

Amit Shah Turns Tamil Nadu BJP Chief's Tour Finale Into Party's Poll Pitch

Addressing party workers and supporters, Amit Shah struck a combative note, exuding confidence that the National Democratic Alliance would capture power in the state.

Pudukkottai .(Agency)
Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday effectively sounded the Bharatiya Janata Party's campaign bugle in Tamil Nadu, transforming a programme meant to mark the culmination of state BJP chief Nainar Nagendran's statewide tour into a full-fledged election launch a head of the Assembly polls. Addressing party workers and supporters, Amit Shah struck a combative note, exuding confidence that the National Democratic Alliance would capture power in the state. Launching a sharp attack on the ruling DMK, he accused the party of dynastic

politics, corruption and failure to ensure women's safety. Aiming at the DMK's first family, Amit Shah said, "First it was Karunanidhi, then MK Stalin and now Udhayanidhi. Mr Stalin, your dream will not come true," drawing loud cheers from the gathering. Referring to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Amit Shah said that even though the AIADMK and BJP contested separately, their combined vote share indicated the strength of the alliance. "In 2024, though we fought separately, we could have won 26 seats going by the vote share each got," he said,



asserting that a united NDA stood a strong chance of forming the next government in Tamil Nadu. Amit Shah's visit, however, comes at a time when the NDA faces significant challenges in the state. The AIADMK remains a divided house, with party chief Edappadi K

Palaniswami unwilling to take back expelled leaders Sasikala, O Panneerselvam and TTV Dhinakaran. The PMK is witnessing a public father-son tussle, the DMDK founded by late actor Vijayakanth is yet to make up its mind on alliances, while OPS and Dhinakaran have already exited the NDA. Adding a new variable to the political landscape is actor Vijay's Tamilaga Vettai Kazhagam, which is set to make its electoral debut. Raising the politically sensitive Thiruparankundram issue, the Home Minister alleged that the

DMK government was denying the rights of Hindus - a charge that the BJP has increasingly highlighted as it seeks to consolidate its support base. He also strongly pitched the revived AIADMK-BJP partnership, calling it a "natural alliance". The ruling DMK-led alliance appears stable and confident, having won three successive elections. While the BJP continues to attack the DMK on issues such as crimes against women, alleged decline in law and order and drug abuse, the DMK has countered by accusing the Centre of withholding funds, pushing Hindi imposition and undermining federalism.

'People of Bengal embraced SIR as beacon of hope': BJP's Suvendu writes to CEC, countering Mamata

Adhikari claimed that the CM's call to "halt" the special intensive revision (SIR) is nothing short of an "admission of defeat"

Kolkata .(Agency)
West Bengal's Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari on Monday wrote to Chief Election Commissioner Ganesh Kumar, urging him to continue the SIR of electoral rolls "undaunted", two days after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee sent a letter stating that the exercise should be halted. Adhikari claimed that the CM's call to "halt" the special intensive revision (SIR) is nothing short of an "admission of defeat", and a "brazen attempt to perpetuate the electoral malfeasance" that has defined her tenure. He alleged Banerjee's "litany of grievances" is not only factually inaccurate but a deliberate distortion designed to malign the EC as "politically motivated" and to manufacture a false narrative of widespread discomfort and disenfranchisement. "By contrast, the people of West Bengal have embraced the SIR as a beacon of hope. Her narrative of 'anxiety and harassment' is a TMC-orchestrated mirage, drowned out by the chorus of



approval from those who reject her politics of patronage and prefer the purity of the ballot," he claimed in the letter that he shared on X. Dismissing allegations of undue haste and inadequate preparation, Adhikari said more than 50,000 Booth Level Officers (BLOs) and Electoral

members of attempting to derail the SIR by intimidating field officials and spreading misinformation. He said the exclusion of Booth-Level Agents (BLAs) from certain hearings was necessary to ensure neutrality and prevent "cadre-led disruptions" during the process.

"I implore the ECI to press forward with the SIR undaunted, fortified by the unwavering support of the democratic masses. This exercise is not an assault on the Constitution but its true vindication, purging the shadows that have eclipsed our polls for too long," he said.

In a strongly worded letter dated January 3, Banerjee urged Kumar to halt the "arbitrary and flawed" SIR in the state, warning that its continuation in the present form could trigger "mass disenfranchisement" and "strike at the foundations of democracy". Banerjee accused the EC of presiding over an "unplanned, ill-prepared and ad hoc" process marked by "serious irregularities, procedural violations, and administrative lapses".

Registration Officers (EROs) in the state had undergone training for the revision exercise. He defended the use of digital platforms such as WhatsApp for urgent clarifications, calling them supplementary to formal circulars and consistent with modern administrative practices. The BJP leader, in turn, accused the state administration and TMC

of attempting to derail the SIR by intimidating field officials and spreading misinformation. He said the exclusion of Booth-Level Agents (BLAs) from certain hearings was necessary to ensure neutrality and prevent "cadre-led disruptions" during the process.

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The Sikh Times
Bathinda, 5 January - District Administration on 5th January 2026, launched a free coaching programme for competitive examinations under the flagship initiative 'Mission Pragati'. Speaking on the occasion Sh. Rajesh Dhiman, IAS, Deputy Commissioner in the presence of Mrs. Amneet Kondal, IPS, SSP, Bathinda explained that the initiative has been conceptualized to support meritorious students who often lack access to quality and affordable coaching facilities. Implemented at the District Library, Bathinda, 1st batch has commenced with 35 students. Mission Pragati adopts a comprehensive and integrated approach, combining structured academic coaching with physical training, to prepare students for a wide range of competitive examinations including SSB, Punjab Police, CPO, Armed Forces and other central and state-level recruitment exams. Academic coaching will be imparted in core subjects such as Mathematics, Reasoning, General

Studies/Current Affairs and English, supported by regular mock tests, performance tracking and personalized mentoring. Physical training sessions will be conducted at C-PYSTE grounds under the supervision of trained instructors. The physical trainers will include personnel associated with the C-PYSTE & Punjab Police ensuring professional and exam-oriented physical preparedness. It is difficult for the students to have conducive study environment and to purchase expensive competitive books. Therefore, the selected candidates would be provided books free of cost from District Library after enrolling them as member on nominal charges. A unique feature of the programme is its teachers' mentoring model, wherein faculty members are themselves young aspirants appearing for competitive examinations. The District Administration is thus supporting teachers who are also preparing for such examinations, creating a model of "young supporting young". Many of the teachers also

IRCTC 'scam' case: Delhi HC asks CBI to reply to Lalu's plea against charge framing order

New Delhi .(Agency)

The Delhi High Court on Monday sought response of the CBI on a plea by RJD leader Lalu Prasad Yadav challenging an order framing charges against him in the alleged IRCTC scam case.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma, however, refused to stay the trial, at this stage, in the case, and said it cannot do so without going through the probe agency's reply. The court issued notice to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Yadav's petition and stay application, and listed the matter for further hearing on January 14. On October 13, 2025, the trial court had framed charges against the accused persons -- Lalu, his wife Rabri Devi, son Tejaswi Prasad Yadav and 11 others -- in the case for the alleged offences of cheating, criminal conspiracy under the Indian Penal Code and sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

The former union railway minister approached the high court assailing the trial court's order. The trial court had made a scathing observation that the land and share transactions in the case were "possibly an instance of crony capitalism fostered in the garb of eliciting private participation in the Railways' hotels at Ranchi and Puri."

Besides Lalu Yadav, the court had framed charges against Pradeep Kumar Goel, Rakesh Saksena, Bhupendra Kumar Agarwal, Rakesh Kumar Gogia and Vinod Kumar Asthana under Section 13(2) read with Section 13(1)(d)(ii) and (iii) of the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act.

Section 13 (2) deals with the punishment for criminal misconduct by a public servant, and Section 13(1)(d)(ii) and (iii) with abuse of position by a public servant to obtain favours. The court had also directed that the charge be framed under IPC section 420 (cheating) against Lalu Prasad, Rabri Devi, Tejaswi, M/s LARA Projects LLP, Vijay Kochhar, Vinay Kochhar, Sarla Gupta, and Prem Chand Gupta.

"A common charge is directed to be framed against all (14) accused under section 120B (criminal conspiracy) IPC read with section 420 IPC and section 13(2) read with section 13(1)(d)(ii) and (iii) PC Act," the court had said.

Congress misleading people on G-RAM-G scheme: Shivraj

New Delhi .(Agency)

Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Sunday accused the Congress of spreading "misinformation" about the VB-G-RAM-G scheme, which he said has been updated with features that benefit the poor. He alleged that corruption had been widespread under MGNREGA and claimed that resistance to the new scheme by Congress and other Opposition parties was driven by politics.

Speaking to the media, Chouhan criticised the Congress after it announced a campaign against the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeekika Mission-Gramin (VB-G-RAM-G) starting from January 10. He questioned the absence of Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi from the Lok Sabha during a debate on the issue. Terming

the Congress's planned campaign an "attempt to protect corruption", Chouhan said the party's announced 'MGNREGA Bachao Sangram' was effectively a campaign to shield wrongdoing. He charged the Congress with presiding over large-scale irregularities, stating, "MGNREGA had become synonymous with corruption.

Under social audits done by gram sabhas, there were more than 10,51,000 complaints. Same work was repeated, work was done by machine, and money was siphoned in the name of cleaning canals, roads. Thirty percent workers were above 60 years". He further said that the Modi government had allocated significantly more funds to rural employment, adding that over ₹ 8,48,000 crore had been provided compared to just

over 2 lakh crore during the UPA regime. He maintained that the interests of workers have now been better safeguarded under the new scheme and announced that ₹ 1,51,282 crore would be allocated for the programme in the next financial year, with over ₹ 95,600 crore coming from the Centre. He added that there would be no shortage of funds to guarantee 125 days of work.

The Opposition has been protesting against the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeekika Mission Bill, or VB-G-RAM-G, which was passed by voice vote in the Rajya Sabha amid protests on December 21, 2025, just hours after being cleared by the Lok Sabha. President Droupadi Murmu gave her assent to the Bill on December 21, turning it into an Act that replaces MGNREGA.

Protest an 'attempt to protect corruption'
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'Sacrificed His CM Post Without Hesitation': Yogi Adityanath Pays Tribute To Former UP CM On Birth Anniversary

New Delhi .(Agency)

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday paid tribute to former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and former Rajasthan Governor Kalyan Singh on his birth anniversary, highlighting his contributions to the state's development and the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. CM Yogi Adityanath hailed Kalyan Singh for "sacrificing" his CM post "without any hesitation" during the height of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement.

Yogi further added that Kalyan Singh's tenure as UP CM will be remembered for development and advancing the nationalist mission. "When the Ram Janmabhoomi movement was moving towards its peak, he sacrificed his post as CM without any hesitation, respecting the sentiments of

Lord Ram's devotees. He promptly took responsibility when the structure symbolic of slavery was demolished," Yogi Adityanath said while addressing an event in Lucknow.

Earlier in a post on X, Yogi Adityanath paid tribute to Kalyan Singh, calling him a steadfast warrior of the Ram Temple movement. "On the birth anniversary of the steadfast warrior of the Shri Ram Temple movement, who ignited the lamp of faith in the hearts of countless devotees of Lord Ram—the former Governor of Rajasthan, former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, 'Padma Vibhushan' recipient Kalyan Singh 'Babuji'—humble tributes to him," he wrote.

The revered 'Babuji', an embodiment of devotion, sacrifice, and dedication, gave new momentum to Uttar Pradesh's development through his people-welfare policies and firm administrative resolve. His life is a unique example of dedication to society and the nation," he added. Kalyan

Singh passed away on August 21, 2021, at Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGI) in Lucknow due to sepsis and multi-organ failure. Singh served as Uttar Pradesh CM twice, from June 1991 to December 1992 and September 1997 to November 1999, and was Governor of Rajasthan from 2014 to 2019. He also held multiple organisational roles in the BJP at both state and central levels. Kalyan Singh was the CM when the Babri Masjid was demolished. A few hours after the demolition, he resigned as Chief Minister. The Congress-led Union Government then dismissed the Uttar Pradesh state government on the same day. Singh later faced legal proceedings and was jailed for a single day over the incident.

News box

Al-Falah hostel work halted over GRAP violations, HSPCB orders sealing of site**Gurgaon.(Agency)**

Haryana's pollution watchdog has ordered the closure and sealing of an under-construction hostel and mess block on Al-Falah University's Faridabad campus for carrying out work despite GRAP-restrictions and without mandated environmental approvals. It also initiated prosecution-linked action after tests showed even treated effluents discharged by the university exceeded permissible limits. The disclosures emerged from an RTI reply, dated Dec 26, issued by Haryana State Pollution Control Board's (HSPCB) Ballabgarh office to environmentalist Varun Gulati. The RTI response confirmed that Al-Falah — which is at the centre of a white-coat terror module linked to the Nov 10 Delhi blast — had a combined consent-to-operate (CTO) under the Water and Air Acts from Oct 1, 2024, to Sept 30, 2028, and was classified as a red-category "health-care establishment/projects having discharge of 100 KLD or more".

During an inspection on Nov 15, a team of HSPCB officials collected samples from the inlet and outlet of both the sewage treatment plant (STP) and effluent treatment plant (ETP) on the campus. According to the pollution board's laboratory report, several parameters exceeded prescribed norms. At the ETP outlet, BOD (biochemical oxygen demand) was recorded at 92 mg/l (limit 30 mg/l), COD (chemical oxygen demand) at 472.3 mg/l (limit 250 mg/l) and total suspended solids at 290 mg/l (limit 100 mg/l). The STP outlet also breached norms for BOD, TSS, TDS and faecal and total coliform. Based on these findings, the board issued a show-cause notice under sections 43, 44 and 45A of the Water Act, warning that prosecution and environmental compensation may follow. Gulati said the RTI documents pointed to serious compliance gaps. "You cannot expect the system to look the other way when you have untreated or poorly treated effluents being discharged and large construction going on during GRAP-3. The rules apply to everyone, including universities," he said.

Man handed 20 years RI, Rs 1 lakh fine for abducting child, raping her**Ghaziabad.(Agency)**

Seven years after a Vijayanagar industrial area resident abducted and raped a five-year-old girl, a special Pcoso court sentenced him to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment. The court imposed a fine of Rs 1.1 lakh, which is to be given to the minor's treatment and rehabilitation. The man abducted the minor on July 24, 2018, while she was sleeping next to her grandmother in their courtyard and took her to a desolate place. He raped her but was caught red-handed by the neighbours, who testified in court. An FIR under section 376 IPC was registered at the Vijayanagar police station by the girl's father on the same day. Later, the police added abduction charges under section 363 of the IPC and sections 5/6 of the Pcoso Act for aggravated penetrative sexual assault.

They filed a chargesheet on Sept 19 of the same year and the sessions court took cognizance of the matter the next day. Charges were framed on Feb 17, 2020, and the case was transferred to the special Pcoso court on Jan 2, 2024. The prosecution presented seven witnesses, including the minor, her father and three eyewitnesses, apart from the doctor who examined and treated the girl. The survivor said in her testimony that she was sleeping in the courtyard with her grandmother when the man took her behind bushes. She said that he did 'dirty things' to her and tried to strangle her before she lost consciousness.

She was also able to identify the man in court. Her testimony was corroborated by one of the neighbours who had caught the man. The neighbour told the court that he came out of his house around 2am, when he heard the girl's father screaming.

Manipur woman left hospital 'quietly': How weekend binge drinking session ended in murder of South Korean man at 3am**Noida.(Agency)**

A binge-drinking session allegedly spiralled into a fatal confrontation in the early hours of Sunday, when a 47-year-old South Korean national was stabbed to death by his live-in girlfriend at their Sector 150 flat in Greater Noida. The accused, a 22-year-old woman from Manipur, has been detained for questioning. Duck Hee Yuh, a resident of Cheongju-si in South Korea, had been working with a logistics company in Greater Noida for the past 10 years. He was in a live-in relationship with Lunjeana Pamai of Bishnupur, Manipur, and the two had been living together at a flat in ATS Pious Hideaway for the past two years. Police received information about Hee's death from the Government Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS) on Sunday morning. "A team reached the hospital and learnt that the South Korean national was in a live-in relationship with his girlfriend for the past two years," said Sudheer Kumar ADCP (Greater Noida). Initial investigation revealed that the couple had met at a party in Gurgaon before entering into the relationship. While Hee was employed in Greater Noida, Pamai was not working at the time. Explaining the trigger behind the incident, Kumar said Hee had been drinking since Saturday morning, which upset his girlfriend. "Between 3am and 4am, Pamai tried to stop him from drinking. She asked him to have dinner and go off to sleep. But Hee became aggressive, which led to a heated argument between the two. It soon escalated into a physical fight, and Hee thrashed Pamai badly. In retaliation, she picked up a knife from the dining table and stabbed Hee a number of times in the chest," the officer said. As Hee collapsed, Pamai called his driver, Mandeep Singh. "She asked him to come to the flat. When Singh arrived early in the morning, Pamai told him everything. Singh called an ambulance and took Hee to hospital along with Pamai. By the time they reached GIMS, Hee had died.

