remains in control," he adds. This is where the fitment factor, i.e., the multiplier used to revise basic pay and pensions, becomes important. If salary hikes fail to match real living costs, it can affect savings, spending habits and long-term financial stability.

MORE THAN JUST INFLATION MATH

Gupta says that pay commission reforms go beyond simply adjusting for inflation.

"Reforms on the salary side are more than just mathematical compensation for inflation. They are related to the preservation of purchasing power," he explains, adding that housing affordability is likely to influence both salary hikes and HRA revisions.

WHAT ABOUT ARREARS?

There is also clarity emerging on arrears. CA Manish Mishra, Founder of GenZCFO, says delays in implementation will not mean loss of dues.

AWS glitch sends shockwaves across US and India, disrupts cloud-powered services

New Delhi.(Agency)

Chennai: Amazon Web Services (AWS) experienced disruption on Thursday that triggered connectivity complaints from users in the United States and India, bringing renewed attention to the fragility of cloud-dependent digital ecosystems. The incident was flagged by outage-tracking platform Downdetector, which recorded a sharp spike in user reports over a short period, suggesting problems with accessing services hosted on AWS infrastructure. In the US, the volume of complaints rose quickly during early hours, with users reporting difficulties ranging from slow response times to complete service unavailability. In India, the number of reports was relatively smaller but spread across key technology hubs, indicating that the disruption was not confined to a single geography. Several consumer-facing platforms, particularly online gaming services and applications that rely heavily on AWS for backend operations, were among those affected, amplifying the visibility of the outage during a period of high internet usage. AWS did not immediately acknowledge a widespread internal failure, and its public service health

indicators did not reflect a major system-wide disruption. This divergence between user-reported issues and official status updates highlights a recurring challenge in assessing cloud outages. Many digital



services operate on complex stacks involving content delivery networks, internet service providers, application layers and third-party integrations. A fault in any of these components can manifest to end users as a cloud outage even if core infrastructure remains largely functional. From an analytical perspective, the episode underscores the growing concentration risk in the global cloud market. AWS hosts a vast share of the world's digital traffic, from enterprise applications and fintech platforms to entertainment and gaming

services. Even limited or region-specific disruptions can cascade quickly across multiple industries, affecting millions of users simultaneously. The timing of the incident, during a holiday period marked by elevated online activity, likely magnified both the operational impact and the volume of user complaints. The event also reflects the increasing reliance on real-time outage trackers as an alternative source of information during disruptions. While such platforms provide early signals based on crowd-sourced data, they can sometimes overstate the scale of a problem or blur the distinction between infrastructure failures and downstream service issues. At the same time, delays or limited transparency in official communications from cloud providers can fuel uncertainty among businesses and consumers alike. Overall, the reported AWS disruption serves as another reminder of how deeply embedded cloud services have become in everyday digital life and how even brief interruptions can have outsized effects. For enterprises, it reinforces the importance of redundancy, multi-cloud strategies and clear incident communication.

CBDT NUDGE campaign: Rectify mistakes if you receive SMS and emails; deadline Dec 31

Kolkata .(Agency)

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has launched the NUDGE campaign for assessment year 2025-26. NUDGE is the acronym for "Non-intrusive Use of Data to Guide and Enable". In the process, it is alerting taxpayers about incorrect deductions and exemptions via SMS and email. The CBDT is not out to scare taxpayers but wants to provide taxpayers with a window to voluntarily correct errors by reviewing their ITRs. The deadline for filing revised returns is December 31, 2025. This is a special campaign to encourage taxpayers to review their ITR (income tax returns) and voluntarily correct any errors.

Why the NUDGE campaign?

In a notification issued on December 23, 2025, the CBDT stated that advanced

excessive deductions have been shown, resulting in understated income and understated tax liability. The CDT wants these to be rectified by the end of this calendar year.

Mode of alerting taxpayers

CBDT is not dispatching notices to taxpayers who usually view notices with apprehension. Instead Income Tax Department has contacted taxpayers via SMS and email. This contact is being made under the "Non-intrusive Use of Data to Guide and Enable (NUUDGE)" campaign. Taxpayers have been asked to re-examine their ITRs and file revised returns by December 31, 2025.

