

# AKHAND BHARAT SANDESH

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UNIQUE GIFT OF KRIYAYOGA ASHRAM AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE TO GIVE IMPETUS TO WORLD BUILDING AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

## Briefs

LUCKNOW

### Bomb threat disrupts IndiGo flight

An IndiGo flight from Delhi to Bagdogra in West Bengal carrying 222 passengers made an emergency landing at the Lucknow airport on Sunday after a handwritten note on a tissue paper bearing the words "Plane mein bomb" (bomb on the plane) was found in the aircraft, police said. The airline said that the plane was "diverted" to Lucknow after a "security threat" was detected on board. All passengers, including eight infants, and seven crew members were safely evacuated, officials said.

GUWAHATI

### Assam CM leaves for Davos

Assam is set to make history on the global economic stage as Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma leaves for Davos, Switzerland, to participate in the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting from January 19 to 23. With this visit, Sarma becomes the first Assamese Chief Minister to attend the prestigious global summit, marking a significant moment in the State's economic and diplomatic journey. The invitation to Assam, extended by the Union government, places the State alongside some of India's most industrially advanced regions at one of the world's most influential platforms for dialogue on economics, development and global cooperation.

PATNA

### Tejashwi may be RJD's working prez

Leader of Opposition in Bihar assembly Tejashwi Yadav is likely to be appointed RJD's working president in view of party chief Lalu Prasad's health condition. A decision to that effect may be taken in the RJD's national executive meeting to be held on January 25. Tejashwi's possible elevation to the post of RJD's working president will come at a time when he is facing challenges politically.

## ASSAM SHINING | Ahead of polls, Modi boosts 'Look East' policy by announcing infrastructure initiatives worth over ₹6,950 cr

# PM paves way for new corridor in Kaziranga

GUWAHATI

Calling Kaziranga "more than a National Park — it is the soul of Assam and a priceless jewel of India's biodiversity," Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday performed the bhoomi puja of the Kaziranga Elevated Corridor Project, a major infrastructure initiative worth over Rs 6,950 crore, at Kaliabor in Nagaon district in Assam.

The project involves the four-laning of the Kaliabor-Numaligarh section of National Highway-715 and includes a 35-kilometre elevated wildlife corridor designed to allow the free movement of animals beneath the highway, while ensuring smooth and safe vehicular traffic above.

"Every visit to Assam fills me with joy," Modi said, describing the state as a land of bravery, talent and cultural richness. Referring to his participation a day earlier in the Bagurumba Dwhou festival in Guwahati, he praised the Bodo community's daughters for creating a new record with the participation of over 10,000 performers. Highlighting Kaliabor's historical significance, the Prime Minister recalled that it was from this region that Lachit Borpuhan planned the strategy to defeat



Prime Minister Narendra Modi looks at a model of Kaziranga Elevated Corridor during its foundation stone-laying ceremony, in Assam's Nagaon district. Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and CM Himanta Biswa Sarma accompanied him.

## 'Cong handed over land to infiltrators'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday slammed the Congress, accusing the party of handing over Assam's land to infiltrators for votes during its rule in the northeastern state. Modi, while addressing a rally here on the second day of his visit to poll-

bound Assam, said infiltration "kept increasing" during the Congress rule in the state for decades, with illegal immigrants "encroaching upon forests, animal corridors and traditional institutions". "The BJP government is protecting Assam's identity and culture by evicting

infiltrators who encroached land,' he asserted. 'Infiltrators are disturbing the demographic balance, attacking culture, snatching jobs from the poor and youth, and fraudulently occupying land in tribal areas,' the PM said.

## Connectivity boost with two new trains

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma said the elevated corridor would reduce travel time between Upper Assam and Guwahati by at least one hour, offering relief to daily commuters, traders and tourists.

Meanwhile, the two Amrit Bharat Express trains flagged off by the Prime Minister are expected to significantly strengthen rail connectivity.

The Dibrugarh-Gomti Nagar Amrit Bharat Express will cover 1,894 km in about 42 hours.

the Mughal forces. He said the victory was not merely military but a symbol of Assam's pride, unity and self-confidence. From being a strategic centre during the Ahom era, Kaliabor is now emerging as a vital hub of connectivity and development, he added.

## Never wished to cause pain: Rahman after remarks row

NEW DELHI

After the backlash following his recent comments on alleged "communal" bias in the Hindi film industry, noted music composer **AR Rahman** shared a video post on his social media on Sunday, saying "intentions can sometimes be misunderstood".