Citizens' group flags 25 dust hotspots on key roads in Gurgaon after checks, presses MCG for mitigation measures**Gurgaon.(Agency)**

A citizens' group on Sunday submitted a 15-point dust control charter to MCG commissioner Pradeep Dahiya even as the city continues to reel under severe air pollution. Making Model Gurugram (MMG) has identified over 25 dust hotspots across the city and demanded enforcement against contractors leaving construction debris and soil exposed. The submission follows a joint inspection of Golf Course Extension Road, Southern Peripheral Road, Hamilton Road, Vyapar Kendra and other dust-affected stretches on Saturday, the third day of the ongoing citizens' campaign. MMG convener Gauri Sarin, whose New Year's Eve fast sparked the campaign, said the movement now includes over 550 members and will push for a multi-agency dust task force, helpline and real-time monitoring. "This is not a one-off campaign. We will sustain pressure, track action on our charter and meet the chief minister and state environment minister this month," she

said. The citizens' wishlist calls for strict coverage of all roadside construction sites, with immediate removal of excess soil and fines for defaulting contractors; regular upkeep of roads and footpaths, with accountability fixed across departments; deployment of mechanised sweepers; greening of bare patches; visible officer contact boards and bins; and coordinated planning to avoid repeated digging of pavements. Meanwhile, MCG officials told the residents the civic body has drawn up a Rs 470-crore roadmap to tackle dust, including intensified night-time mechanised sweeping and targeted clean-up drives. They said MCG already submitted a revised administrative approval request for the road sweeping and cleaning plan to the state urban local bodies department. The proposal envisages both mechanised and manual sweeping citywide, with one agency per zone handling scheduled cleaning, including

night-time operations and additional crew deployment on weekends and holidays. "The estimates are worked out zone-wise — Rs 145.5 cr for Zone 1, Rs 64.2 cr for Zone 2, Rs 81.8 cr for Zone 3 and Rs 179.4 cr for Zone 4 — and factor

strengthen Gurgaon's sanitation infrastructure and help improve road cleanliness under national urban missions," said MCG official. Residents said such plans must be married with on-ground enforcement. "If, in days, tons of dust can be removed, there's no excuse for the administration to wait to tackle the No 1 contributor to PM10 pollution in Gurgaon. Breathing clean air is our right," said Sanjiv Paul of Tata Primanti, part of the inspection team representing Gurgaon Residents Against Pollution. Dust was a persistent driver of poor air quality in Gurgaon, with recent independent checks showing only a handful of road stretches dust-free and widespread visible dust on the rest, prompting calls from the Commission for Air Quality Management for stronger mechanical sweeping, water sprinkling, and enforcement.



in population density, traffic and waste generation patterns. This is expected to

FIR to be registered against violators who dump sewage in open in Gurgaon**Gurgaon.(Agency)**

Tanker operators allegedly dumping sewage in open areas and drains came under scrutiny at a review of Yamuna Action Plan on Saturday, with police now set to "act against violators" through challans and FIRs wherever required. The joint review meeting in the city — where police officials were also involved — was attended by senior officials of Haryana State Pollution Control Board (HSPCB) and representatives from GMDA, MCG, MCM, municipal council/corporation Bahadurgarh, Haryana Shahari Vikas Pradhikaran, Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation and the public health engineering department. HSPCB told departments to strictly follow SOPs at sewage treatment plants and submit detailed compliance reports. Officials said sludge output from the plants will be tracked regularly to assess whether they are meeting prescribed standards. The meeting reviewed the progress of the action plan

prepared to curb pollution in Badshahpur Leg I, II and III in Gurgaon, and Drain No 8 and the Mungeshpur drain in Jhajjar. Departments were told to ensure time-bound and effective implementation of all listed measures and submit regular progress reports. In Haryana, drains — such as Badshahpur Leg I, II and III, as well as Drain No 8 and the Mungeshpur drain in Jhajjar — were identified as major conduits through which untreated domestic sewage and industrial waste flow into the stormwater network and eventually connect to the Yamuna via the Najafgarh drain. These drains, originally designed for stormwater, became significant pollution pathways due to unchecked dumping by tankers and unauthorised discharges from industrial units, drawing repeated attention under state action plans and the broader Yamuna clean-up programme. Civic agencies in Gurgaon and Jhajjar were also asked to prepare a comparative report on household sewer connections, listing earlier coverage and the current status. A

special drive was sought to bring more homes onto the sewer network, along with awareness programmes to encourage residents to take connections. A senior HSPCB officer said, "Treated wastewater from STPs should be reused to the maximum extent, including in parks and green belts in private colonies." An official said, "Illegal industrial units and unauthorised RMC plants will face action under environmental laws." Agencies were also asked to quantify the waste removed during drain-cleaning operations and ensure plastic and other rubbish is not dumped back into the drains. Departments were also asked to strictly enforce SOPs for solid-waste handling. Officials stressed that coordination across agencies is key to improving water quality in the drains that eventually discharge into the Yamuna. HSPCB officials also inspected the continuous ambient air-quality monitoring stations at Vikas Sadan and Sector 51 to assess real-time data systems, equipment and maintenance.

Greens, Gurgaon residents seek Unesco Biosphere Reserve tag for Aravalis**Gurgaon.(Agency)**

Citizens campaigning for the protection of Aravali hills on Sunday urged Centre to push for Unesco Biosphere Reserve status for it to "ensure long-term protection".

Aravalli Bachao Citizens Movement (ABC) also called for a comprehensive plan to restore the entire 76,000 sq km landscape, instead of what they described as fragmented "definition-led" approaches tied to mining. Biosphere Reserve status would mean marking the entire range as the learning site for sustainable practices within the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR). These demands were reiterated at a 'Sunday Baithak' organised



by ABCM behind Suncity in the forest area in Gurgaon, where parents, senior citizens, students and environmental volunteers from across NCR gathered for poetry readings, discussions and role-plays on policy and court decisions. "Recognising the power of community-based action is so important," said Akshay Khurana, who

works on zero-waste initiatives, adding, the range should be declared a protected Unesco biosphere. One of the prominent appeals at the event read, "No defining away our ecosystems." Participants collectively read out a charter of demands that included a complete halt to mining across the Aravalli biosphere by Jan 26, a pause on all construction activity until air quality improves to AQI 50, stricter emission norms for coal-fired power plants, a ban on waste-to-energy plants, free public transport to reduce private vehicle use and substantially higher taxes on private transport to fund public mobility.

As Faizan attempted to flee, he was chased and assaulted. The attackers then damaged the vehicle, smashing its windscreen with sharp weapons and iron rods, the complainant stated. The occupants managed to escape and sought help at the village chaupat. Soon after, a larger group allegedly reached Tahir's neighbourhood and attacked residents, pelted stones at them and broke household items. Yasin sustained multiple blows to the head, face and legs and collapsed unconscious at the spot. Khurshid suffered chest injuries after being hit with bricks and sticks, while Farhana, Tahir's daughter, lost an upper incisor

Sports City ban lifted, registries to now ease for 8,000 Noida homebuyers**Noida.(Agency)**

A decision by Noida Authority to lift the ban on Sports City project in Sector 150 is set to ease property registries for around 8,000 homebuyers who have been waiting for years despite taking possession. With the restriction removed, approvals linked to occupancy and documentation are expected to move again, clearing a key bottleneck that had left buyers unable to complete registries.

The affected homebuyers include about 2,000 in a Tata project, 1,500 in Eldeco, 1,500 in ATS Home Kraft, 1,200 in Samridhi, 1,500 across Godrej's two projects, and around 500 in Prateek Group housing developments.

On Saturday, the Authority board decided to issue a conditional occupancy certificate and formally lifted the freeze on plan approvals and occupancy-related permissions for the Sports City SC-02 project,

adhering to directions issued by Supreme Court in Nov last year. The issue was placed before the Authority board as part of action taken to implement the apex court's orders in a batch of special leave petitions (SLPs) linked to the Sector 150 project. Officials pointed out that Saturday's decision was limited to compliance with the court order and did not dilute the developer's oversight of the mandated sports facilities under the Sports City scheme. "The decision is set to bring considerable relief for the project. It would remove the earlier blanket restriction for Sports City. Next, the Authority can resume processing building plan revaluation. Then, it can take up revised or fresh maps for consideration, and, finally, it can issue occupancy certificates, which are crucial for completing registries and related approvals," an official said. The curbs had been imposed during the Authority's

201st board meeting on Jan 18, 2021, after serious objections were raised by Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) in its 2019 audit report. The audit flagged irregularities in the allotment process, execution, costing and overall implementation of Sports City projects in Noida. Acting on these findings, the board halted approvals related to revaluation of building plans, revised and fresh maps, and issuance of occupancy certificates in Sports City projects where the mandated 70% sports infrastructure had not been developed. The dispute eventually reached Supreme Court.

In its order on Nov 24, 2025, the court asked the Authority to lift the ban after obtaining the board's approval, preferably within 30 to 45 days. The directions were aimed at reviving stalled projects while safeguarding the Authority's financial and regulatory

interests. Noida Authority CEO Lokesh M said one project had already been granted a conditional occupancy certificate after clearing all outstanding dues, and that the process to approve revised master plans had also been initiated.

For homebuyers, the decision brings long-awaited relief after years of uncertainty. Many said they faced financial and emotional stress, paying EMIs while continuing to live in rented accommodation due to the prolonged delay. A spokesperson for Lotus Greens, the lead member of the SC-02 consortium, said the developer was committed to strict compliance with the Supreme Court's directions. "We are in touch with the authorities concerned and are taking all necessary measures to streamline processes and ensure that registries are executed in favour of homebuyers who stood by the

project during difficult times,"

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71 Complaints received at Jansath Tehsil; DM warns against delay

The Sikh Times
Manoj Pal

Muzaffarnagar. Samadhan Diwas was organized at the Jansath Tehsil auditorium under the joint chairmanship of DM Umesh Mishra and SSP Sanjay Kumar Verma. During the session, the officials listened to the grievances of the public with great sensitivity and emphasized the need for a qualitative and time-bound disposal of all pending issues. The DM issued stern directions to the concerned departmental officers, stating that they must conduct on-site inspections to ensure 100% satisfaction of the complainants. He warned that any negligence or lack of transparency in the redressal process would not be tolerated, as the primary objective of these sessions is to provide immediate relief to the common man at the grassroots level. The SSP took a detailed review of the complaints related to the



gations into crimes against women. He also stressed the importance of resolv-

ing complaints received via the IGRS portal within the stipulated time frame

that land disputes and revenue-related matters should be handled with utmost impartiality to prevent any potential law and order issues in the region. A total of 71 complaints were registered during the day-long program, involving various departments such as Revenue, Nagar Panchayat, Labor, Electricity, and the Forest Department. While 4 complaints were resolved on the spot through immediate intervention, the DM and SSP set strict deadlines for the remaining 67 matters. The session saw the presence of several senior officials, including SDM Jansath Raj Kumar, Joint Magistrate Aparajita Aryan, Tehsildar Shraddha Gupta, CMO Sunil Kumar Tewatia, and CO Jansath. Other district-level officers, including the District Backward Classes Welfare Officer, Chief Veterinary Officer, Assistant Labor Commissioner, and Additional District Panchayat Officer, were also present to assist in the grievance redressal process.

Rs 1.4L lehenga purchase exposes cyber fraud

New Delhi: A wedding lehenga purchase, worth Rs 1.40 lakh, at a bustling Chandni Chowk garment store turned into a cyber-crime trail that led Delhi Police to unearth a cyber fraud, officials said on Tuesday. The accused, identified as Manish Verma (19), was arrested from Chakru in Jaipur, Rajasthan. The case came to light on December 13, when a customer who was buying a lehenga scanned QR codes displayed at a reputed shop and paid Rs 1.40 lakh in two installments. Despite successful payment screenshots, the shop later informed her that no money had been received. What appeared to be a routine payment glitch soon unfolded into a meticulously planned cyber fraud. As the investigation began, the police discovered that the payments had not 'failed' at all; they had simply gone elsewhere. A detailed UPI trail

NAME CHANGE

I, hitherto known as M. KRITIKA RAO D/o M. KISHAN KUMAR RAO R/o C-160 DDA Flt. Govt View Apartments, Saket (Delhi), Malya Nagar, South Delhi, Delhi-110017, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as KRITIKA RAO.

NAME CHANGE

I, MOMINA KHATOON W/o KAFIL AHMED R/o C-144 RAJDHANI PARK MUNDKA NANGLOI DELHI-110041, I have changed my name to MOMINA. Permanently for all Future purpose

NAME CHANGE

I hitherto known as Sanjay Kumar S/o Chandrika Singh R/o B-202, Sector-25 Rohini, Raja Pur Kalan, North West Delhi, Delhi-110085, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Sanjay Kumar Singh.

NAME CHANGE

I, LETHIKA KUMARI AMMA mother of NO-15702555Y, Rank-HAV Name-RATHEESH R residing at LEKSHMI BHAVAN, PERUMON, PERINAD, KOLLAM, KERALA-691601, have changed my name from LETHIKA KUMARI AMMA to LETHIKA KUMARI AMMA K for all future purposes. Vide Affidavit dated 05/01/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

NAME CHANGE

I hitherto known as Dhanraj Chandelkara S/o Baksham Chandelkara R/o Y-1697, Third Floor, Y-Block, Mangolpuri, Delhi have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Dhanush Chandelkara.

NAME CHANGE

I hitherto known as Pritam Singh S/o Jawand Singh R/o C-16, Nizamuddin East, Hazrat Nizamuddin, South Delhi, Delhi-110013 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Pritam Singh Dang.

NAME CHANGE

I hitherto known as Harbir Kaur W/o Pritam Singh R/o C-16, Nizamuddin East, Hazrat Nizamuddin, South Delhi, Delhi-110013 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Harbir Kaur Gajjal Dang.

NAME CHANGE

I, SUSHIL KUMAR TIWARI S/o RAMASHANKAR TIWARI R/o C-135-OLD NO-C-33-A JAWAHAR PARK DEOLI ROAD GROUND FLOOR KHANPUR DELHI-110062, I have changed my name to SUSHIL KUMAR TIWARI Permanently for all Future purpose

NAME CHANGE

I, AASHISH CHADHA S/o BHARAT BHUSHAN R/o A- 55, AMAR COLONY QMARRUDIN NAGAR NANGLOI DELHI-110041, I have changed my name to AASHISH CHADHA. Permanently for all Future purpose

NAME CHANGE

I, BHARAT BHUSHAN S/o RAMESH CHAND R/o 55 AMAR COLONY QMARRUDIN NAGAR NANGLOI DELHI-110041, I have changed my name to BHARAT BHUSHAN Permanently for all Future purpose

NAME CHANGE

I MD YAMIN AND MOHD YAMEEN KHAN S/o MOHD YASEEN R/o H.NO 301/302, 2ND FLOOR KATRA SUJAN RAI BAZAR DELHI GATE DARYA GANJ DELHI-110002, I have changed my name to MOHAMMAD YAMEEN Permanently for all Future purpose

NAME CHANGE

I GAZALA GULNAR D/o ISRAIL UDDIN R/o VILLAGE WEST RAGHOPUR P.S. BAKHTIYAR PUR PATNA BIHAR - 803212, I have changed my name to GAZALA GULNAZ Permanently for all Future purpose

behind the fraud. He revealed that he edited genuine merchant QR codes using mobile-based image-editing applications, replacing the shop's bank details with his own while keeping the QR code's appearance unchanged. Examination of his mobile phones yielded more than 100 edited and original QR codes, along with chats.