Avoiding false claims

Do not ignore any messages or email from the Income Tax Department after Dec 12, 2025.



data analytics and risk management systems have revealed instances where deductions and exemptions have been incorrectly claimed for assessment year 2025-26. Quite a few discrepancies have been found in these cases. Some taxpayers have shown donations to political parties or organisations that are either unrecognised or even non-existent. In many cases, incorrect or invalid PAN numbers have been used for donations. In some returns,

IndiGo, Air India Express kick off operations at Navi Mumbai International Airport

MUMBAI.(Agency)

IndiGo and Air India Express commenced operations at the newly inaugurated Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) on Thursday. Promoted by Adani Airport Holdings, NMIA commenced airside operation from December 25, 2025 with the arrival of its first commercial flight. The inaugural arrival, IndiGo flight 6E460 from Bengaluru, touched down at 08:00 hrs and was welcomed with the traditional water salute. This was followed by the airport's first departure, an IndiGo flight 6E882 to Hyderabad, which took off at 08:40 hrs, completing NMIA's inaugural arrival and departure cycle. The airport, second in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), is a 74:26 joint venture between Adani Airport Holdings Ltd (AAHL) and City and Industrial Development Corporation of Maharashtra (CIDCO). With a planned capacity of 90 million passengers and 3.2 million tonnes of cargo per annum, NMIA will commence Phase 1 operations with a capacity of 20 million passengers and 0.8 million tonnes of cargo per annum. IndiGo's initial services from NMIA connect to the following 13 destinations: Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Cochin, Delhi,



Hyderabad, Lucknow, Mangaluru, Nagpur, Goa (Mopa), Jaipur, Chennai, Coimbatore and Vadodara. Vinay Malhotra, Head of Global Sales, IndiGo, said, "Initially, IndiGo will be connecting NMIA to over 10 key destinations across the nation. These newly launched services will support the growth of this brand-new aviation gateway and complement Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport." Air India Express inaugurated its services from NMIA with direct flights to Bengaluru and Delhi. The first Air India Express flight from Navi Mumbai International Airport operated to Bengaluru, marking the commencement of the airline's services from the new airport. Following the inaugural Bengaluru service, the airline's inaugural Delhi flight is scheduled to depart from Navi Mumbai at 14:05 hours and arrive in the national capital at 16:20 hours. Alok Singh, Managing Director, Air India Express, said, "AIX will scale up its operations going forward, offering guests reliable, value-driven connectivity delivered with the warmth of Indian hospitality, supported by a modern fleet."

Gold And Silver Bring Cheers For Investors, 2026 Outlook Remains Strong

With equity markets facing volatility, both metals strengthened their position as preferred safe investment options, but silver clearly outshone all traditional choices. Gold's strong performance was supported by geopolitical tensions, inflation concerns, and expectations of interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve.

New Delhi.(Agency)

In a year marked by heightened global uncertainty, precious metals delivered exceptional returns for investors, with silver emerging as a surprise winner. Silver prices surged by more than 137 per cent -- outperforming gold -- which also posted a strong gain of around 68 per cent this year. With equity markets facing volatility, both metals strengthened their position as preferred safe investment options, but silver clearly outshone all traditional choices. Gold's strong

performance was supported by geopolitical tensions, inflation concerns, and expectations of interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve. A major driving force behind gold's rally was steady buying by global central banks. For three consecutive years -- 2022, 2023 and 2024 -- central banks have purchased more than 1,000 tonnes of gold each year. Alongside this, global investors continued to invest through gold ETFs, using them as a safe place to park funds. Big global banks have turned increasingly bullish on gold's outlook. Goldman Sachs has raised its 2026 year-end gold price target to \$4,900 per ounce, citing strong central bank demand and ETF inflows. Deutsche Bank has also upgraded its outlook, projecting gold prices at \$4,450 per ounce in 2026. Silver's rally, however, has been driven by more than just safe-haven demand. Strong industrial usage has played a crucial role. Growing demand from sectors such as solar power, electric vehicles, and electronics has significantly increased silver consumption. At the same time, supply constraints have tightened the market, pushing prices sharply higher.