"I have never wished to cause pain, and I hope my sincerity is felt," the 59-year-old composer said in a post on his Instagram handle.

"Music has always been 'the way to connect, celebrate and honour India's culture', he said, adding: 'India is my inspiration, my teacher and my home. I understand that intentions can sometimes be misunderstood. But my purpose has always been to uplift, honour and serve through music,'" he said in the video.



"I feel blessed to be Indian, which enables me to create a space which always allows freedom of expression and celebrates multicultural voices. From nurturing Jhalaa, presented at the WAVES summit in front of the honourable Prime Minister and Rooh-e-Noor, to collaborating with the young Naga musicians, to creating a string orchestra, to mentoring the Sunshine orchestra, also building Secret Mountain, India's first multicultural virtual band and the honour of scoring Ramayana, alongside Hans Zimmer. Each journey has strengthened my purpose," he added.

## TMC MP Yusuf Pathan visits killed migrant worker's home

KOLKATA

TMC MP from Murshidabad Yusuf Pathan on Sunday visited the residence of a migrant labourer from Beldanga whose unnatural death in Jharkhand earlier this week triggered mob violence in the West Bengal town and pledged his support to the victim's family.

Pathan met the parents of 30-year-old Alauddin Sheikh, whose body was found hanging at his shelter in the neighbouring state and brought to his native village in Beldanga on Friday.

"I strongly deplore the harassment and attacks on poor Bengali-speaking migrant workers from Murshidabad and other parts of Bengal



TMC leader Yusuf Pathan speaks to the media regarding the lynching of a migrant labourer in Jharkhand, in Murshidabad on Sunday.

who go outside the state in search of livelihood," Pathan told reporters after meeting the family.

"Our party, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, party national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee and other MPs and MLAs are taking up the issue with the administration of respective states. We

## Bus with wedding guests overturns in J'khand, 9 die

LATEHAR

At least nine people, including five women, were killed and over 80 others injured after a bus carrying wedding guests overturned in Jharkhand's Latehar district on Sunday, police said.

The accident occurred at Orsa Bangladara valley under Mahuadanr police station limits.

"A bus carrying a marriage party was coming from Balrampur district in Chhattisgarh for a wedding at Mahuadanr in Latehar. The bus overturned, and five people died on the spot. Among them, four were women. The injured were taken to a hospital," Superintendent of Police Kumar Gaurav told PTI.

Two persons died during treatment in hospital, another official said.



In a post on X, Chief Minister Hemant Soren asked the Latehar deputy commissioner to provide appropriate medical facilities to the injured.

Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Vipin Kumar Dubey said 60 injured were admitted to Mahuadanr community health centre and over 20 at a private hospital.

"Thirty-two people, who are serious, are being referred to RIMS Ranchi for better treatment," he said.

Six of the deceased were identified as Reshanti Devi (35), Prema Devi (37), Sita Devi (45), Sonamati Devi (55), Sukhna Bhuiyan (40) and Vijay Bhuiyan. Identification of three others is underway, Dubey said. The bus driver, Vikas Pathak, said around 90 passengers were on the bus.

## Need to erase caste from mind to end discrimination: RSS chief

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief **Mohan Bhagwat** has said that if caste discrimination is to be eliminated from social practice, then caste must first be erased from the mind.

In the past, caste was linked to profession and work, but later, it became entrenched in society and led to discrimination,



tion. Bhagwat said on Saturday at the Jan Sangoshthi

organised here as part of the centenary year of the RSS, where he held an interaction with members of the public.

Prant Sanghchalak Anil Bhalerao was also present on stage.

Addressing the caste system

issue, Bhagwat appealed to people to remove it from their minds.

"To end this discrimination, one must eradicate caste from the mind. If this is done honestly, caste discrimination will be eradicated within 10 to 12 years," he said.

Responding to questions from the audience, Bhagwat said the Sangh aims to lead India to its ultimate glory along with society.

## Man backed out of terror plot due to apple harvest

NEW DELHI/SRINAGAR

Investigations into the "white collar" terror module busted after the recent car bombing near Red Fort showed that the mastermind Dr Umar-un-Nabi had attempted to recruit a second suicide bomber but could not succeed as he backed out of the terror plot citing the need to help his family during the apple harvest, officials said on Sunday.

The Srinagar Police and the NIA have uncovered a parallel terror module orchestrated by Nabi, the man who was driving the explosive-laden vehicle that detonated outside the historic Red Fort on November 10, killing over 12 people.