NAME CHANGE

I, NAWAHADE SUNITA SHRIKANT wife of JC-389546L S/o SUNITA SHRIKANT Shankar who's serving in 3 IDSR, c/o 160 DDA Flt. Govt View Apartments, Saket (Delhi), Malya Nagar, South Delhi, Delhi-110017, have changed my name to NAWAHADE SUNITA SHRIKANT NATHAWADE which is decided through Affidavit No IN-2L7302363691372Y dated 05/01/2026. I am applying for rectification the same. Objection if any may convey to concern authority.

NAME CHANGE

I, NEETA TUKARAM JADHAV is legally Wife of No. 13627523A Rank-HAV Name-JADHAV RAMCHANDRA Presently resident of VILL-KHIRKHINDI, PO-EKAMBEM, TEH-KOREGAN, DIST-SATARA (MAHARASHTRA)-415501, have changed my name from NEETA TUKARAM JADHAV to NITA TUKARAM JADHAV for all future purposes. vide affidavit dated 03.01.2025 Before Public Notary Delhi.

NAME CHANGE

I, SHABEEN S/O ISHAK R/o 264, main 33 tuba road bhagirathi vihar mustafabad delhi 110094 changed my name to Shabir Jahan.

NAME CHANGE

I, NEETA TUKARAM JADHAV is legally Wife of No. 13627523A Rank-HAV Name-JADHAV RAMCHANDRA Presently resident of VILL-KHIRKHINDI, PO-EKAMBEM, TEH-KOREGAN, DIST-SATARA (MAHARASHTRA)-415501, have changed my name from NEETA TUKARAM JADHAV to NITA TUKARAM JADHAV for all future purposes. vide affidavit dated 03.01.2025 Before Public Notary Delhi.

NAME CHANGE

I, DEVI SINGH DALAL Son of NO-1601204X, Rank-HAV, Name-DARA SINGH residing at VILL-DOOMERA, PO-KHEDLY SHYAD, TEH-ALWAR, RAJASTHAN-301030, have changed my name from MANU to MANU DEVI for all future purposes, in my husband's service record my date of birth wrongly mentioned as 01/02/1983 instead of my correct date of birth as 02/01/1983. Vide Affidavit dated 05/01/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

NAME CHANGE

I, MANU wife of NO-1601204X, Rank-HAV, Name-DARA SINGH residing at VILL-DOOMERA, PO-KHEDLY SHYAD, TEH-ALWAR, RAJASTHAN-301030, have changed my name from MANU to MANU DEVI for all future purposes. vide affidavit dated 05/01/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.

NAME CHANGE

I, PANNASWARI Devi w/o Ranbir Singh R/o D-32 Green Valley Apartment, Sector 18, Rohini Sector 15 S.o, North West Delhi, Delhi, 110089, have changed my name to Panneshwari for All future purposes.

NAME CHANGE

I, Raja Kumar Arora S/o Rattan Chand Arora R/o H.NO.521, Old Rajender Nagar, Rajender Nagar, Delhi-110030 have changed my name to Raj Kumar.

NAME CHANGE

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NEWS BOX

Indian woman found dead in US city, police allege her ex-boyfriend killed her and fled to India

NEW YORK. (Agency)

A 27-year old Indian woman, who was reported missing last week, was found dead and police are looking for her former boyfriend, alleging that he killed her and fled to India. Nikitha Godishala of Ellicott City was reported missing on January 2. Howard County police said in a statement on Sunday that she was found deceased with stab wounds in the Columbia, Maryland apartment of her ex-boyfriend Arjun Sharma, 26. Police have obtained a warrant for Sharma's arrest on first and second-degree murder charges. The Indian Embassy in Washington DC said in a post on X that it is in contact with Godishala's family and is extending all possible consular assistance. "The Embassy is also following up the matter with the local authorities," it said.

Authorities said that Sharma made the missing person report to police and said he last saw Godishala on December 31 in his apartment in the Maryland city. Police later learned that on the same day as making the report, January 2, Sharma left the country on a flight to India. The next day, detectives executed a search warrant for his apartment and located Godishala deceased. Through investigation, detectives believe Sharma killed Godishala shortly after 7 pm on December 31. The investigation is ongoing and no motive is known at this time. Howard County police said adding that they are working with United States federal law enforcement to locate and arrest Sharma.

North Korea Test-Fires Hypersonic Missiles, Kim Jong Un Cites "Geopolitical Crisis"

Havana. (Agency)

North Korea test-fired hypersonic missiles on Sunday, state media KCNA reported on Monday, to assess its military operational capability regarding war deterrence. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who oversaw the missile launch, said: "It's a very important strategy to maintain or expand the strong and reliable nuclear deterrent," because of "the recent geopolitical crisis and various international circumstances," according to KCNA. The missiles hit targets about 1,000 km (621 miles) away, over the sea east of North Korea, KCNA said. The South Korean military said on Sunday that North Korea fired ballistic missiles towards the sea to its east as South Korean President Lee Jae Myung started a



state visit to China. The missile launch followed a North Korean statement on Sunday that denounced the US strikes on Venezuela as a violation of that country's sovereignty. North Korea fired hypersonic missiles in October 2025, which analysts assumed were unveiled at a military parade along with a long-range intercontinental missile. The test was apparently a response to US strikes on Venezuela, Hong Min.

Can't Accept Countries Acting As 'World Judge': China As US Captures Maduro

Beijing. (Agency)

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Beijing cannot accept any country acting as the "world's judge" after the United States captured Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro. "We have never believed that any country can act as the world's police, nor do we accept that any nation can claim to be the world's judge," Wang told his Pakistani counterpart Ishaq Dar during a meeting in Beijing on Sunday, referring to "sudden developments in Venezuela" without directly mentioning the US. "The sovereignty and security of all countries should be fully protected under international law," China's top diplomat added, in his first remarks since images of the 63-year-old Maduro blindfolded and handcuffed on Saturday stunned Venezuelans. Maduro is in a New York detention centre awaiting a Monday court appearance on drug charges. Beijing has ambition to become a diplomatic heavyweight, a goal it articulated most clearly after brokering a surprise rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2023, pledging to "play a constructive role in global hotspot issues." Analysts say Beijing's success in going toe-to-toe with the US in trade negotiations has only reinforced China's confidence. However, President Donald Trump's assertion that the US will oversee Venezuela's government for the time being poses a stern test to the "all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership" Beijing and Caracas struck in 2023, marking almost 50 years of diplomatic ties. "It was a big blow to China, we wanted to look like a dependable friend to Venezuela," said a Chinese government official briefed on meeting between Maduro and China's special representative for Latin American and Caribbean affairs, Qiu Xiaoxi, hours before his capture.

Friends and community members described Nikitha Godishala as a young professional who had moved to the United States for higher studies and work opportunities.

world. (Agency)

The Indian Embassy in Washington said it is in touch with the family of Nikitha Godishala and is extending all possible consular assistance, while closely following the matter with local authorities, after the Indian national was found dead in the United States. According to local police in Maryland, the 27-year-old woman, originally from India, had been reported missing earlier this week. Her body was later recovered from an apartment in Columbia, Maryland, where she had been



residing, police said. Investigators have identified her former boyfriend as the prime suspect in the case. Police said the suspect allegedly reported her missing and left the United States shortly thereafter. Authorities have issued arrest warrants on charges including first and second degree murder, and are coordinating with federal agencies regarding next steps. The Indian Embassy said it is providing all required support to the bereaved family, including

assistance with documentation and coordination with local officials. The Embassy is also monitoring developments in the investigation and remains in touch with concerned agencies, an official statement said. Friends and community members described Godishala as a young professional who had moved to the United States for higher studies and work opportunities. Members of the Indian diaspora in the region expressed shock over the incident and called for swift justice. The case has drawn attention amid growing concerns over the safety of Indian nationals abroad. The Embassy has advised Indian citizens in the United States to remain vigilant and to reach out to consular officials in case of emergency. Meanwhile, local authorities said the investigation is ongoing and further details will be released as appropriate. They urged anyone with information related to the case to contact law enforcement. The family of Ms. Godishala has sought privacy as legal processes continue. Officials said cooperation between Indian and United States authorities would continue to ensure that the matter is pursued in accordance with law. Police said consular coordination would remain essential as the case proceeds across jurisdictions, and reiterated that updates would be shared following established legal procedures and court processes in due course, subject to investigation requirements and judicial timelines.

Cuba says 32 Cuban officers were killed in US operation in Venezuela

world. (Agency)

An American military operation in Venezuela killed 32 Cuban officers over the weekend, the Cuban government said Sunday in the first official death count provided of the American strikes in the South American nation. The Cuban military and police officers were on a mission the Caribbean country's military was carrying out at the request of Venezuela's government, according to a statement read on Cuban state TV on Sunday night. What the Cubans were working on in the South American nation was unclear, but Cuba is a close ally of Venezuela's government and has sent military and police forces to assist in operations for years. Rumours of the deaths circulated on the island over the weekend. You know, a lot of Cubans were killed yesterday, US President Donald Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One as he flew Sunday night from Florida back to Washington. There was a lot of death

on the other side. No death on our side. The US operation Saturday seized Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife to face prosecution on an indictment accusing them of participating in a narco-terrorism



conspiracy. While Venezuela's government has acknowledged that a number of people died in the American blasts, they did not confirm how many were killed. The Associated Press, Cuba's government announced

two days of mourning for the Cuban officers who were killed, and former president and revolutionary leader Raúl Castro and President Miguel Díaz-Canel sent condolences to their families. The names of the dead and the positions they held were not immediately disclosed by Cuban authorities. Faithful to their responsibilities for security and defense, our compatriots fulfilled their duty with dignity and heroism and fell after fierce resistance in direct combat against the attackers or as a result of the bombings of the facilities, the official statement said.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the son of Cuban immigrants, also pointed to Cuban involvement in Venezuela over the weekend, saying that Maduro's internal security apparatus was headed by Cubans and that they were propping up Maduro.

Trump says Ukraine didn't target Putin residence in drone strike as Kremlin claims

World. (Agency)

Aboard Air Force One: President Donald Trump on Sunday told reporters that US national security officials have determined that Ukraine did not target a residence belonging to Russian President Vladimir Putin in a drone attack last week, disputing Kremlin claims that Trump had initially greeted with deep concern. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov last week said Ukraine launched a wave of drones at Putin's state residence in the northwestern Novgorod region that the Russian defence systems were able to defeat. Lavrov also criticised Kyiv for launching the attack at a moment of intensive negotiations to end the war. The allegation came just a day after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had travelled to Florida for talks with Trump on the US administration's still-evolving 20-

point plan aimed at ending the war, and had Zelensky quickly denied it. "I don't believe that strike happened," Trump told reporters as he travelled back to Washington on Sunday after spending two weeks at his home in Florida. Trump addressed the US determination after European officials argued that the Russian claim was nothing more than an effort by Moscow to undermine peace effort. But Trump, at least initially, had appeared to take the Russian allegations at face value. He told reporters last Monday that Putin had also raised the matter during a phone call he had with the Russian leader earlier that day. And Trump said he was very angry about the accusation. By Wednesday, Trump appeared to be downplaying the Russian claim. He posted a link to a New York Post editorial on his social media platform that raised doubt about the Russian

allegation. The editorial lambasted Putin for choosing "lies, hatred, and death" at a moment that Trump has claimed is closer than ever before to moving the two sides to a deal to end the war. The US president has struggled to fulfil a pledge to quickly end the war in Ukraine and has shown irritation with both Zelensky and Putin as he tried to mediate an end to a conflict he boasted on the campaign trail that he could end in one day. Both Trump and Zelensky said last week they made progress in their talks at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort on a 20-point peace plan. But Putin has shown little interest in ending the war until all of Russia's objectives are met, including winning control of all Ukrainian territory in the key industrial Donbas region and imposing severe restrictions on the size of Ukraine's post-war military and the type of weaponry it can possess.

After Maduro, who's next? Trump's comments spur anxieties about his plans for Greenland and Cuba

YANGON. (Agency)

A day after the audacious U.S. military operation in Venezuela, President Donald Trump on Sunday renewed his calls for an American takeover of the Danish territory of Greenland for the sake of U.S. security interests, while his top diplomat declared the communist government in Cuba is "in a lot of trouble." The comments from Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio after the ouster of Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro underscore that the U.S. administration is serious about taking a more expansive role in the Western Hemisphere. With thinly veiled threats, Trump is rattling hemispheric friends and foes alike, spurring a pointed question around the globe: Who's next? "It's so strategic right now. Greenland is covered with Russian and Chinese ships all over the place," Trump told reporters as he flew back to Washington from his home in Florida. "We need Greenland from the standpoint of national security, and Denmark is not going to be able to do it." Asked during an

interview with The Atlantic earlier on Sunday what the U.S.-military action in Venezuela could portend for Greenland, Trump replied: "They are going to have to view it themselves. I really don't know." Trump, in his administration's National Security Strategy published last month, laid out restoring "American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere" as a central guidepost for his second go-around in the White House. Trump has also pointed to the 19th century Monroe Doctrine, which rejects European colonialism, as well as the Roosevelt Corollary — a justification invoked by the U.S. in supporting Panama's secession from Colombia, which helped secure the Panama Canal Zone for the U.S. — as he's made his case for an assertive approach to American neighbors and beyond. Trump has even quipped that some now refer to the fifth U.S. president's foundational document as the "Don-roe Doctrine." Saturday's dead-of-night operation by U.S. forces in

Caracas and Trump's comments on Sunday heightened concerns in Denmark, which has jurisdiction over the vast mineral-rich island of Greenland. Danish Prime Minister



Mette Frederiksen in a statement that Trump has "no right to annex" the territory. She also reminded Trump that Denmark already provides the United States, a fellow member of NATO, broad access to Greenland through existing security agreements. "I would therefore strongly urge the U.S. to stop threatening a

historically close ally and another country and people who have made it very clear that they are not for sale," Frederiksen said.

Denmark on Sunday also signed onto a European Union statement underscoring that "the right of the Venezuelan people to determine their future must be respected" as Trump has vowed to "run" Venezuela and pressed the acting president, Delcy Rodriguez, to get in line. Social media posting angers Danes

Trump on Sunday mocked Denmark's efforts at boosting Greenland's national security posture, saying the Danes have added "one more dog sled" to the Arctic territory's arsenal. Greenlanders and Danes were further rankled by a social media post following the raid by a former Trump administration official turned podcaster, Katie Miller. The post shows an illustrated map of Greenland in the colors of the Stars and Stripes accompanied by the caption: "SOON."

NEWS BOX

Maha: Dr. Sindhutai Sapkal Yashoda Mai National Award presented to Eklavya Trust, Seva Sankalp Pratishthan

Pune.(Agency)
The fourth Padma Shri Dr. Sindhutai Sapkal Yashoda Mai National Award, organised by the Mai Parivar, was today conferred upon Renutai Gavaskar (Chairperson, Eklavya Child Education and Health Trust, Kudal, Sindhudurg district) and Seva Sankalp Pratishthan (Chikhli, Buldhana district) for their selfless contribution to the social sector. Speaking at a commemorative event held here on the occasion of Sindhutai Sapkal's memorial day, senior social activist Padma Shri Girish Prabhune said that late Sindhutai Sapkal was a perennial source of compassion who dedicated her life to selfless service and inspired countless others to do the same.

He recalled how Sindhutai encouraged him to confidently communicate his work to society, giving him the energy and direction to continue his social journey.

Her work is like a banyan tree—deeply rooted, expansive, and sheltering many, he remarked. During the programme, a special children's storybook, titled "Chindhichi Goshta", published by Mai Publications to introduce Sindhutai Sapkal's inspiring life journey to young readers, was formally released by the guests.

Accepting the award, Renutai Gavaskar said that both she and Sindhutai were avid readers, which helped them understand society better. She stressed the importance of meaningful education for children, saying true nation-building is impossible without it. "If even ten children are shaped through my work, I will consider my contribution worthwhile," she added.

Telangana Assembly winter session enters fourth day, key bills on agenda

Hyderabad. (Agency)

The Winter Session of the Telangana Legislative Assembly entered its fourth day on Monday, with proceedings commencing at 1000 hours. According to the agenda released by the Secretary to the Legislature (Legislative Assembly), Rendla Thirupathi, the House began the day with Question Hour, followed by the laying of official papers and consideration of government business.