This dual role -- as a precious metal and an industrial input -- has helped silver deliver more than double the returns of gold in 2025. Looking ahead, experts believe the positive momentum in silver could continue into 2026. Market specialists say that strong industrial demand, limited supply, and supportive global trends could help silver rise by another 15 to 20 per cent next year. Some analysts expect that in the first half of 2026 alone, silver may generate an additional 20 to 25 per cent return from current levels, though they advise investors to invest gradually, especially if prices see short-term corrections. Gold's outlook also remains positive for 2026. Continued central bank buying, possible US rate cuts, and

ongoing geopolitical risks are expected to support prices. Analysts suggest that keeping an eye on central bank activity -- whether they continue buying, hold their reserves, or start selling -- will be critical, as their actions often signal future price trends well in advance. "With uncertainty still dominating the global economic landscape, precious metals are likely to continue playing an important role in investor portfolios, offering a mix of safety and growth potential," experts stated. Meanwhile, both metals' prices climbed to new record highs on the MCX on Wednesday morning, helped by a weak US dollar and expectations that the US Federal Reserve may cut interest rates further. Gold futures for February rose 0.42 per cent to touch an all-time high of Rs 1,38,469 per 10 grams. Silver futures for March jumped nearly 2 per cent to hit a fresh record of Rs 2,23,742 per kg.

In the global market, gold prices crossed the \$4,500 per ounce level for the first time. The rise was driven by strong demand for safe-haven assets as investors expect more interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve next year.

Karan Kundrra Calls Doing Laughter Chefs With

Tejasswi Prakash

'Weekly Rehearsal For Future'

Karan Kundrra and Tejasswi Prakash have been one of the cutest couples on television, and recently the two have joined COLORS' Laughter Chefs: Unlimited Entertainment. The audience has been loving their on-screen camaraderie on the reality show. Now, as the year 2025 is coming to an end, Karan Kundrra has opened up about how this year has been for him.

Speaking about how 2025 has been, Karan Kundrra shared, "This year has been special in more ways than one. Watching Laughter Chefs come back and win the audience all over has been the highlight of my year, and I couldn't be prouder of the entire team. One of the most unexpected joys has been cooking with Teja and learning about her kitchen personality; it honestly feels like a weekly rehearsal for the future. Nothing on this show feels put on. We argue, we panic, we laugh at each other, and somehow



land the dish just as time runs out. That honesty has connected with people, and I think audiences sense that.

The kitchen troublemakers on this show make me laugh at the most ridiculous things, and I hope viewers continue to find themselves doing the same in 2026. Here's to more fun, more wins, and many reasons to celebrate. Wishing everyone a very Happy New Year."

More About Laughter Chefs – Unlimited Entertainment Season 3

The celebrity cooking-comedy reality show, which premiered on November 22, is hosted by popular comedian Bharti Singh. Celebrity chef Harpal Singh Sokhi serves as the judge of the third season, featuring a new twist: contestants are split into two rival teams, Team Kaanta and Team Chhurri, adding a competitive edge to the culinary chaos.

The show airs on Colors TV every Saturday and Sunday at 9 PM and also streams on JioHotstar. The season features a mix of returning favourites from previous seasons and new celebrity duos, including Elvish Yadav and Isha Malviya, Aly Goni and Jannat Zubair, Krushna Abhishek and Kashmera Shah, Abhishek Kumar and Samarth Jurel, Karan Kundrra and Tejasswi Prakash, Gurmeet Choudhary and Debina Bonnerjee, and Vivian Dsena and Eisha Singh.

Recently, after Bharti Singh took a maternity break following the delivery of her second baby boy, reports suggest that Arjun Bijlani will replace her as a temporary host.



Nagma Mirajkar

Farrhana Bhatt All Set To Embrace Christmas Spirit

Christmas is just around the corner, and Bigg Boss 19 alums are all set to embrace the holiday spirit. While some look forward to spending a cosy Christmas, others are getting ready to party the night away.

Ahead of Christmas, Nagma Mirajkar and Farrhana Bhatt were seen getting all decked up for a holiday photoshoot, while Abhishek Bajaj, Ashnoor Kaur, and their group were spotted partying at a pre-Christmas celebration.

Nagma Mirajkar and Farrhana Bhatt Get Christmas Ready

On Instagram, Nagma shared a few glimpses of her Christmas photoshoot. In the pictures, she was seen in a white off-shoulder top paired with blue baggy jeans. Nagma sat on a red and white decorated couch with a huge Christmas tree beside her. The place was filled with decorative gifts, Christmas ornaments, and candles – highlighting a cosy Christmas celebration.