Interrogations of the arrested suspects have high-

lighted recruitment tactics used by the doctor-turned-terrorist, leading to the nabbing of a Shopian resident, Yasir Ahmed Dar, by the NIA.

The officials said Nabi had successfully radicalised Dar as a potential suicide bomber, but during a meeting in

August last year, he backed out at the last minute, citing the "apple harvest season" and repairs at home as reasons.

According to the officials, Dar had been in contact with Nabi since 2023 and he admitted that Nabi's professional status as a medical doctor played a significant role in his influence.

The name of Dar, a school dropout, had surfaced earlier in investigations when one of his friends had joined the ranks of terror groups.

## Scuffle at Prayagraj Magh Mela disrupts Mauni Amavasya snan

LUCKNOW

The Mauni Amavasya snan at the Prayagraj Magh Mela was marred by controversy on Sunday after a confrontation between the disciples of Shankaracharya Swami Avimukteshwaranand and senior state officials escalated into a scuffle, forcing the seer to return without taking a holy dip.

Trouble erupted when police stopped the rath and palanquin of Swami Avimukteshwaranand as he was proceeding towards the



Sangam. A heated argument between his followers and Uttar Pradesh Home Secretary Mohita Gupta, along with police personnel, soon turned physical, creating chaos at the mela site.

Following the incident, the Shankaracharya returned midway and later reached his

camp, where he sat on a dharna. He said he would not take a dip in the Ganga unless the administration escorted him to the site with respect.

Prayagraj District Magistrate Manish Kumar Verma said the seer had arrived in a palanquin without prior permission.

## 'Nitish silence over NEET aspirant's death criminal'

PATNA

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Sunday made a scathing attack on Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar over suspected rape and death of a NEET aspirant and other criminal incidents across the state, and alleged that CM's silence on them was criminal.

Claiming that the funeral of Bihar law and order was complete, RJD leader wrote on X, "The corrupt system and machine-made double-engine NDA government has become a reliable tool for oppressors, corrupt individuals, criminals, and rapists.

The insensitive Nitish government in Bihar, formed through vote-buying, is perpetrating atrocities on minor girls, female students, daughters, and women across the entire state. Because these are atrocities sustained by those in power, the government's key figures are maintaining a hypocritical silence on these spine-chilling horrific incidents."

"The funeral of Bihar's law and order has already taken place. The CM's silence is criminal. Even media professionals might not recall when the Chief Minister last engaged in dialogue with the media," Tejashwi alleged.

## CBI summons Vijay again in stampede case

CHENNAI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has issued a fresh summons to Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) leader Vijay, directing him to appear once again in New Delhi on Monday in connection with the probe into the Karur stampede. The case relates to a political campaign held in Karur on September 27, 2025, when Vijay was campaigning for TVK. During the event, a massive crowd gathered, leading to a deadly stampede that claimed 41 lives.

## 2 more Naxals killed on 2nd day of Bijapur op; toll hits 6

BIJAPUR

A day after four Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, two more Maoist cadres were neutralised during the same operation in the region on Sunday, said police.

The latest exchange of fire occurred in the morning in the forested hills of the district's north-western region, where a joint team of security forces has been conducting an anti-Naxalite operation, Bijapur Superintendent of Police Jitendra Yadav said.

Four Maoists were killed during the same operation on Saturday. They were identified

as senior cadre Dilip Vedja, who was a divisional committee member, area committee members Madvi Kosa and Lakkhi Madkam, and party member Radha Metta.

All four were active in the National Park Area Committee of the Maoists, the SP said.

The identity of the two Maoists killed on Sunday is yet to be ascertained, he added.

Personnel from the Special Task Force (STF) and District Reserve Guard (DRG), both police units, and CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action), an elite group of the CRPF, are involved in the operation.

## offgrid

# With lions on its armrests, a new throne for Yogi



LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and Gorakshpeeth Mahant Yogi Adityanath will now sit on a distinctive cedarwood chair featuring sculpted lions on its armrests, a handcrafted piece prepared in Uttarakhand and presented to him on the occasion of Makar Sankranti.

The chair was gifted by Uttarakhand Minister of State (retired Colonel) Ajay Kothiyal,

who travelled to Gorakhpur to personally hand it over. It has been made using leftover deodar wood from the Kedarnath reconstruction project, giving it a strong spiritual and cultural link with the Himalayan shrine.