Under Papers to be Laid on the Table, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy was scheduled to table copies of Gazette Notifications issued in September 2007 and April 2023, as required under Section 24(5) of the Right to Information Act, 2005.

Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao was to lay the first to fourth Annual Reports and Accounts of the Telangana State Warehousing Corporation for the years 2015-16 to 2018-19, along with explanations for the delay, as mandated under the Warehousing Corporation Act, 1962. The House was also set to take up government bills, including the Telangana Universities (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which the Chief Minister would move for consideration and passage. The Telangana Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2026 was also listed, with motions for its introduction, consideration and passage.

In addition, a short discussion was scheduled on the Hyderabad Industrial Lands Transformation (HILT) Policy.

Nostalgia on four wheels: Kerala minister takes new Sierra for spin

Kochi. (Agency)

Kerala Transport Minister K.B. Ganesh Kumar became one of the first prominent public figures in the state to experience the all-new Tata Sierra, as he personally test-drove the iconic SUV that has made a much-anticipated comeback after nearly 25 years.

The minister's drive has drawn wide attention among automobile enthusiasts, given the Sierra's emotional connection with Indian motoring history, company sources said.

A video of Ganesh Kumar driving and closely examining the vehicle's design and features was shared by KVR Tata, Palakkad, on its official Instagram page, quickly going viral among auto lovers. The minister was seen appreciating both the exterior styling and the driving dynamics of the reborn Sierra.

Sharing a personal memory associated with the model, Ganesh Kumar recalled that he once owned a grey Tata Sierra bearing the registration number KL-01 D 1, which he used extensively for several years.

The minister noted that the Sierra had been a trusted companion during that period, making the test drive of the new-generation version a nostalgic yet exciting experience.

"The new Sierra is not something that can be compared with the old one," Ganesh Kumar remarked, pointing out that the SUV has evolved dramatically in terms of technology, comfort and driving feel. He said the modern Sierra offers an entirely new experience, reflecting how far automotive engineering has progressed over the decades.

No signal at 20 feet under: Why Mumbai's Aqua Metro is stuck in a network blackout amid telcos-MMRCL stalemate

A standoff between telecom companies and the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Ltd in connection with pricing has left several underground stations on Line 3 without mobile connectivity, raising concerns among commuters.

Mumbai .(Agency)

Three months on, Mumbai's underground Aqua Metro (or Line 3, Colaba-Bandra-SEEPZ) is nowhere close to having a functional mobile network in its underground stations and tunnels. Commuters continue to bear the brunt of the network blackout, which is absolute in the stations between Worli and Colaba, while the stalemate continues between telecom service providers and the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Limited (MMRCL).

Only Vodafone Idea (Vi) and BSNL offer connectivity in restricted sections of the Metro line, which opened to the public on October 8, 2025. While Jio and Airtel users face network outage across the whole line, Vi claims to have network from Aarey to Acharya Atre Chowk station, Worli. Its users have complained of issues from Worli to Cuffe Parade. Meanwhile, a parallel situation is playing out at the Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA).

The root of the disagreement in the Metro line's case stems from the third party contracted by

the MMRCL to provide in-building solutions (IBS), i.e. neutral telecommunications infrastructure, in the stations 20 feet below ground. To connect to this infrastructure,

sight. "MMRCL has expressed its intent to discuss and come to a resolution, but telecom companies have refused to come around and agree to pay a reasonable cost for the infrastructure investment that has gone into it. It is their subscribers that are inconvenienced," said a senior MMRCL official, adding, "The rates that the third party is demanding account for three things—the physical infrastructure and installation, daily operation and maintenance costs, and the charges committed to MMRCL."

Telcos slam 'extortionate' rates Major telecom operators, however, have called these rates "monopolistic and extortionate." They say that setting up their own telecom infrastructure along the underground line would be far cheaper for them.

The gap is substantial, running to several millions of rupees," said Lt Gen Dr SP Kochhar, the director general of the Cellular Operators' Association of India (COAI), the telecom industry body.



telecom companies claim that the third-party, ACES India Private Limited, is demanding commercially unviable rates.

Despite multiple meetings between all players, including the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), a solution is not in

Kogilu residents protest in Bengaluru against eviction; slam BJP's 'Bangladeshi' branding

BENGALURU.(Agency)

Amid growing uncertainty over rehabilitation of residents of Fakir Colony in Kogilu near Yelahanka, various progressive organisations and residents held a public meeting opposing the statements by BJP leaders branding the displaced residents as "Bangladeshis".

They demanded that alternative accommodation be provided to the evictees or they be granted permission to erect temporary shelters on the contentious site, and food and health facilities should be made available as per the order from the Human Rights Commission.

The public meeting, which began with the reading of the Preamble of the constitution, was organised under the banner of the newly formed Kogilu Slum Residents Struggle Committee here on Sunday, on the 16th day of demolition of homes by the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA).

Representatives from Dalit organisations, All India Janavadi Mahila Sanghatane, Dudiyuda Janara Vedike, National Federation of Indian

Women, Left parties, including CPI and CPM, Islamic student groups, and civil society organisations participated and addressed the gathering. The speakers strongly condemned what they termed the "politics of



stigmatisation", alleging that BJP leaders were attempting to derail the Congress government's decision to rehabilitate the affected families by portraying them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

"The residents were living there for years. Even if the land belonged to the government, they were

not homeless until the demolition made them so," Nandini, a representative from Dhudiyuda Janara Vedike, said. The organisers clarified that they were not opposed to housing being provided to other eligible beneficiaries but

demanded that the Kogilu residents be rehabilitated immediately, as promised by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Housing Minister B Zameer Ahmed.

With summer approaching and families spending over two weeks without shelter, the speakers stressed that rehabilitation must be treated as an emergency. Listing multiple issues, the residents said they are not able to cook their own food, some of them are suffering from health issues and their children are not able to attend schools. They called on the government to act without further delay and warned against politicising the issue.

The residents gave an ultimatum of two days to the state government to provide them with alternate arrangements, or they would plan protests.

Residents protest proposed liquor shop in residential area in Bengaluru

Residents, including women and children, gathered in large numbers holding placards and raising slogans, opposing permission for the outlet.

BENGALURU. (Agency)

Hundreds of residents of ECC Road in Whitefield on Sunday staged a flash protest against a proposed



slogans, opposing permission for the outlet. The protest saw participation from residents of Prithvi Layout, Umiya Woods, Prestige Boulevard, Citilights Rustique and Gopalan Atlantis—communities located directly around the building where the liquor shop is proposed. The protesters expressed serious concern over safety and law & order, pointing out that ECC Road is used daily by thousands of schoolchildren and families visiting a nearby temple. They said the proposed outlet is close to residential apartments, a school, places of worship, including a temple, church and mosque, making it unsuitable for a liquor store. Residents also alleged that the building in question is illegal.

The agitation follows developments over two public hearings conducted by the excise department. Condemning what they term collusive conduct by excise officials, residents asserted they would continue their protest against the liquor shop and other illegal commercial activities in the neighbourhood.

liquor shop in what they describe as a purely residential locality, alleging collusion between excise officials and the shop applicant. Residents, including women and children, gathered in large numbers holding placards and raising

Greater Chennai Corporation opens dining centres in 200 wards for sanitary staff

CHENNAI. (Agency)

Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) Commissioner J Kumaragurubaran has said that dining facilities for conservancy workers have been provided in all 200 wards in the city, with 232 such facilities established at various locations. In a post on X, the commissioner also noted that resting pods are being constructed for conservancy workers at these locations to improve their working conditions.

Speaking to a corporation official said that the facilities have been set up in all city wards, with some wards having more than one unit. The pods also differ in size from one area to another.

"These facilities provide conservancy workers a designated space to sit, rest, and have their meals. Each unit is equipped with a dining hall with benches and chairs, RO drinking water, toilets, and resting or waiting halls. In most locations, changing rooms have also

been provided," the official said. The official added that the facilities at few locations the work might be in the final stages. The initiative follows CM MK Stalin's inauguration of the free one-meal-a-day scheme for 31,373 conservancy workers, most of whom are engaged



through private agencies in the civic body, on November 15 last year. At the event, the CM had also announced that resting rooms measuring about 300 sq. ft. each, along with toilet facilities, would be established for conservancy workers in each GCC ward.

SC ruling on missing kids cases and incomplete data create panic: Mumbai cops

The series of events began on December 13 when MNS chief Raj Thackeray tweeted to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis citing NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) data on missing children's cases rising by 30 per cent in the past three years.

Mumbai .(Agency)

WHATSSAPP GROUPS of housing societies and parents' groups are buzzing with messages of news reports relating to kidnappers being on the prowl, asking them to be careful. While some housing societies have put up posters in lifts asking parents to be vigilant, police say that they take every missing child case seriously, while incomplete data and Supreme Court ruling on registering all missing cases as kidnapping cases are leading to panic.

News of child kidnappers resurface every few years, sometimes with fatal consequences like the one where two sadhus were killed in Palghar in 2020 on the suspicion of being child-lifters.

In the past few weeks, there has been a revival of the threat of kidnappers, mainly due to messages on social media. The series of

events began on December 13 when MNS chief Raj Thackeray tweeted to Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis citing NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) data on missing children's cases rising by 30 per cent in the past three years.

The issue was discussed in the state Assembly and data was provided. After new stories of some of the data of "kidnapped children" started going viral, it led to panic.

SC ruling on missing kids cases and incomplete data create panic: Mumbai cops The Mumbai Police put out a message on their X handle on December 14, clarifying that 98 per cent of the children who were reported missing over the past five years had been reunited with their parents and 2025 was no exception. "As per Supreme Court judgement in the Bachpan Bachao Andolan vs Union of

India, all missing cases of minors are registered as kidnapping cases since 2013," the tweet said. An officer said that while intending to ensure that every missing child

is registered as kidnapping cases, which has led to some panic. "Anyone looking at the data would think thousands of children are being

kidnapped every month, which is not the case. Kidnapping cases are ones where usually the family receives a ransom call. However, the majority of these cases relate to children running away with friends at times for a day and coming back. Unfortunately, since they are registered as kidnapping, it has led to a wrong impression that kidnappers are on the prowl picking up children," the officer added.

As per data from Mumbai Police, from January to November 2025, the total cases of missing/kidnapping minor children stand at 2,177, out of which police claimed they have rescued 1,974. In the past four years, the missing/kidnapping numbers of teenage children have been increasing every year. In 2022, total 1,927 minor children were allegedly kidnapped, while police rescued 1,896.

Govt gives top priority to women's empowerment and welfare: Seethakka

Hyderabad. (Agency)

Telangana Panchayat Raj, Women and Child Welfare Minister Danasari Anasuya Seethakka on Monday told the Assembly that the state government is giving top priority to women's empowerment and welfare, with a focus on economic self-reliance and social dignity.

Replying during Question Hour, the Minister said the government launched free bus travel for women within 48 hours of assuming office. She said the Indira Mahila Shakti programme has emerged as a cornerstone of women's empowerment, to ensure that every woman becomes a member of a Self-Help Group (SHG).

Women from the age of 15 to the elderly are being enrolled, with special SHGs formed for adolescent girls, senior citizens and persons with disabilities.

Seethakka said Indira Mahila Shakti canteens have become a powerful symbol of both women's empowerment and public welfare, providing hygienic, nutritious food at affordable prices while creating sustainable livelihoods. At present, 250 such canteens are functioning across Telangana in collectorates, government hospitals, tourist centres and other bus locations.

To ensure quality services, the government is providing free 10-day training to SHG members through the National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality Management (NITHM), Hyderabad, at a cost of Rs 22,300 per person, covering culinary skills and canteen management. Loans are being extended for setting up canteens, while space and infrastructure are being provided free of cost in government premises.

The Minister said thousands of women are gaining employment and financial independence through these initiatives, enabling them to play a decisive role in family and social decision-making.



case is taken seriously, the Supreme Court directed that all missing cases be registered as kidnapping cases, which has led to some panic. "Anyone looking at the data would think thousands of children are being

Illusion of reform in universities

The Higher Education Regulatory Bill, presented as a decisive break from the failures of the UGC, is being offered as a solution to institutional stagnation, bureaucratic inaccessibility and authoritarian intrusion. Aligned with the goals of NEP-2020, the Bill speaks the language of reform, autonomy, transparency and rationalisation. Yet, a dispassionate analysis is necessary. The Bill emerged in 2025, a year when test-driven pedagogies along with AI-induced anxiety and the reduction of learning to employability results have diminished the intellectual culture of universities. At its heart lies a rejection of the UGC model. Over time, universities had begun to be governed less through academic judgment and more through disciplinary monitoring structures, metrics-driven systems and documentation-heavy accountability. The regulation of higher education became an end in itself, detached from the free and lived realities of teaching and critical inquiry.

The Bill sets out to correct this failure. By separating funding, accreditation, regulation and academic oversight into distinct functions, it claims to eliminate overlap, reduce arbitrariness and introduce transparency. Regulation, we are told, will be "light but tight"; governance will be simplified; institutions will be freed from micromanagement.

However, the Bill's rhetoric belies a narrower truth in its proposal for technocratic recalibration, wherein universities are reimagined as mechanisms within a performance-oriented system, detached from the complex social, caste-based and linguistic realities that shape academia. Its emphasis on "rationalisation" and "efficiency" reflects a continuity with past approaches, recasting autonomy as compliance-dependent allowance rather than a reappraisal of the university's position within a stratified society.

A paradox lies in the Bill's embrace of performance-based regulation. While presented as a neutral mechanism for quality assurance, outcomes are never self-evident. The concerns that arise are: who defines them? The pedagogical gaze is conditioned by the tyranny of measurability, wherein learning is rendered legible only insofar as it conforms to quantifiable outcomes and intellectual labour is valorised solely through its alignment with pre-ordained metrics, thereby eclipsing the possibility of alternative assumptions about truth and the space for non-utilitarian forms of knowledge. This contradiction is stark when read alongside the NEP's commitment to creativity, critical thinking and multidisciplinary exploration. These values require intellectual risk, institutional trust and the freedom to fail. The Bill's vision of efficiency thus sits uneasily with the university's deeper vocation as a space of slow, critical and often irreverent thought in the marketplace of ideas.

Plus, the Bill invokes institutional freedom, yet autonomy without material security and academic self-governance is illusory. If funding is contingent on compliance with central frameworks, if accreditation becomes the mode of control and if regulatory bodies answer more readily to policy imperatives than to academic communities, then autonomy becomes merely rhetorical. The danger is a subtler form of control exercised through norms, metrics and incentives.

The Bill also assumes a level of institutional capacity and ethical governance that does not uniformly exist. Higher education is marked by disparities in infrastructure, faculty strength, regional access and historical privilege. A uniform regulatory vision risks reproducing inequality under the guise of standardisation. What appears as reform from above may translate into inequities and exclusion in institutional functioning.

This is where the Bill's euphoric tone becomes problematic. It assumes that restructuring governance will automatically revitalise intellectual life, a veneer of novelty.

As we all wish each other a joyous new year, 2026, two bits of information cannot have escaped the mind's eye. The first, that India has overtaken Japan to become the fourth largest economy in the world, a fact that should certainly push each of us towards a self-congratulatory pat on the shoulder even as we sing, in unison, all the stanzas of *Vande Mataram* — no matter the uneven data glares at you as you look a bit deeper, for example the rising coefficient of inequality. The second bit of news, somewhat more worrying, is the staggering 14,875 instances of free speech violations recorded through 2025, including nine killings (eight journalists and one social media influencer), 117 arrests, including eight journalists, and 11,385 instances of Internet censorship.

This report, compiled by the Mumbai-based Free Speech Collective, is a sobering description of India's free speech landscape. I've written about this in these columns before — which is, that Article 19, a fundamental right in the Constitution which guarantees freedom of speech and expression, gives with one hand but takes away with the other. So, for example, while Article 19(1)(a) grants citizens the right to freely express their thoughts, opinions and ideas via speech, writing, printing, visual representations or any other means, "reasonable restrictions can be imposed on this right" in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, public order, decency or morality etc. Question is, who is to decide what is "public order"? We know why these restrictions were placed in 1950 when the Constitution was born, when India was still emerging from the fires of the Partition. Over these past decades, some of those fires have been replaced by others, both real and make-believe. That's why journalists have always been at the frontlines of courage, pushing establishments to reveal more and more information in the interest of the people. Isn't that what democracy is about, anyway. Even Napoleon — or especially, Napoleon — knew that information is power. Closer home, ruling parties have never shied away from controlling the narrative. The BJP is clearly the master of this universe. The Free Speech Collective in its report went on to add that in May 2025, the Centre asked X, the social media giant, to withhold over 8,000 accounts and another 2,354 in July. X also told the Karnataka High Court that it had received 29,118 requests from the government to remove content from January-June 2025 and had complied with 26,641.