On the other hand, Farrhana Bhatt opted for a chic Christmas look. The Bigg Boss 19 runner-up wore a royal blue dress, featuring a deep plunging neckline and zip detailing in the front. Sharing the picture, Farrhana wrote, "Less Noise, More Poise," followed by a fire emoji.

Bigg Boss 19 Contestants Spotted at Pre-Christmas Party

Previously, Bigg Boss 19 contestants Abhishek Bajaj, Ashnoor Kaur, Nagma Mirajkar, Awez Darbar, and Natalia Janoszek were spotted attending a Christmas party. Several photos from the party started making rounds on social

media, where the group was seen enjoying their time.

Nagma Mirajkar looked classy in a maroon blazer, while Awez Darbar opted for a head-to-toe black look. Abhishek Bajaj kept it casual with a white t-shirt and leather jacket combo, whereas Ashnoor Kaur looked glamorous in a silver-coloured sheer gown, adorned with sequin work all over it. Natalia Janoszek brought the holiday spirit to life as she donned a



strappy red bodycon dress and sported a matching headband featuring Santa Claus.

About Bigg Boss 19

The 19th season of Bigg Boss, which premiered in August, became a massive hit among audiences. With intense drama, changing participant dynamics, and exciting challenges – the season kept audiences entertained.

The grand finale aired on December 7, where Gaurav Khanna emerged as the winner and Farrhana Bhatt finished as the runner-up.



Sukesh Chandrasekhar's Gifts

Jacqueline Fernandez A New Home, Calls It 'The Love Nest'



Alleged Conman Sukesh Chandrasekhar has gifted a new home to Bollywood actress Jacqueline Fernandez for the occasion of Christmas. In a letter that Sukesh wrote to Jacqueline on Wednesday, he described the new home as their 'love nest' and expressed his love for the actress.

"Baby on this gracious, glorious day I present you, 'The Love Nest' your new, our new home in Beverly Hills. Yes, my love the same house which I made for you, for us, which you thought would not be completed. Baby I am proud to say I completed it for you and gifting it to you today on this Christmas day. But Baby it's bigger and better, than how it was previously planned by us, that is a private, our own '19' Hole golf course around our house," he wrote, as quoted by IANS.

Sukesh further claimed that he is planning to buy the IPL team Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) and added, "Baby one more thing, on this Christmas day I wanna surprise is, one more dream of yours, I am working on which is owning an IPL team, I have placed my bids for RCB, god willingly we should be able to get a piece of action."

For the unversed, Sukesh Chandrasekhar is currently lodged in Delhi's Mandoli jail in connection to Rs 200 crore extortion case. He was rumoured to be in a relationship with Jacqueline. While the actress has repeatedly denied any kind of romantic relationship with Sukesh, she is an accused in the case and has also been questioned by the Enforcement Directorate multiple times.

The central agency believes that Jacqueline was aware of conman Sukesh being an extortionist. In a chargesheet filed by ED, the central agency claimed that even the actress' family and friends 'benefited' from her alleged relationship with Sukesh. In September 2022, Jacqueline's stylist had also admitted taking Rs 3 crore from Sukesh.

However, Jacqueline Fernandez has always maintained that she was unaware of the alleged crimes committed by Jacqueline. In February 2024, Jacqueline also accused Sukesh of using media as a tool to defame her image. She had also alleged harassment by him and had asked the court to file a case against him. However, the actress withdrew her plea later.

'Strange, Unpredictable World': Priyanka Chopra On Her Life With Social Media



Priyanka Chopra Jonas travelled to India to film for the upcoming season of Kapil Sharma's The Great Indian Kapil Show on Netflix. The first episode of Season 4 of the show aired on December 20 and lived up to fans' expectations. During a talk with Kapil, Priyanka discussed the unpredictable nature of social media and how it impacts her as an actor. Opening up about it on the show, she said, "We live in a strange and unpredictable world, with all kinds of people. There is a lot of weirdness on social media, so always choose kindness. Please treat everyone around you well, make them laugh. Nothing is more important than this."