The lion figures carved on both armrests symbolise strength and authority, while the backrest carries intricate designs inspired by the traditional architecture of Uttarakhand's temples. Saffron

fabric, Yogi Adityanath's preferred colour, has been used in the upholstery.

Colonel Kothiyal said the idea was to put the remaining sacred cedarwood from the Kedarnath project to meaningful use at a holy place. The design was prepared by architect Krishna Kudiyal after studying temple architecture in Uttarakhand and was executed by traditional wood artisans from Kota village near Chakrata. The craftsmen took

about 15 days to complete the chair, incorporating elements of Mahasu Devta temple woodcraft.

The chair was presented to Yogi Adityanath in his capacity as Mahant of Gorakshpeeth and has been installed in the main hall of the Gorakhnath Temple. The natural fragrance of cedarwood is also spreading through the hall.

Yogi Adityanath is originally from Panchur village in the Yamkeshwar block of

Uttarakhand's Pauri district, adding a personal connect to the gift.

Colonel Kothiyal played a key role in the Kedarnath reconstruction after the 2013 disaster. He later entered politics, contested the 2022 Uttarakhand Assembly elections and subsequently joined the BJP. He currently holds Minister of State rank. Architect Krishna Kudiyal is an alumnus of The Doon School and IIT Roorkee.





# Bhandara Organized at Girinar Baba Camp on Mauni Amavasya, Devotees Throng the Venue



Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** On the auspicious occasion of Mauni Amavasya, a grand Bhandara (community feast) was organized on Sunday at the Swami Girinar Baba camp located in the Magh Mela area. A large number of devotees arrived and partook of the prasad (blessed food). Bhairav ??Baba Maharaj, a devoted disciple of Girinar Baba, who was present at the camp, said that organizing the Bhandara is an

old tradition of the camp. Whether it is the Magh Mela or the Kumbh Mela, the Bhandara is organized daily for the entire month. During this time, devotees from various parts of the country visit the camp. He said that disciples from Chitrakoot, Lucknow, Fatehpur, Jhansi, Kanpur, Banda, Mahoba, Ujjain, Jabalpur, Varanasi, and Prayagraj, among other places, stay at the camp set up by the ashram for a month, take a dip in the Ganges, and partake of



the prasad prepared daily. After the Magh Mela ends, all the



devotees return to their respective homes. Bhairav ??Baba Maharaj said that this Bhandara is being organized through the

generosity of disciple Shri Ram Purwar. This event is not new, but has been going on continuously for the past 30 years.

## Mouni Amavasya: A Grand Confluence of Faith, the Great Festival Concludes Successfully Thanks to Police Vigilance

### Administration claims 45.2 million people took a dip of faith in the Sangam

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj:** The auspicious bathing ritual of Mouni Amavasya, under the aegis of Magh Mela 2026, concluded successfully on Sunday with devotion, faith, and discipline. From the early hours of Brahma Muhurta, a sea of devotees thronged the Sangam banks. Millions of devotees took a holy dip in the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and the invisible Saraswati, earning religious merit. The active participation and vigilance of the police administration were clearly visible in ensuring the successful completion of the grand festival. Police personnel remained fully alert from the ??? area to the main roads of the city. Crowd management, traffic control, lost and found centers, deployment of women police personnel, and surveillance through drones and CCTV cameras further strengthened the arrangements.

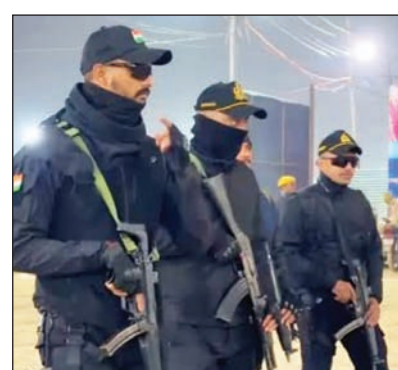


**Administrative Staff Present** On the occasion of the Mouni Amavasya bath, all the respected officers of the Mela administration were present at the site throughout the day. Senior police officers, administrative officers, and Mela magistrates continuously toured the area, reviewing the arrangements. Quick response teams, health department teams, and ambulance services were also fully active to deal with any emergency situation.

**Devotees Applaud the Arrangements** Devotees from India and abroad praised the security and arrangements. Due to cleanliness, drinking water facilities, lighting arrangements, and smooth arrangements at the ghats, devotees did not face any inconvenience. Sadhus, saints, Kalpavasis, and devotees performed bathing, charity, and worship in a peaceful atmosphere.