Blocking orders from the Union Ministry of Information Technology, shutdowns and bans on apps have been rampant. Nor are ruling parties in non-BJP-ruled states exempt from the temptation. The Ludhiana police have filed an FIR against 10 persons, of which nine are journalists, for posting "distorted and unverified content" about stories that Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's helicopter was being used when he was on an official visit to Japan and South Korea from December 1-10. It is not known who was using the

countries) in 2024 to 151 in 2025. In South Asia, only Pakistan and Afghanistan fare worse. India, the world's largest democracy, finds itself in the company of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Sudan, Syria and North Korea — as well as Russia. (India's fast friend, Vladimir Putin, has been in power in one way or another for the last 26 years.) The RWB makes two points about media freedoms, both of them obvious, but which bear repeating. The first is that there is a direct relationship between freedom of speech and democracy. A feisty press flourishes around the cut

and thrust of argument between the ruling party and the Opposition and especially revels in a David-Goliath situation, when a small but plucky Opposition won't let a majoritarian ruling party rest. The RWB's second finding is that there is a direct relationship between media censorship and funding. That "serious funding cuts" are a real blow to the media economy, already grappling with the expansion of influence of tech giants like Facebook and Google — and now AI. It's a no-brainer that the media is far freer in a market economy, which allows the diversification of its funding. And then there's

AI. The X handle of the Punjab unit of the Aam Aadmi Party @AAPPunjab has broken new ground with an AI video that mimics — and criticises — Opposition leaders, ending with Chief Minister Mann's real persona "speaking for Punjab". It's not a cartoon. Congress leaders Charanjit Channi and Amrinder Raja Warring as well as Akali Dal leader Sukhbir Badal — almost — look like the way they do in real life. Worse, there are no disclaimers. This deepfake mixing of truth with fiction is already familiar in the non-political space — we saw its use in media stories during Op Sindoor last year. But if political parties are also going to start employing AI video in the pursuit of influence, then it's clear that not just the rules, the nature of the game is being fundamentally changed.

The task to separate truth from fiction in the free speech lakshman rekha just became tougher. The freedom of speech and its consequent dissent-and-control argument just took a whole new turn.



Nimesulide ban: A necessary check on unsafe medicines

The move to curb high-dose oral forms sends an important signal against irrational drug use.



therapeutic value. The move to curb high-dose oral forms sends an important signal against irrational drug use. Many countries have either restricted or never approved

nimesulide precisely because of these safety concerns. Yet, the ban also exposes deeper systemic issues: weak enforcement, poor prescription discipline and the persistence of combination drugs that escape rigorous scrutiny.

The challenge now lies in implementation. State drug controllers must ensure swift withdrawal of banned stocks and strict monitoring of pharmacies. Doctors need clear advisories on alternative treatments and patients must be informed that higher doses do not mean faster or better relief. More broadly, this episode underscores the need for a proactive, evidence-driven drug policy rather than reactive bans after years of widespread use. Public health cannot afford to lag behind commercial momentum.

The many new years of India

Indians of different faiths start their years on different days. Even among Hindus, differing traditions and astronomical calculations mean there are different days marking the turn of the calendar. The good thing is that we greet others on their auspicious days

On the last day of 2025, I found myself at a popular south Indian vegetarian eatery in New Delhi. A huge picture of the founder's guru hung on the wall near a lamp and other visuals that symbolised Shaivite devotion. As I waited for my takeaway, a colourful garland of giant balloons arrived to decorate the place. An attendant sporting sacred ash on her forehead told a colleague in Tamil: "Only now it feels like a new year." The incident happened after a week that saw zealots disrupting Christmas celebrations across India, taunting fellow Hindus for sporting Santa caps. Such disruptions are an exception to the Indian rule of celebrating festivals—looking beyond faith. Multicultural bonhomie is reinforced by joyful social media posts like the clichéd one on Kolkata's Nahoum's bakery: "It is the only place in the world where the Hindus stand in queue to buy Christmas cakes from a Jewish bakery made by a Muslim baker." But there is more to this than a penchant for festive fervour. There is no such thing as a single new year's day for most Indians. Apart from Hindus, we have Sikhs, Muslims, Jews, Parsis and Buddhists celebrating their own turns of the calendar. While Christians start their era with what is the most widely accepted birth year of Jesus Christ, the Sikhs have their Nanakshahi calendar honouring Guru Nanak, on which the year starts around March 14. But then, Sikhs also have their harvest-linked Baisakhi around April 14 to mark the solar new year coinciding with the start of the Khalsa order by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.

Bengali Hindus mark the same day as Poila Baisakh, as do most Tamilian Hindus with the start of the Chittirai or Chaitra month. The Keralite Hindu new year often varies by a day; this year, their Vishu falls on April 15. The divergence is attributed to differing calculations on when the sun enters the zodiac sign of Aries, the day with



Assamese celebrate as Bihu. Things change from the solar to the lunar calendar in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Maharashtra. The Ugadi festival for the southern states and Gudi Padwa for Maharashtra fall this year on March 19. All that makes me scoff at a sticker I once saw in Delhi that questioned Hindus celebrating on January 1: "Videshi nav varsh par yeh kaisa swadeshi harsh?" (How can natives celebrate a foreign new year?) But no one really cared. This sticker was presumably by hardliners who follow the Vikram Samvat era, marking the ascent of King Vikramaditya. Most northerners do not know about other new year days differing by region, calendar calculations and harvest seasons. But many Indians know the Vikram Samvat year, thanks to stock exchanges that mark Diwali as the new year's day with

their auspicious 'mahurat' trading. The Samvat calendar is somewhat complicated. It calculates months on the lunar cycle but is synchronised with the solar year by adding an extra month (a job done by the leap year in the Gregorian calendar). The Vikram era starts 57 years ahead of the Gregorian calendar, which was introduced by Pope Gregory in 1582 as a new standard. It marks King Vikramaditya's victory over the Shakas (nomadic Scythian warriors of Iranian origin).

Circa 1935, the Dravidian movement added a revised new year to Tamil culture by introducing the Thiruvalluvar aandu (Thiruvalluvar year) commemorating the poet-philosopher's birth year calculated at 31 BC by spiritual scholar Maraimalai Adigal. Tamil Nadu officially adopted that calendar under DMK rule in 1971. However, in 2011, AIADMK Chief Minister Jayalalithaa

overturned her rival's decision to celebrate the birth of the month of 'Thai' (January 15) as the Tamil new year's day and restored it to the popular mid-April day. There has been no reverse swing since.

What's laudable in this confusion of calendars is the practice of people from different faiths or regions greeting each other. I get Pongal wishes from non-Tamilians and join many in wishing Parsis on Navroz. Indian Zoroastrians mark their new year in July or August (August 16 this year) following the Shahenshahi calendar, unlike Iranian Zoroastrians who mark it with the Spring Equinox in March. Jains follow the popular mid-April new year. Muslims are aligned to the Hijra, starting in 622 AD when the Prophet Muhammad migrated with his followers from Mecca to Medina. This year, the Muslim new year starts on June 16.

Some Tamil publishers add the Muslim Hijri year to their calendars that run from January 1 in tear-away sheets that also announce a wide range of Hindu festivals and auspicious days. Buddhism was born in what is now Bihar, but its adherents across Asia differ in their new year's day. Theravada Buddhists in Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar mark it on the first full moon day after mid-April, while the Mahayana followers in China, Korea and Vietnam do it on the full moon day in late January or early February. Tibetans do it in February or March. Lunar calendars add their own layer of complication to cultures influenced by tradition, ethnicity and colonialism. Indian Buddhists are split between all three categories and thus have three separate calendars. The new year is a good time to take stock of the diversity that offers Indians more opportunities to celebrate. On that note, let me wish you a happy 2026. If you missed greeting someone on January 1, do not fret. There's always a new new year's day around the corner.

Major road accident on Gwalior Highway in Agra, two killed

Agra.(Agency)

A major road accident occurred in Agra district on the Gwalior Highway due to dense fog, leading to a collision involving nearly half a dozen vehicles. The tragic incident claimed the lives of two people, while several others were injured and admitted to the hospital for treatment, police said on Monday.

According to information, the accident took place early in the morning on Monday near the village of Nagla Imlu under the Iradat Nagar police station area. One after another, around six vehicles collided on the highway, resulting in a serious crash.

Two people died on the spot, and more than half a dozen sustained serious injuries.

On receiving the information, local police immediately reached the spot and started rescue operations. The injured who were trapped inside the vehicles were pulled out after considerable effort and rushed to nearby hospitals for immediate medical care. Villagers said the accident occurred around 6 am, when the fog was extremely dense, and visibility was almost zero. Due to poor visibility, drivers were unable to see ahead, causing vehicles to collide one after another. After the first collision, vehicles coming from behind lost control and crashed into those ahead.

Resident Satyendra Singh Chahar confirmed that two people lost their lives and around six others were injured in the accident.

Following the incident, traffic on the highway was disrupted for some time. The police later cleared the road and restored traffic movement.

UP: Rs 1 lakh bounty criminal Azam killed in police encounter in Sultanpur



Sultanpur. (Agency)

A wanted criminal carrying a reward of Rs 1 lakh, identified as Azam alias Talib, was killed in a police encounter in Sultanpur on Monday, police officials said. According to the police, they had received specific input that Azam was planning to carry out a crime in the area.

Acting on the information, a police team set up a blockade near the Diyara bridge in the Lambhua area. When Azam was spotted approaching the spot on a motorcycle, the police attempted to stop him.

However, he allegedly opened fire on the police team. In retaliation, the police fired back, and a bullet hit Azam, causing him to fall to the ground. He was rushed to a hospital for treatment but succumbed to his injuries on the way, officials said. Azam, a resident of the Faradhan police station area in the Lakhimpur Kheri district, had been absconding for a long time.

Police records show that at least 17 criminal cases were registered against him, including a gang rape case. With this incident, Azam has become the 15th criminal killed in an encounter in Uttar Pradesh this year.

Based on these figures, the UP police have conducted an average of nearly one encounter per week. Police officials said further legal formalities are being completed.

Gulmarg records season's coldest night at minus 8.8°C

Srinagar. (Agency)

The ski resort of Gulmarg recorded the coldest night of the season so far as the mercury plunged to minus 8.8 degrees Celsius, officials said on Monday. According to the Meteorological Department, all weather stations of the Valley continued to witness sub-zero temperatures during the intervening night, with south and north Kashmir also experiencing a sharp dip.

MeT said Gulmarg in the Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir witnessed a sharp drop in temperature from minus 6.5°C recorded on the preceding night, making it the coldest place in Kashmir during the night. Gulmarg received 4 cm of fresh snowfall during the last 24 hours. Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, registered a minimum temperature of minus 3.6°C, slightly lower than the minus 3.2°C recorded the preceding night.

In south Kashmir, Pahalgam, the famous tourist destination, recorded minus 4.8°C, compared to minus 4.0°C a night earlier. Pahalgam also recorded very light snow in the last 24 hours. Shopian recorded a minimum of minus 5.6°C, while Pulwama settled at minus 4.2°C. Qazigund, the gateway town of Kashmir, registered minus 2.0°C, showing an improvement from the previous night's minus 4.0°C. Kokernag in south Kashmir registered minus 1.2°C, marginally warmer than the previous night's minus 1.6°C. In north Kashmir, Kupwara recorded minus 1.8°C, slightly higher than the minus 2.5°C witnessed during the preceding night. The Meteorological Department has forecast isolated light rain or snowfall at a few places over the next 24 hours, while stating that no major weather disturbance is expected across Kashmir in the coming days.

Strict law being framed to address sacrilege incidents :AAP

Chandigarh. (Agency)

Punjab AAP media in-charge Baltej Pannu Sunday said that a law is being framed to address sacrilege incidents. Taking to media in Chandigarh, Pannu said, "This proposal has already come before the Punjab Assembly. A committee has been formed, meetings have been held with representatives of all parties, and inputs are being collected to frame a strong state law with the strictest possible punishment so that no one dares to commit such a crime," he said.

The government had held a special Vidhan Sabha session on July 14 last year and tabled The Punjab Prevention of Offences Against Holy Scriptures Bill, 2025, proposes life imprisonment for sacrilege acts against religious scriptures. The Bill mandates strict punishment, extending up to life imprisonment, for the desecration of holy scriptures, including Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Bhagavad Gita, Bible and Quran. Later, the Speaker constituted a committee led by AAP MLA Inderbir Singh Nijjar to consult all stakeholders. The committee was given six months time. Pannu also slammed Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC)

president Harjinder Singh Dhami, accusing him of acting as a spokesperson of SAD instead of standing with justice, truth and the Guru Sahib.

Responding to Dhami's press conference held in



Chandigarh a day earlier, Pannu said he claimed he wanted to put his version before the people through the media. "The invitation for Dhami's press conference was issued by the SAD. Dhami Sahib often says allegations are made that he is a spokesperson of SAD. Yesterday, he himself admitted it by saying he is proud to be a soldier of the Akali Dal. It

would have been better had he been a soldier of Guru Sahib," Pannu said.

Taking strong objection to Dhami's claim that SGPC does not accept FIRs and does not need the police, Pannu said this was completely misleading. "SGPC itself is constituted under an Act, which is a law. Whenever SGPC holds its general house in Amritsar, it takes permission from the Deputy Commissioner. How can you say you don't believe in FIRs or police?" he asked. Drawing examples from his own two decades in journalism, Pannu said, "If we go back to 1996, Prakash Singh Badal repeatedly spoke about forming a Truth Commission. But when Akali governments ruled from 1997 to 2002 and again from 2007 to 2017, who promoted the very officers accused of atrocities on youth? Who made Sumedh Saini the DGP? Who promoted Mohammad Izhar Alam? Who brought his family into politics? Dhami Sahib seems to have forgotten all this."

Pannu further asserted that when the name of SS Kohli surfaced, a news channel linked to the party Dhami serves muted the story to prevent the truth from coming out.

Severe cold wave in UP: Kanpur-Etawah record season's coldest night

Lucknow.(Agency)

The cold wave has intensified in Uttar Pradesh after a sharp drop in minimum temperatures across several districts in the state. According to the Meteorological Department, Kanpur recorded a minimum of 3.2 degree Celsius, and Etawah 3.8 degree Celsius, marking the coldest night of the season so far.