Priyanka Chopra's Adorable Moment With Malti

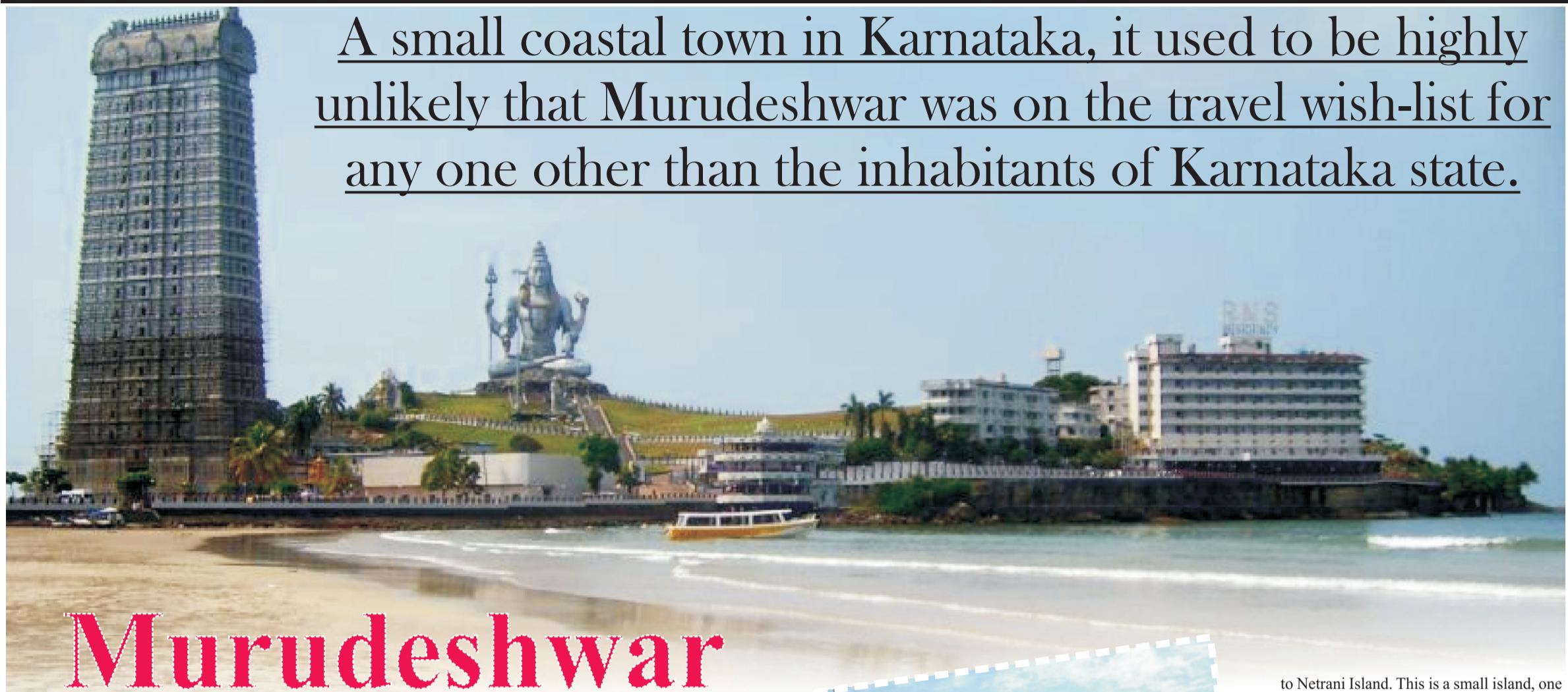
During a recent appearance on The Great Indian Kapil Show, she also talked about how her Indianness comes through when she scolds her three-year-old daughter, Malti Marie Chopra Jonas. When Kapil Sharma asked what words she uses to chastise her daughter, the actress revealed a humorous anecdote that had everyone chuckling.

In the episode, the comedian-turned-actor said, "Hum ye jaanna chahte hai Priyanka Chopra, unki beti jab shararat karti hai toh aapke andar se kaun si bhasha nikalti hai uss samay (We want to ask Priyanka Chopra, when your daughter is being naughty, what language comes out of you at that moment)?"

Responding with humour, the actress revealed, "Meri soch Hindi mein hoti hai lekin usko zyada Hindi samajh mein nahi aati hai aur wo meri galti hai kyunki main bolna bhal jaati hun kabhi kabhi usse lekin nikalti Hindi mein hi hai (My thoughts are in Hindi, but she doesn't understand Hindi that well, and that is my fault because sometimes I forget to speak it with her. But when it comes out, it comes out in Hindi)."