Barabanki's mercury fell to 4.5°C, while Lucknow recorded 6°C, its coldest night this season. On January 1, Lucknow had a minimum of 7°C. The central parts of the state have experienced a 3-6°C drop in temperatures, with Kanpur seeing a significant 7.4°C fall within 24 hours. Etawah and Lucknow also witnessed sharp declines. The 5.4°C drop in Lucknow in a single day has caused considerable discomfort, especially for the elderly, children, and those with heart or bone ailments. Senior Meteorologist Atul Kumar Singh explained that after the Western Disturbance, cold and dry north-westerly winds from the hills,

Alipurduar Division Sets a First for NFR with 'Eat Right Campus' Certification

The Sikh Times

Maligaon, 5th January: The Alipurduar (APDJ) Division of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has achieved a notable milestone in food safety and hygiene. One railway station and three institutional facilities under the division have been awarded the prestigious Eat Right Station and Eat Right Campus certifications by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). Earlier, several stations across NFR including Guwahati, Harishchandrapur, Lumding, Rangiya, Mariani, Samsi, New Bongaigaon, New Jalpaiguri, Kamakhya, New Tinsukia, Jalpaiguri Road, Binnaguri, Dhubguri, Falakata, Dinhata and New Cooch Behar, etc. had already been awarded Eat Right Station certifications. The latest recognition for the Alipurduar Division further strengthens NFR's expanding network of certified

stations and campuses, reinforcing its commitment to safe and hygienic food services across the zone. New Alipurduar Railway Station, located in Alipurduar district of West Bengal, has been certified as an Eat Right Station for a period of 04th December 2025 to 03rd December 2027. The certification, awarded with an Exemplary rating, reflects the station's strict adherence to FSSAI guidelines relating to food safety, hygiene, sanitation, waste management and quality control at catering and food vending units. In addition, three facilities under the APDJ Division have been certified as Eat Right Campuses for the period 22nd December 2025 to 21st December 2027, all



with Exemplary ratings. These include the Rail Coach Restaurants at Rajabhat Khawa and Rail Museum, Cooch Behar along with the Multi-Disciplinary Zonal Training Institute, Alipurduar Junction. The Rail Coach Restaurants have set a good example by serving safe, hygienic and quality food in a unique dining setup, improving the overall visitor experience. The Multi-Disciplinary Zonal Training Institute has also shown strong compliance with food safety and hygiene standards. Together, these recognitions mark the first Eat Right Campus certification in the entire

19 discharged, 94 in hospitals | Gandhinagar typhoid surge: Shah orders immediate repair of leakages in water pipeline

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

Amid emergence of over 100 suspected typhoid cases in Sector 24 and 28 and Adiwada areas of Gandhinagar city due to leakage in a water pipeline, Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah has directed the authorities concerned to deal with the situation on a war footing, an official release stated on Sunday. Shah has also ordered immediate repair of leakages in the water pipeline so that the outbreak

Minister Harsh Sanghvi, district Collector Mehal Dava and Municipal Commissioner of Gandhinagar Municipal Corporation J N Vaghela, the statement said. According to the release, 113 suspected cases of Typhoid have been detected in the state capital so far. Of these, 19 patients have been discharged after treatment, while 94 are currently being treated in Gandhinagar Civil Hospital as well as health centres of Sectors 24 and 29, said the release, adding that their condition is stable. A 24X7 OPD has been started in the affected areas. A total of 75 health teams have conducted a survey in the areas of Sector 24, 26, 28 and Adiwada where the suspected cases have been found. The survey teams are also distributing pamphlets advising people to drink only boiled water, not to eat outside food and to keep their hands clean. The release also stated that wherever pipeline leakages are found, it is being repaired immediately.

The Gandhinagar Municipal Corporation authorities have started intense inspection of units selling panipuri, ragda patis, ice

gola, shikanji, milk products etc., it added.

The teams have surveyed more than 20,800 households, covering a population of over 90,000. Also, 30,000 tablets of chlorine and 20,600 packets of ORS have been distributed as a preemptive measure. The process of super chlorination of water has been expedited and the amount of chlorine is being inspected, the release stated.



Body swap at Ludhiana hospital: four doctors named in FIR

Then hospital authorities tried to handover the body of another woman to the family but when they checked her face, it wasn't Jasvir. Later hospital authorities admitted that Jasvir's body was handed over to Manju's family, and by then Manju's family had already cremated Jasvir's body assuming it was Manju's.

Tamil Nadu. (Agency)

Nagar of Moga, had said in his complaint that his wife Jasvir Kaur Sandhu was admitted to Orison Hospital after developing a stomach related ailment. She was being treated by Dr Malhi but she died undergoing treatment on December 19. He added that since their both sons were abroad, they requested hospital authorities to keep the body in mortuary till their sons arrived for last rites. However, on December 22 when they went to collect the body in the mortuary, the fridge in which Jasvir's body was kept, was empty. Then hospital authorities tried to handover the body of another woman to the family but when they checked her face, it wasn't Jasvir. Later hospital authorities admitted that Jasvir's body was handed over to Manju's family, and by then Manju's family had already cremated Jasvir's body assuming it was Manju's. The FIR on December 22 was registered under the sections 305, 314 and 316 (2) (criminal breach of trust) of BNS.

Gujarat hardlook: Ahmedabad's green push

From its image in the 1980-90s as a 'dusty' city, Ahmedabad, the most populous city in Gujarat, chose to fight back by reclaiming its green spaces and adding new ones as it grew almost three-fold in area, writes RITU SHARMA

Ahmedabad. (Agency)

IT WAS 1897. At a public meeting in Ahmedabad, prominent citizens proposed the idea of setting up a garden to commemorate the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria, the then ruler of the United Kingdom. As per the decision, the garden would be maintained by the City Municipality and a yard next to the jail of the time was set aside for the purpose.

Well-known sculptor from the then Bombay state, H G Mhatre, carved a statue of the Queen in marble, standing over 7-ft-high in her full regalia, a sceptre in one hand and a globe in the other, and it was unveiled in the garden under a stone canopy in 1910. Thus the Victoria Garden opened in the city.

The garden was built with funds raised by the city businessmen, at the east end of Ellis bridge, now Vivekananda Bridge.

In 1929, Victoria Garden saw another chapter in history when the Ahmedabad municipality cleared a proposal to set up a statue of Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak at the garden, for which a third of the sum was raised by contributions from the general public. The statue was unveiled by Mahatma Gandhi in February of that year, garlanding it with a hand-spun cotton hank. Several decades later, the garden would be named after Tilak, and the queen's statue would be moved out.



The Self Employed Women's Association or SEWA. Bhatt planted a banyan tree 50 years later at the spot to mark the birth of the

body, which today is among the largest network of self-employed women. Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited the redeveloped 34,000 square yard garden to pay homage to Bhatt's memorial here in 2023.

Called the city of gardens before the British came, Ahmedabad is not only reviving its gardens but building new ones integrating the needs of the neighbourhood – some with jogging tracks, open gyms, and yoga spaces.

If Victoria Garden was created with money raised from Ahmedabad's businessmen, the model today is Public Private Partnership (PPP). The city now has 308 parks and gardens with the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation using spaces around lakes, under flyovers and metro routes to create gardens and green spaces by roping in private players for their development and maintenance. Sardar Baug – a restoration and relief Among the latest of the historic gardens refurbished is the Sardar Baug in Lal Darwaja, located next to the Sidi Saiyyed mosque, in the busiest part of the city on the east, with the central bus station, luxury hotels of the time, banks, and the informal bazaar.

Trial delay not a trump card: Top Supreme Court remarks on Umar Khalid bail plea

While pronouncing its order on Monday, the Supreme Court said that a delay in trial cannot be sued as a trump card and observed that prima facie, Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam seemed to have played a "central role" on the alleged Delhi riots conspiracy.

BJP says AAP dropped dog-counting charge, turned to personal attacks on Ashish Sood

New Delhi.(Agency)
Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva on Sunday said that the people of Delhi are shocked by what he described as the repeatedly changing positions of Aam Aadmi Party leaders. Sachdeva said that AAP leaders, including Arvind Kejriwal and Saurabh Bharadwaj, initially attacked Delhi government Education Minister Ashish Sood by claiming that his department had issued a circular assigning teachers the duty of counting dogs. However, he said that when the Education Department's circular was made public through the media by the minister and himself, exposing what he termed the "lies of AAP", the party leaders shifted to making personal remarks against Ashish Sood. Sachdeva said that the people of Delhi and the Delhi BJP strongly condemn the personal remarks being made by AAP leaders against Minister Ashish Sood. He challenged them to either produce any circular in which teachers were assigned dog-counting duties or apologise to Ashish Sood. He further alleged that during its 10 years in power, AAP has surpassed the Congress and the Samajwadi Party in terms of corruption.

Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said that Sood comes from a simple family of teachers, has received an ordinary education, lives in the middle-class locality of Janakpuri, and represents its residents along with those from nearly 25 unauthorised colonies. Kapoor said he has known Sood for over 20 years and that the minister never discriminates between colleagues as "big" or "small". He added that the defeated and frustrated AAP leaders have twisted this into a victim narrative by raising slogans such as "small people, small colony".

Needed: Debate on governance, not pompous jousting as Delhi Assembly winter session begins

Both the Rekha Gupta government and the Opposition face a credibility test—on delivery, accountability and whether debate rises above political spectacle.

New Delhi.(Agency)
The winter session of the Delhi Assembly is set to begin on Monday, and with it arrives an opportunity, perhaps even a test for the government and the Opposition. As per protocol, this being the first session of the calendar year, the Lieutenant Governor will address the House, outlining the vision and roadmap for the capital in the coming months.

This address is not meant to be ceremonial alone. It is intended to set direction, define priorities, and offer clarity on how the administration intends to confront Delhi's growing governance challenges. Following the address, the House will take up the Motion of Thanks, often an underused yet crucial parliamentary exercise.

In mature legislatures, this motion becomes the stage on which elected representatives scrutinize, question, endorse, or challenge the ideas presented by the executive. For Delhi, where urban complexity, environmental distress, and infrastructure constraints are converging into everyday crises, such discussion is not merely political ritual it is a democratic necessity. Among the issues demanding urgent and honest debate, air pollution stands at the top. The recurring winter smog is no longer a seasonal inconvenience; it has become a stark indictment of policy inertia, bureaucratic fragmentation, and the absence of long-term planning. The Motion of Thanks debate should ideally compel the Assembly to treat pollution not as a headline-driven emergency, but as a systemic governance failure requiring coordination across departments, neighbouring states, and agencies.

The Rekha Gupta government, now nearly 11 months into office, cannot afford to rely on promises alone. By this time, it ought to possess both an assessment of where the administration stands and a realistic roadmap of where it wants to go. The Lieutenant Governor's address, shaped significantly by inputs from the government, will therefore be watched closely. It must move beyond slogans to measurable timelines, financial commitments, and institutional mechanisms. But the onus does not lie with the government alone. The Opposition Aam Aadmi Party has its own introspection to undertake. For years, AAP thrived on confrontation politics of dramatic press conferences, quick allegations, and political positioning framed through social media and sound bites.

New Delhi.(Agency)
In its order denying bail to two 2020 Delhi riots accused Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, the Supreme Court on Monday clarified that prolonged trial delays cannot justify bail. While pronouncing its order on Monday, the Supreme Court said that a delay in trial cannot be used as a trump card and observed that prima facie, Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam seemed to have played a "central role" on the alleged Delhi riots conspiracy. This court is satisfied that the prosecution material disclosed a prima facie allegation against the appellants Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam. The statutory threshold stands attracted qua these appellants. This stage of proceedings does not justify their enlargement on bail," a bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and NV Anjaria said. The court granted bail to Gulfisha Fatima, Meera Haider,

Mohd Samir Khan, Shadab Ahmed, and Shifa ur Rehman, noting that Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam stood on a different footing compared to the others.

It also said that the relief being given to them did



not imply any dilution of the allegations against the five.

They will be released on bail subject to around 12 conditions. "If any of these conditions are

violated, the trial court may cancel their bail after giving the accused an opportunity to be heard," it added. In its order, the court noted the factual background and prosecution narrative and considered issues relating to prolonged incarceration, the scope of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), and other relevant aspects. The Supreme Court clarified that it has not engaged in abstract comparisons between the statute and the Constitution. Rather, the precise question is how courts should examine bail applications under the UAPA when delays in prosecution are argued. The court reaffirmed that the right to a speedy trial is recognised under the Constitution.

"Mere delay in prosecution cannot be treated as punishment, and deprivation of liberty must not be arbitrary," it said. While courts must consider bail at the pre-trial stage, in cases involving national security allegations, delays cannot operate as a "trump

card" but may trigger heightened judicial scrutiny.

The court further emphasised that while considering bail, the role of each accused must be examined in the context of the conspiracy or activity alleged under the UAPA.

Consequently, ordinary assessments of liberty differ in cases that threaten the foundation of the state, requiring careful judicial evaluation of each accused's role under the relevant provisions of the UAPA.

Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, and other accused were charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and relevant IPC provisions for allegedly masterminding the 2020 northeast Delhi riots, which left 53 people dead and over 700 injured.

The violence broke out amid protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). The accused approached the Supreme Court, challenging a Delhi High Court order from September 2 that had denied them bail in the "larger conspiracy" case linked to the riots.

AAP Protests Inside Delhi Assembly Over Worsening Air Quality

Amid worsening air quality in the capital, AAP MLAs staged a protest inside the Delhi Assembly, demanding urgent action as AQI levels stayed in the poor to very poor range.

New Delhi.(Agency)
MLAs of the Aam Aadmi Party staged a protest inside the Delhi Assembly premises on Monday, highlighting the worsening air pollution situation in the national capital. The demonstration was led by Leader of Opposition Atishi, as the party stepped up pressure on the government to take responsibility and introduce urgent measures to address Delhi's deteriorating air quality. AAP leaders warned that hazardous pollution levels continue to pose serious health risks, particularly for children, senior citizens, and people suffering from respiratory ailments.

During the protest, the party demanded immediate and stricter action to curb pollution sources, including vehicular emissions, industrial pollution, and stubble burning in neighbouring states. Meanwhile, several Indian cities including Delhi, Mumbai, and Guwahati woke up to dense fog on Monday morning. In the national capital, air quality fluctuated between the 'poor' and 'very poor' categories across multiple areas, while reduced visibility led to delays in flight



operations at the Indira Gandhi International Airport. According to data from the Central Pollution Control Board, Delhi's overall Air Quality Index stood at 260 in the 'poor' category at 8 am. Readings from different locations showed sharp variations—Akshardham recorded an AQI of 294, ITO reported 256, while Anand Vihar slipped into the 'very poor' category with an AQI of 320. Chandni Chowk emerged as one of the worst-hit areas, registering an AQI of 337. Amid these conditions, the Sub-Committee on the Graded Response Action Plan under the Commission for Air Quality Management lifted Stage-III restrictions on Friday evening, citing noticeable improvement in air quality due to favourable weather conditions.

Red Fort blast accused trained remotely using ghost SIMs and encrypted apps

New Delhi.(Agency)
Officials investigating the Red Fort car blast case have found that the terror module behind the attack operated with clinical precision, using layers of digital anonymity, while staying constantly connected to handlers across the border.

The accused, many of them qualified doctors, exploited telecom vulnerabilities and encrypted communication platforms to plan and execute the blast, while maintaining the appearance of ordinary professional lives.

At the heart of the planning operation was a strict multi-phone system. Each operative carried a "safe" handset registered in their own name for routine use, alongside separate devices



dedicated solely to encrypted communication. These phones were powered by SIM cards issued in the names of unrelated civilians or generated using forged documents.

Investigators said this allowed the module to operate in plain sight. The compromised SIM cards enabled

accounts on messaging platforms to stay active even when the physical cards were removed or the devices were operated from Pakistan or Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

This loophole, officials said, gave handlers uninterrupted access to operatives on Indian soil.

Cross-border handling for Delhi blast prompted govt order on physical SIMs

The Red Fort blast accused were allegedly in direct contact with handlers using coded identities, receiving instructions, targets, and guidance through encrypted chats. Security agencies found that the module was coached remotely to assemble improvised explosive devices using publicly available online videos, with handlers monitoring progress and correcting mistakes in real time.

'BJP ki chhoti soch': AAP targets Delhi minister Ashish Sood over jibe at MLAs' financial background

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday launched a social media campaign titled 'BJP Ki Chhoti Soch', accusing Delhi Education Minister Ashish Sood of mocking the financial background of AAP MLAs Sanjeev Jha and Kuldeep Kumar.

As part of the campaign, AP Delhi State President Saurabh Bharadwaj, Burari MLA Sanjeev Jha and several party leaders sharply targeted Sood and the BJP, alleging that the remarks reflected a regressive and elitist mindset.

Bharadwaj said the minister's comment suggesting that "people from small localities roam around as big national spokespersons" exposed the BJP's thinking. "We may be poor in terms of money, but we are rich at heart," Bharadwaj said in a post on social media platform X.

AAP MLA Sanjeev Jha termed Sood's remarks extremely unfortunate and said they showed disrespect towards people from modest backgrounds. "Ashish Sood is suggesting that people win elections from small localities and then roam around as big spokespersons. I represent the Burari Assembly constituency. People there may be poor and may live in kachchi colonies, but they are not small," Jha said.

He further said, "Ashish Sood has won an election for the first time, while I have won four times. The number of votes he received is equal to my margin of victory. Whether in terms of experience or margin, I am bigger than him."

Questioning the mindset behind the remarks, Jha asked whether living in a bungalow makes someone 'big' and living in a kachchi colony makes someone 'small'.

"Seventy per cent of Delhi lives in kachchi colonies. If Ashish Sood considers them small, these very people will show him his real place," he said, adding that the remarks insult people from Purvanchal, the poor and those living in unauthorised colonies.

Citing other instances, Jha referred to controversial remarks made by a minister's husband in Uttarakhand and a Ghaziabad case involving a Bihar resident, claiming these reflected the BJP's broader outlook. "This mindset will be answered by the people at the right time," he said.

In another video, Jha said, "We live in kachchi colonies, but we are not small people."

'Remarks insult the poor'

"Sood has won an election for the first time, while I have won four times. The number of votes he received is equal to my margin of victory. Whether in terms of experience or margin, I am bigger than him," AAP MLA Sanjeev Jha said, adding that the remarks insult poor people.

'Nowhere to go... locked out': Ashoka University students claim hostel access barred during winter break

Varsity claims information on hostel was shared when term started

New Delhi.(Agency)
"My home is 500 km away. I'm in Sonipat. It's unsafe. Where do you want me to go? It is getting dark," pleaded an undergraduate student on a cold December evening after the winter break had started as she stood outside her hostel at Ashoka University's campus in Sonipat while speaking with a residence official. She claimed she was baffled that her access card was no longer working. "I was told to leave," she told The Indian Express. The student, who hails from Uttar Pradesh, claimed that despite having paid for nine months of use of the residential facility on campus, there was no communication about the need to vacate the facility during the winter break. The student was later told she could stay at an off-campus housing facility typically used by PhD scholars and teaching fellows, but only if she made an additional payment. Only after

intervention from the Student Government, the student body of the covered residence through December, was the payment waived for the night. "There were no bedsheets and no heaters there... I couldn't go anywhere else," she said.

This was not an isolated incident, students claimed. An undergraduate student from Karnataka also told that he found himself locked out of campus close to midnight in a similar manner after receiving an email barring him from staying on campus during the winter break on very short notice.

For years, according to the students, they have been allowed to remain in their hostels at Ashoka University during such vacations. Many students, especially those from outside North India, or abroad,

followed was delayed, ambiguous, or entirely absent.

In an official statement to The Indian Express, the varsity said, "During the winter break, students who are required to be on campus for pre-scheduled official assignments, with advance information to the university and all international students are permitted to be on campus. Due to security and logistical concerns, access to university premises remains restricted during this period to those with prior approval, as per university regulations."

"Any student requiring access under circumstances mandating their presence on campus, is required to do so with supporting documentation. Communication, in accordance with the policy, was shared with all students at the beginning of the term so that they could make their arrangements in time.



of the Student Government said that students were informed of a new 'Residence Life' policy, requiring them to vacate campus during the winter break unless they received special approval through an appeal process. Several students say the communication that

NEWS BOX

Running with a purpose: Pooja Krishnamurthy flies the Indian flag at Brazil 135

NEW DELHI (Agency)

The Brazil 135 is probably one of the toughest ultra-runs in the world at the moment, and completing it is no mean feat. The race spans 217 kilometres, with elevation rising to nearly 20,000 feet across mountains, valleys, and rough terrain. Add to this the presence of humid jungles and cold highlands during the run, which must be completed within 60 hours. It is a challenge that would test the toughness of the best runners — and India's Pooja Krishnamoorthy is looking to create a piece of history. For 21 years, no Indian woman has attempted to conquer the Brazil 135 ultra, and Pooja is hoping to inspire many more to follow in her footsteps. But it is not just about the miles she will cover. The ultra-runner will enter the course with a clear purpose and a cause larger than herself.

Speaking exclusively to India Today before heading off for the Brazil 135, scheduled from January 8 to 10, the Indian runner spoke about why she took up running, how her journey began, and the cause she will carry with her during the expedition in Brazil.

The start

Pooja currently works as an advertisement producer and is the proud owner of Bowline, a small company that has already created ads



for some big names. However, her journey into sport began much earlier. She became a certified mountaineer at the age of 11 and credits her family for fostering her love for the outdoors. The entire love for the outdoors and love for sports is all thanks to my family, because my upbringing has also been such that they have valued experiences, and experiential learning and learning through experiences a lot. "The whole family are all travellers, and we all believe in learning from the outdoors, other than being extremely academic, since I come from a south Indian family," said Pooja. "And long before running became central to my life, I was a certified mountaineer. Spending time in the Himalayas. I think I did my first trek to the Himalayas at the age of 11. After which it was something that kept happening every year and eventually leading treks, learning to respect the pace of the mountains."

Novak Djokovic quits tennis player body he founded in shock exit

NEW DELHI (Agency)

Novak Djokovic has announced a dramatic split from the Professional Tennis Players Association (PTPA), the players' organisation he helped found six years ago, citing deep-seated concerns about its governance, transparency, and how his voice and image have been handled. The decision marks a major turning point for the organisation and opens fresh questions about the future of player representation in professional tennis. In a statement on social media late Sunday, Djokovic said: "After careful consideration, I have decided to step away completely from the Professional Tennis Players Association. This decision comes after ongoing concerns regarding transparency, governance, and the way my



voice and image have been represented." He highlighted pride in the original vision behind the PTPA but said that "it has become clear that my values and approach are no longer aligned with the current direction of the organisation." The 24-time Grand Slam champion, who is preparing to begin his 2026 season at the Australian Open, added that he will now focus on "my tennis, my family, and contributing to the sport in ways that reflect my principles and integrity." Djokovic's exit comes at a crucial moment for the PTPA, which has been embroiled in legal and political battles with tennis's governing bodies.

WHAT IS PTPA?

The Professional Tennis Players Association was co-founded by Djokovic and fellow player Vasek Pospisil in 2019/2020 as a response to long-standing player frustrations with the way professional tennis is run. At its core, the PTPA was intended to give players — men and women — a collective voice independent of the sport's governing bodies, which include the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP), the Women's Tennis Association (WTA), the International Tennis Federation (ITF) and the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA).

Arne Slot backs Liverpool's measured style of play despite Fulham draw

Arne Slot defended Liverpool's approach after another frustrating draw. Despite questions over creativity and identity, the manager insisted his philosophy remains intact as the Reds continue to search for balance and consistency.

New Delhi. (Agency)

Arne Slot has pushed back against suggestions that Liverpool are losing their attacking identity, insisting his footballing philosophy remains unchanged despite the Reds being held to a 2-2 draw by Fulham at Craven Cottage on Sunday. The result extended Liverpool's frustrating run and reignited debate over their increasingly measured style of play. Liverpool looked set to claim a dramatic away win when Cody Gakpo struck in the 94th minute, only for Harrison Reed to respond with a stunning equaliser three minutes later. Speaking in the post-match press conference, Slot addressed the growing scrutiny around Liverpool's attacking output



and firmly rejected claims that he has turned cautious. "My philosophy of football hasn't changed. This year compared to all the seasons I was a manager before, we have to do it with the players that we have available, and I think today 11 very good football players were on the pitch." Liverpool once again controlled large spells of the game, much like their goalless draw against Leeds

earlier in the week. However, dominance in possession did not translate into a steady flow of clear chances, an issue compounded by the absence of injured top scorer Hugo Ekitike. Slot pointed to moments that could have changed the outcome, highlighting near-misses and marginal calls.

"Just before they scored, we had exactly the same chance from Cody Gakpo," he

added. "In the second half, two disallowed goals, a header on the bar. So there are things to like, but again the result is not what we may deserve." Questions around Liverpool's identity have lingered throughout the season, particularly during a difficult spell that included nine defeats in 12 games. Over their last 12 matches, Liverpool have won five, drawn four and lost three, leaving supporters searching for signs of a clear direction.

Slot acknowledged the need for improvement in the final third but stressed that balance remains key. "I would love to create five times as many chances and not concede a chance at all. But in periods when we played more open, we didn't create more chances and we conceded much more," he said.

Despite the dropped points, Liverpool remain firmly in the race for a top-four finish. Slot's side currently sit fourth in the Premier League table with 34 points from 20 matches, having won 10, drawn four and lost six. They are just three points clear of Chelsea in fifth, while third-placed Aston Villa are eight points ahead, underlining how little margin for error remains as the season enters its decisive phase.

Mustafizur Rahman IPL row: Bangladesh teammate reveals how pacer reacted to KKR snub

NEW DELHI (Agency)

Mustafizur Rahman has been at the centre of controversy since being left out of the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) squad for the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026. The left-arm pacer was bought for Rs 9.20 crore at the auction last month, but KKR later released him following directives from the Board of Control for



clarification, and no attempt to assume responsibility. KKR, meanwhile, had simply worked within a framework approved by the board itself. Seven Bangladeshi players had been cleared for the auction. Mustafizur was one of them. If the presence of Bangladeshi cricketers had suddenly become untenable, that failure lay squarely with administrators, not franchises. This is where the comparison with Pakistan, often invoked in defence of such actions, begins to fall apart. As Congress MP and author Shashi Tharoor pointed out in an interview with The Indian Express, "No, Bangladesh is not Pakistan. Bangladesh has not been dispatching terrorists across the border. It's not a comparable situation at all. And besides, our relationship with the two countries is also different. You cannot make a simple equation between the two."

To treat Bangladesh through the same lens is not just diplomatically lazy, it is factually dishonest. The fallout has now extended beyond the IPL.



Cricket in India (BCCI) amid political tensions surrounding minority issues in Bangladesh. However, Mustafizur has responded in the best possible way—with his performances on the field. Representing Rangpur Riders in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), he has been impressive, most notably delivering a match-winning final over against Dhaka Capitals on Sunday at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

'MUSTAFIZUR IS AT EASE'
Riding on his spell, the Riders edged past the Capitals by five runs. After the match, Rangpur captain Nurul Hasan Sohan praised Mustafizur for his outstanding performance, adding that despite missing out on the IPL, the Satkhira-born bowler remains calm, relaxed, and focused. For us, Mustafiz is a world-class bowler. He has been proving that for a long time. Everyone has confidence in him. There's nothing more to say about him—everyone is always impressed," Sohan said in the post-match press conference. "He is relaxed and at ease. At the same time, there may still be some disappointment (regarding the KKR issue). He deserves what he has now—and he deserved even more before



Kumawat, emphasised its intent to resolve the matter in consultation with all concerned parties. The RCA stated that it remains open to dialogue and is committed to addressing any issues in a transparent and cooperative manner. The association assured the BCCI and Rajasthan Royals that all safety, security and infrastructure requirements at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium would be fully met ahead of IPL 2026. It underlined that preparations would strictly follow BCCI protocols, relevant government regulations and established international standards, leaving no room

for compromise on spectator or player safety. Responding to reports that the Royals had sounded out the Maharashtra Cricket Association about hosting home matches in Pune, the RCA noted that it was not made aware of, nor involved in, any independent assessment of the Jaipur venue. The association stressed that evaluations of government-owned stadiums must be carried out through recognised regulatory processes and in coordination with statutory authorities. The RCA strongly defended the condition of the Sawai Mansingh Stadium, stating that the ground remains structurally robust and operationally secure. It pointed to the stadium's long history of staging IPL matches, along with a wide range of domestic and international fixtures, without serious safety concerns. To support its case, the association cited the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy matches being played across Rajasthan, including games hosted in Jaipur.

Pakistan's Naseem Shah trumps Kieron Pollard after heated verbal exchange

ILT20 final: Pakistan fast bowler Naseem Shah was engaged in a verbal battle with Kieron Pollard during the big final in Dubai. Naseem's three-wicket haul played a key role in helping Desert Vipers beat MI Emirates and win their maiden ILT20 title on Sunday.

NEW DELHI (Agency)

Pakistan fast bowler Naseem Shah and former West Indies captain Kieron Pollard were involved in a heated on-field exchange during the final of ILT20, the UAE's premier

franchise-based T20 tournament, on Sunday. Playing for Desert Vipers, Naseem ran riot with the ball, playing a key role in helping his side defend 182 in the final at Dubai International Cricket Stadium. The flashpoint came in the 11th over of the MI Emirates chase. Naseem bowled a delivery Pollard failed to middle and, with a smile on his face, followed it up with a stare—seemingly suggesting the ball was too good to attack. Pollard took offence to the gesture, charged towards the young fast bowler and exchanged words before the umpires stepped in to defuse the situation. Naseem, however, did not lose his composure. He had the final say by dismissing Pollard with the first delivery of the 17th over. Bowling a short ball, Naseem induced a miscued pull that was safely caught by substitute fielder Sanjay Pathal at deep mid-wicket. The wicket proved decisive. MI Emirates slipped to 122 for 6, still requiring 61 runs from the final 23

deliveries. They were eventually bowled out for 136 in 18.3 overs as the Vipers went on to clinch their maiden ILT20 title. Despite the earlier confrontation, the tension did not spill over after the match, with Naseem and Pollard remaining composed during post-match interactions. Naseem played a central role in the Vipers' dominant win, finishing with figures of three for 18 from four overs. He set the tone early by removing Andre Fletcher (10 off 11) and

Tom Banton (7 off 6), leaving MI Emirates three down inside the first six overs and crawling to 46 for 3. The pressure continued as Usman Tariq dismissed Sanjay Krishnamurthy (2 off 9) in the eighth over. Shakib Al Hasan attempted to steady the innings with a composed 36 off 27 balls, but boundaries were hard to come by. With Pollard struggling to break free, MI Emirates reached 72 for 4 after 10 overs, falling further behind the required rate. Once Naseem removed Pollard to end any hopes of a late surge, David Payne ripped through the lower order, claiming three wickets in the 18th over to seal the result.

Earlier in the day, Vipers captain Sam Curran powered his side to an imposing 182 for 4 with an unbeaten 74 off 51 balls, an innings studded with eight fours and two sixes. He was well supported by Max Holden (41 off 32) and Dan Lawrence, who provided a late flourish with 23 off 15 deliveries.



Stock markets decline in early trade dragged by IT firms

New Delhi.(Agency)

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty declined in early trade on Monday, dragged by blue-chip IT stocks. The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 125.96 points to 85,636.05 during early trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty dipped 30.95 points to 26,297.60. From the 30-Sensex firms, HCL Tech, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, HDFC Bank, Tata Consultancy Services, and NTPC were among the biggest laggards. However, Bharat Electronics, Tata Steel, Axis Bank, and Reliance Industries were among the gainers. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 289.80 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Domestic institutional investors (DIIs) also bought stocks worth Rs 677.38 crore. The year 2026 has begun with major geopolitical developments which can have profound consequences. The US action in Venezuela has the potential to further destabilise global geopolitics," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi index, Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Shanghai's SSE Composite index were trading significantly higher, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng index quoted marginally lower.

US markets ended mostly in positive territory on Friday. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, dipped 0.08 per cent to USD 60.70 per barrel.

On Friday, the Sensex climbed 573.41 points, or 0.67 per cent, to settle at 85,762.01.

Govt may withdraw X's safe harbour tag over Grok AI obscene content lapses

New Delhi.(Agency)

The Centre has warned social media platform X over AI-generated obscene content, saying if it does not follow takedown orders for such content, it risks losing its "safe harbour" status under the Indian law, The Economic Times reported. Notably, X has previously lost legal immunity for non-compliance with Indian rules.

What is safe harbour?

Under Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000, online platforms are protected from liability for user-generated content, as long as they follow government rules and act quickly on takedown orders. As a significant social media intermediary (SSMI), X must meet stricter legal and compliance requirements.

What triggered the warning?

On January 2, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) sent a formal notice to X over reported use of its AI chatbot, Grok, for creation and circulation of obscene images and videos of women. The notice gave the platform 72 hours to remove objectionable content, take action against offending accounts and submit an action-taken and compliance report. It also warned that failure to show auditable compliance could lead to the loss of safe harbour protection.

X's earlier brush with Indian law

In 2021, X (then Twitter) briefly lost its safe harbour protection after failing to fully comply with the IT Rules, 2021. At the time, the Delhi High Court noted that the Centre was free to take action if the platform did not follow the law. Twitter later appointed key India-based officers, but its legal immunity remained suspended for nearly three months.

MeitY's latest notice has again questioned the role and authority of X's Chief Compliance Officer. It is important that these officers have real oversight and the power to act when required, an official quoted by The Economic Times said.

HDFC Bank posts 2.7% loan growth to 28.45 trn in Q3, deposits rise higher

New Delhi.(Agency)

India's top private lender HDFC Bank posted on Monday a sequential quarterly loan growth, supported by the festive season and sweeping tax cuts, while deposits also rose.