She then mockingly showed how she scolds her daughter, much like a typical Indian mother. Her performance had the audience in splits. She noted that Malti frequently stares at her, perplexed by what her mother just said. Priyanka went on to claim that she would then switch to English.

A small coastal town in Karnataka, it used to be highly unlikely that Murudeshwar was on the travel wish-list for any one other than the inhabitants of Karnataka state.



Murudeshwar

The offbeat Beach Getaway

But the times are a changing now. Coupled with accessibility and the increased desire of visiting off-beat destinations, people have started venturing further south of beach haven, Goa, to Murudeshwar. Scuba diving has been another reason for this destination becoming popular over the past couple of years.

Scuba diving is what brought me here.

Climate

The summers in Murudeshwar are hot and extend from March to May. The winters are quite pleasant and do get as chilly as it can

possibly get on the Indian west coast. This makes the months of Oct to Mar the perfect time to visit Murudeshwar. Leaving aside the monsoon months of July to September, anytime is a great time to visit here.

Food

Being a religious town, it is not easy to come by non-vegetarian restaurants in Murudeshwar. The Sea Lounge at RNS Residency is a great place to sit and have a meal given its ambience and view but does not serve non-veg or alcohol. You can however come down here for a juice or milkshake in the morning or afternoon. Naveen Beach Resort is probably the only one in the main town where you get both alcohol as well as

non-veg food and is therefore the one most popular amongst tourists. Definitely go here for seafood. Naveen Beach Restaurant is a great place to have breakfast with its traditional south Indian fare. They have amazing dosa, upma, medu wada, etc.

Places of interest

Murudeshwar is a small little beautiful beach town with loads of tourists visiting to see the temples and to take a dip in the holy waters of this town. The town is in fact named after Lord Shiva.

Shiva temple

Murudeshwar is home to the second tallest Shiva statue in the world. Standing enormously tall at 123 ft, this statue is the main reason thousands of tourists throng to Murudeshwar.

Raja Gopura



At 18 to 20 storeys high, this tower was built by Mr. R.N. Shetty, a very well-known businessman and philanthropist in Murudeshwar. To me it seemed like he practically owns the town. This Raja Gopura was built with a viewing gallery on the 18th floor so that everyone could witness the spectacular views from a height as well as get a great view of the statue of Lord Shiva.

Murudeshwar beach

While the beach is beautiful just as any other beach is to it, it is lined with small, cheap food stalls, crabs, garbage and locals who stare at you enough to make you uncomfortable. So Murudeshwar beach is preferably best seen from afar. However a trip to the beach really early in the morning might not be a bad idea.

Netrani Island - Scuba diving & snorkelling

A boat ride of around an hour and fifteen minutes from Murudeshwar beach gets you

to Netrani Island. This is a small island, one that you don't really need to get down on to. The boatmen will keep the boat parked close by to the island and you can jump in with a snorkel mask and have some fun. I'd recommend giving scuba diving a try. It is probably the next best thing to travelling into outer space as a lot of people say.

How to get there

By air

The nearest airport is Mangalore at 165 kms away. It probably doesn't make sense for people to fly to Mangalore and then drive to Murudeshwar unless they're coming from far up north and are really constrained on time.

By rail

Murudeshwar is well connected on the Konkan railway line with a few trains daily connecting it to Goa and onwards to Mumbai.

By road

The journey from Pune to Murudeshwar is over 600 kilometres. We left in a friend's car at 7:45am, not bad considering our targeted time of departure was to be 6:30am. While getting out of Pune, head in the general direction that you would go to Goa. You could go up till Goa and then drive southwards but it is a better idea to travel through the interiors of Karnataka via Hubli and reach Murudeshwar directly. The time taken for this journey was around 11 hours with enough leisurely tea and eats stops. Go to Murudeshwar only if you plan on going snorkeling or scuba diving because there isn't much else here. A few hour stop-over to visit the temples would be just fine but Netrani Island definitely scored high on my travel ranks.

Jaisalmer

Life in a fort

I have never seen a place so lively and vivid as seen at the famous Sonar Kila (Golden Fort). The fort got its name because the yellow sandstone by which the fort has been made, glows in the sunlight. For me, it doesn't actually glow but everything looks very bright and happy. Infact, all the houses or buildings in the city are made of this stone. I wanted to know more about this stone and Googled it, then I realized that you can actually decorate your living room or bathroom with one of these stunning Jaisalmer stones (they also have marble etc).

Little bit more about the fort, its actual name was Trikut Garh because it was made in a triangle shape and was constructed approx. 250 feet above on Trikuta Hills. You must have read in the history books about how a whole city is protected by the walls of fort so that people could be saved from enemy. Yes, this fort is a live example. This is one of the largest forts in the world. The high walls saved the king and the civilians from the enemy. There is

one story that Allauddin Khilji attacked Jaisalmer and thought that he could cut off food and water supply for the city. Interestingly, he didn't know that there are secret doors and tunnels and people of the fort have access to the outer world through these tunnels.

Places of interest

Kings of Jaisalmer were called Maharawal because they are descendants of Yaduvanshi. The fort was built by Rao Jaisal in the year 1156. Later after the independence the fort has been gifted to locals. The fort is being taken care by the government of India. This is one such unique fort in India where a whole city breathes. You will understand better when you read more.

Jaisalmer is one of the very famous tourist's destinations but unlike Jaipur it is not densely populated thus this became a favorite destination for a peaceful vacation.

Being a woman, I definitely would like to add one more

point. The city is safe and crime free so female traveler can easily roam around freely without any inconvenience.

The fort has been gifted by the king to Brahmins, Rajputs and other locals living at that time. So you will find temples, shops, restaurants all in the same place. Our guide explained us in a very nice manner. Jains and Baniyas were supposed to handle money, Rajputs were supposed to fight, protect and Brahmins were supposed to conduct prayers. In the earlier days, there was this clear distinction and thus clear responsibilities for each caste.

The main attractions of the fort are its four gates, Jain temple, Lakshminath temple, Raj mahal, Patwon Ki Haveli. The gates are called Akhai Pol (the entry gate), Suraj Pol (namaskar gate), Ganesh Pol (third gate), and Hawa Pol (forth gate). Apart from beautiful architecture of these gates they also have some important functions. Like the Hawa Pol is the place where the traveler can sit and relax because of the architecture of the gate makes it very airy.

The Jains were the financial backbone of the kings. They lend money to the kings when needed. For their good deeds, the king had presented them a land where the Jain temple had been constructed. This is one of the most beautiful buildings inside the fort. This temple has special significance in Jain community and Jains from all over the country visit this temple.

The temple is carved with yellow sandstone. No cement or any other glueing agent is used to build this temple. Instead the whole temple was made with stones connected and screwed together. Very interesting concept, but this method is used to build all the houses inside the fort.

There are many interesting customs followed by the locals. One such custom is that every house has been decorated with Ganesh symbol outside their home announcing their children's marriage and this would only be changed when a

new marriage took place in the house. Thus, the names and date will change and the rest will be the same. The same custom also happens for deaths and childbirth.

There is a whole lot other things which you could do inside the fort. Indulge yourself in the photography, with those vibrant colors the fort gives ample of opportunity for exclusive photo shoots. You could also indulge yourself with the some fine artifacts like brass and stone work, photo frames, bed sheets, Jaipuri rajais, colorful apparels. There is an immense respect that locals have for Manikda (famous director Satyajit Ray) as according to them, he put Jaisalmer in many ways on the map and increased the sale of yellow sandstone artifacts.

You also got plenty of food option inside the fort, try Kachori's at Bhatia Market or if you dig Italian and continental try Jaisal's Italy (Veg/Egg). What I figure out from my own experience that most of the restaurants inside the fort serves fresh and tasty food. So you can safely try new restaurants in the place.

How to get there

By air

Right now there is only an army airport in Jaisalmer but one civilian airport is being constructed which will take some more time to built. The nearest airport from Jaisalmer is in Jodhpur which is approx. 300km from the city. There are good number of transportation plying between Jaisalmer and Jodhpur.

By rail

The connectivity of Jaisalmer from other city through train is also good. However, the number of trains are limited so you have to get the tickets booked in advance preferably one or two month in advance.

This is a city living inside the fort, either you could spend couple of hours in the fort or spend a day or couple of days. The fort could fulfill all your wishes, be it a quite holiday or historical tour. You just need to have an open eye and the world (fort) will be your oyster.