As of December 31, loans rose 2.7 per cent sequentially to 28.45 trillion (\$316.13 billion), while deposits increased 2.1 per cent to 28.6 trillion, the Mumbai-based bank said. Analysts had expected stronger loan demand in October-December, supported by spending in the festive season and the boost from tax cuts. HDFC Bank merged with its parent HDFC in

Mis-selling complaints are rising. Here's what IRDAI's latest report shows

New Delhi.(Agency)

Mis-selling continues to be a major concern for India's insurance sector, with complaints linked to unfair business practices rising again in FY25, even as regulations and disclosure norms have been tightened over the years, according to the latest annual report of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI). Data in the IRDAI Annual Report 2024-25 shows that grievances categorised under Unfair Business Practices increased to 26,667 in FY25, up from 23,335 in FY24, a rise of around 14% year-on-year. As a share of total grievances against life insurers, such complaints rose to 22.14 percent from 19.33 percent in the previous year. Overall grievance volumes against life insurers remained broadly stable during the year, indicating that while complaint numbers have not surged across the board, issues related to unfair sales practices continue to worsen. IRDAI FLAGS MIS-SELLING AS A "SIGNIFICANT CONCERN"

In the report, the regulator has explicitly acknowledged the persistence of mis-

selling in the industry. "Mis-selling in the Indian insurance sector is a significant concern that involves the sale of insurance products to consumers without proper disclosure of terms, conditions or suitability," IRDAI said.

The regulator added that insurers have been advised to identify and address the root causes behind such practices.

"Insurers are encouraged to tackle the problem of mis-selling by conducting a root cause analysis to identify the underlying causes. To prevent or reduce mis-selling, insurers have been advised to implement strategies such as assessing product suitability, implementing distribution channel-specific controls and developing a plan to address mis-selling grievances, including carrying out a root cause analysis on a periodic basis," the report said.

LIFE INSURANCE ACCOUNTS FOR MOST COMPLAINTS

Life insurance continues to account for the bulk of mis-selling-related grievances.

IRDAI data shows that complaints linked to survival claims, policy servicing and unfair business practices together made up a significant portion of grievances reported against life insurers in FY25.



Products that combine insurance with savings or investment elements remain the most complaint-prone, reflecting long-standing concerns around suitability, disclosures and sales practices.

BANKS AND CORPORATE AGENTS DOMINATE SALES

The annual report highlights the continued dominance of intermediary-led

distribution in life insurance.

Corporate agents, including banks, accounted for nearly 53 percent of private life insurers' individual new business premium in FY25. Banks alone contributed over 49 percent of private insurers' individual new business premium during the year. By contrast, direct selling channels accounted for just over 10 percent of individual new business premium at the industry level, while online and web aggregator channels together contributed less than 1 percent, underscoring the continued reliance on intermediary-driven sales.

GRIEVANCE RESOLUTION IMPROVES, BUT OUTCOMES MIXED

IRDAI noted improvements in grievance handling through platforms such as Bima Bharosa and the IRDAI Grievance Call Centre. During FY25, a total of 2.57 lakh grievances were received on the Bima Bharosa portal, with 1.20 lakh related to life insurance and 1.37 lakh linked to general and health insurance.

Sensex, Nifty open lower as IT stocks see decline in early trade

New Delhi.(Agency)

Benchmark stock market indices opened lower on Monday as IT stocks fell in early trade, dragging the markets down. Metal stocks see a rise, but the gains on markets were capped by a decline in IT shares. The S&P BSE Sensex was down by 68.48 points to 85,693.53, while the NSE Nifty50 lost 15.35 points to 26,313.20 as of 9:23 am. Dr. VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said that a positive for India from the Venezuelan crisis is that its medium to long-term impact is bearish for crude. "The market is likely to remain resilient in the near-term since we are at all time high and the momentum might support the bulls. The Bank Nifty is strong and has fundamental support from impressive credit growth. Q3 results of the banking and financials segment will be good," he added. Bharat Electronics emerged as the top gainer, rising 3.18%, followed by Tata Steel, which gained 1.86%. Axis Bank moved up 1.44%, UltraTech Cement added 1.34%, and State Bank of India rose 1.22%, giving early support to the market.



I S R E V I E W I N G LEADERSHIPSources quoted by the Economic Times said Chandrasekaran, who is also chairman of Air India, is not fully satisfied with the pace of

held regular performance review meetings with Wilson in recent months. Tata Sons declined to comment on the matter. A person close to Wilson told the Economic Times that he is part of the succession planning process and has informed the board that he may not continue beyond 2027. However, group officials denied this, saying no such board-level discussion has taken place and that the review is being led directly by the group chairman.

WILSON'S TENURE AND THE TRANSFORMATION PLAN

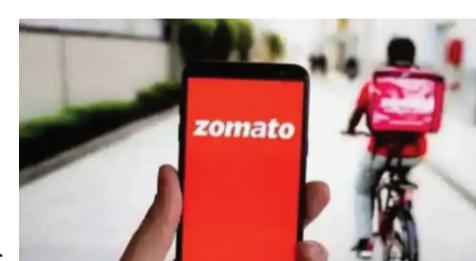
Wilson, a New Zealander, joined Air India in July 2022 and announced a five-year transformation plan to rebuild the airline and improve its financial health. During his tenure, some key changes were completed smoothly. The merger of Vistara into Air India went ahead without major disruption, and the airline expanded its fleet and capacity. At times, Air India even overtook market leader IndiGo on certain metro routes, the Economic Times noted. However, the overall results of the transformation have been mixed.

Why Zomato sacks close to 5,000 gig workers A Month CEO Deepinder Goyal Reveals

New Delhi.(Agency)

Zomato sacks close to 5,000 gig workers a month due to cases involving fraud, while another 150,000 to 200,000 workers leave the fast food delivery platform on their own, its parent firm Eternal's founder and CEO Deepinder Goyal said. In a video podcast with YouTuber Raj Shamani, Goyal said that those who choose to leave the platform consider gig work as a temporary job. Several gig workers operating on quick commerce and food delivery platforms, including Zomato, had gone on a flash strike during New Year's Eve, in support of their demand for high wages, better working conditions and security coverage. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Labour and Employment has published the draft rules for the four labour codes, which also bring gig workers on board for various benefits such as minimum

wage, health, occupational safety and social security coverage. The government has invited feedback from stakeholders on these draft rules and aims to finally roll out the entire



package of four labour codes across the country from April 1. Under the draft rules, in order to be eligible for the benefits, a gig or platform worker must be associated with an aggregator for at least 90 days in a financial year to

qualify for social security benefits created by the Centre. If a worker is engaged with more than one aggregator, the minimum requirement is fixed at 120 days.

The notification is dated December 30, 2025, and was issued a day before the gig and platform workers went on a flash strike for higher wages and better working conditions. The rules clarify that a worker is considered "engaged" on any calendar day if they earn income for work done for an aggregator, regardless of how much they earn. If a worker is associated with multiple aggregators, the number of engagement days will be added together across all aggregators. The draft also states that if a worker is engaged with three aggregators on the same calendar day, it will be counted as three separate days of engagement.

On the other hand, pressure was visible in a few heavyweights. Infosys was the biggest loser, slipping 3.07%, followed by HCL Technologies, which fell 2.93%. Tech Mahindra declined 1.67%, TCS was down 1.52%, and HDFC Bank eased 1.33%. The year 2026 has begun with major geopolitical developments which can have profound consequences. The US action in Venezuela has the potential to further destabilise global geopolitics," said Vijayakumar.

"The Russia-Ukraine conflict is likely to linger longer; there can be worsening of the protests in Iran and how the Iranian regime reacts to that in the context of threat of intervention by Trump; and perhaps even China might use this time of huge uncertainty and unpredictability of geopolitics will influence the market, too," he added.

US action on Venezuela's oil: Is there an opportunity for India

Indian oil refiners and upstream companies could still find opportunities if Venezuelan crude re-enters global markets and long-pending investments and payments are unlocked.

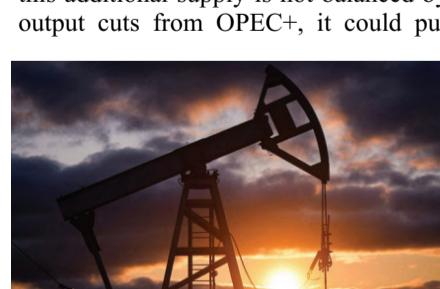
New Delhi.(Agency)

Venezuela, the country with the largest oil deposits, has been attacked by the US and its impact is expected to be felt not just by Washington but also by other countries. In India, the impact is not direct. The country as a whole may not see an immediate benefit from these moves. However, Indian oil refiners and upstream companies could still find opportunities if Venezuelan crude re-enters global markets and long-pending investments and payments are unlocked. This expectation was reflected in stock market action on Monday. Shares of Oil & Natural Gas Corporation rose 2% in early

trade to Rs 246.80 apiece, making it the top gainer on the Nifty 50 index. At the same time, Reliance Industries shares climbed more than 1% to touch a fresh 52-week high of Rs 1,611.8 apiece.

The rally in Reliance shares has pushed the market value of India's most valuable listed company closer to the Rs 22 lakh crore mark, reflecting investor interest in how global oil supply changes could affect its refining and cash flows. According to a report by Jefferies, Reliance Industries and ONGC are seen as key Indian beneficiaries if the US moves towards a takeover or restructuring of Venezuela's oil industry and allows crude exports to global buyers. Venezuela holds around 18% of the world's proven oil reserves but currently contributes less than 1% to global crude supply, with output below 1 million barrels per day. Because production is so low, Jefferies believes the latest geopolitical churn is unlikely to change crude prices in the near term, even if trade routes shift. The brokerage says the real impact would be seen only over the

medium term, as US oil majors invest in Venezuelan fields once sanctions are relaxed. Jefferies expects production to rise gradually through 2027 and 2028. If this additional supply is not balanced by output cuts from OPEC+, it could put



historically traded at a discount of around \$5 to \$8 a barrel compared to Brent. In 2012, Reliance had tied up with PDVSA to source about 20% of its daily crude needs from Venezuela. This arrangement ended in 2019 after US sanctions were tightened. Jefferies says that if Washington allows Venezuelan crude to be sold again to global buyers, Reliance could once more secure long-term volumes at discounted rates. This would support its gross refining margins and cash generation, at a time when the stock trades at around 27 times FY24 earnings and about 14.7 times EV to EBITDA. For ONGC, the potential upside is more directly linked to its balance sheet. The company has not received dividends from its Venezuelan ventures for several years. Jefferies estimates that unpaid dues from production at the San Cristobal field are now more than \$500 million. If a US-led restructuring allows cash to be repatriated, ONGC could recover this amount. It could also restart development of the Carabobo asset in the Orinoco Belt, where it holds an 11% equity stake.



Take a walk around a workspace in a large organization, and the chances are, you will encounter employees gathered around foosball tables, furiously typing away while sitting on beanbags or strategizing business growth over a cup of coffee. These are outward signs of what companies are trying to do - make creativity a part of the organization's culture and generate new products, ideas or solutions by creating a relaxed atmosphere at the workplace.

The workforce today has evolved over the last decade or so to be more open to creativity. With a large number of millennials joining the employee population, the needs of the employees are drastically different from those of the previous generations. And this has caused a cultural shift within organizations. The new culture is headed towards fostering creativity to bring out the best in employees. Rigid systems and processes, hierarchies, inflexible policies and linear modes of thinking are slowly being phased out to welcome flat organizations, space for innovation, and a focus on collaboration through creative thinking.

Richard Lobo, SVP, Head HR, Infosys Limited says, "It's easy to examine these outward signs and mistake them for a creative culture. There is nothing a creative workspace can do if the underlying structure does not allow free collaboration across teams. Allowing a creative culture to grow involves both a strong foundation of creative

values as well as a workspace free of constraints to open the mind." So, how are companies dealing with this? He explains, "At Infosys, we have begun the journey towards greater employee engagement and innovation by fostering creative thinking in the spaces of technology and beyond. In 2014, we launched the first crowd-sourcing idea campaign at Infosys called Murmuration. A CEO-driven initiative, employees were encouraged to provide their ideas about our business strategy, and through an inclusive employee-voting mechanism, 10 ideas were shortlisted for consideration from the original pool of 2,650

ideas." Tech giants such as Facebook and Google are already famous for their hack-a-thons - overnight events where employees are asked to ditch their regular work and concentrate on trying out something else within the company. According to Lobo, "These events encourage out-of-the-box thinking and inculcate the culture of rapid problem-solving using technology." Similarly, Infosys has its own global Hackathon, which is currently in its second season, to channel creative thinking among employees. Here, people are able to get

hands-on experience with open source and proprietary software tools and technologies. It also provides a platform for employees to identify and engage with talented designers and developers. To ensure that employees have a holistic professional experience, it is necessary to encourage creativity in leisure spaces as well. With Google being the front runner, companies are now encouraging healthy environment through creatively designed workspaces, world-class sports facilities, recreational rooms, gyms, and even sleep pods for power naps. The workplace has become all the more

dynamic and fast-paced. Invariably because of long shift hours, the office becomes a second home and the colleagues, an extended family. Sabbas Joseph, Director of one of the leading event management companies, Wizcraft shares, "For keeping the dynamism alive, we always host interesting activities that can help the Wizzes (team members) to get to know each other and more importantly, relieve stress. From quizzes to pop up shops, celebrating festivals together to dedicating an entire room with books and a music system for just 'chilling'; I think it's extremely important for companies, especially those that require loads of creativity, to provide an outlet for people to engage and bond with each other as they serve as the best stress antidotes." Companies have realized the importance of innovation and how encouraging creative activities can boost team morale. Venkatramana B, President, Group HR, Landmark Group India asserts that Landmark Group strongly believes in a culture of innovation and over the years has benefitted greatly from employee sourced solutions. He says, "Keeping the creative juices flowing is important for us and we continuously organize activities that encourage out-of-the-box thinking. Play in a Day or Theatre Methodology has been a very successful program for us, where various concepts. Be it business or soft skills, they are explained to employees through theater." He also talks about conducting an interesting engagement activity called Islempix, in which store teams are provided with various Olympic-like tasks and adds, "These activities are not only fun, but also increase employee morale, camaraderie and understanding between team members."

Take frequent breaks to avoid Fatigue at work

If the high pressure and longer work hour is taking a toll on your health lately and if you want to experience better health and increased job satisfaction, regular short breaks are better than longer breaks, suggest experts. Health and fitness specialists are of the opinion that instead of taking a conventional lunch break, smaller breaks throughout the workday replenishes more resources -energy, concentration and motivation. Here are some ways you can steal those moments without compromising on work...

Plan your day in advance

By planning your work activities in advance you get an exact idea of how much work you need to accomplish that day. Spread the work evenly and also plan your free time. "Planning is the key to a life without stress. Even if you have a few surprises at work, you will be well-equipped to handle them," says Dr Amrapali Patil, yoga and wellness expert. She also suggests doing a bit of stretching and destressing exercises during the breaks.

Seek assistance

If you feel the task at hand is too much for you to handle alone, ask your colleagues to help out. There is no harm in seeking help from your co-workers. Taking too much work and not able to finish it on time or doing a shoddy job will only impact your reputation. In return, help out others as well on your slack day. This will also help you in building a support system at work which will come handy during crisis.

Do something creative to de-stress

You may feel tempted to rush to the coffee machine every time you think of

Fostering a creative culture in the Workplace



Of course, we all come to office so that we could do work, but other than that there are a few regular things that we all end up doing. They all are so regular that they formed a part of our work routine. Here they are...

Take quite a lot of coffee/chai breaks

It's not just one in the evening, and another towards day end, coffee breaks are integral to our work schedule. In fact, no serious meeting, discussion, brainstorming session, or presentation or just starting work can happen without a cup or two of coffee or chai. And, some of these breaks are taken without anyone, just to for some self assessment time or just to break from the work monotony.

Gossip and bitch

No, we don't do it on purpose, it is just the way every workplace functions. Some people are happy and some are not. Happy people generally gossip about how inefficient

the others are and also try to understand why the others are not so happy. While the not so happy ones bitch about the one's who are happy, thinking that the grass is simpler greener on their side.

Read bizarre stuff while researching

Research is a pivotal part of every job profile, and all that research work is usually done online. However, while we are trying to some serious finding out on important stuff, we tend to lose track and go about reading fun and bizarre things by opening one link from another.

Have several non-productive days

This is something we all do, but never accept of doing it. There are days when we are completely non-productive and spend hours doing absolutely nothing. However, we start the day by thinking that we are going to finish a good amount of work, but end it completely being unproductive.