**A Wonderful Confluence of Faith and Discipline** On Mouni Amavasya, a wonderful example of faith and discipline was witnessed at the Magh Mela. With the coordination of the administration and the police, this massive event concluded without any major incident. The influx and outflow of devotees continued until late evening, which was managed in a controlled manner. The administration stated that the cooperation of the general public and the vigilance of the police and administration played a crucial role in the successful organization of Magh Mela 2026, making this holy festival historical and memorable.



## Police personnel stopped the former IG's car by setting up barricades; an argument ensued at the barricade, but the former IG kept smiling

Akhand Bharat Sandesh

**Prayagraj.** Due to the strict security arrangements at the Magh Mela, arguments between the police and the general public continued throughout the day. In this sequence, former IG of Prayagraj zone, Kavindra Pratap Singh, also came under the purview of the police's strictness. Kavindra Pratap Singh, currently the president of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (Kashi province), was trying to enter the fair area from in front of the Alop Shankari temple in his Innova car, but the police personnel deployed at the spot stopped his vehicle by



setting up barricades. Despite the driver introducing the former IG, the constable refused to let the vehicle proceed, citing the rules. It is reported that after crossing one barricade, a constable deployed under the bridge stopped his car again.

After this, K.P. Singh himself got out of the vehicle and introduced himself, saying that he had previously managed

the fair arrangements and was going to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad camp. To this, the constable clearly stated that everyone has to follow the established system. During this time, the former IG was seen smiling. After some time, other police personnel arrived at the spot and recognized him, after which the barricades were removed. Later, the concerned constable also saluted him. Reacting to the entire incident, Kavindra Pratap Singh said that the police personnel were doing their duty. Such situations arise due to the huge crowd in the fair area, but security arrangements are necessary.

Prayagraj

**On the auspicious occasion of Mauni Amavasya, devotees associated with the Girinar Baba camp in the Magh Mela area took a dip of faith in the Sangam during the Brahma Muhurta early Sunday morning. A large number of devotees gathered for the holy bath during the Brahma Muhurta, creating an atmosphere of devotion and reverence throughout the area. The devotees performed the ritualistic Ganga bath and earned merit. Following this, prayers were offered at the camp and prasad (offerings) were distributed. During this time, the saints and devotees of**



Girnar Ashram gave a message of dharma, service, and adherence to Sanatan traditions.

It is noteworthy that during the Magh Mela, the

Girnar Baba camp has become a major center of faith and service for devotees,

where bathing, meditation, and community meals are organized daily.



# Direct transfer of grant amount of Rs 21.19 crore to 2119 beneficiaries of Ghazipur under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) 2.0.

## The program was telecast live and watched and heard at the Collectorate Auditorium in Ghazipur



**Akhand Bharat Sandesh**

**Ghazipur.** Under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban 2.0, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath directly transferred a grant amount of Rs 2,000 crore to the bank accounts of 2 lakh beneficiaries in the state from Indira Gandhi Pratishthan, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow. The program was telecast live and watched and heard at the Collectorate Auditorium in

Ghazipur. In the program, Hon'ble Member of Legislative Council Vishal Singh Chanchal, Hon'ble Rajya Sabha MP Dr. Sangeeta Balwant, Municipal Chairperson Sarita Agarwal, and BJP District President Omprakash Rai transferred a grant amount of Rs 100,000 per beneficiary, totaling Rs 21.19 crore, to the bank accounts of 2119 beneficiaries of the district under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-

Urban 2.0. Under the ambitious Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) 2.0 of the Uttar Pradesh Government and the Government of India, the government is committed to ensuring that no eligible person remains without a house. Hon'ble Chief Minister is fully committed to this. In the program, an amount of Rs 1,00,000 (one lakh rupees) was transferred directly to the bank accounts of 2119 beneficiaries of the district as the



first installment. The honorable public representatives distributed certificates to the beneficiaries for the transfer of funds and highlighted the objectives of the scheme, stating that the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) 2.0 is a strong step towards providing pucca houses to urban poor and eligible families. They urged the beneficiaries to utilize the funds properly and complete the construction of their houses in a timely man-

ner. Chief Revenue Officer Ayush Chaudhary said that the implementation of the scheme in the district should be done with transparency and speed, and the work should be of high quality. He said that eligible beneficiaries should receive the benefits on time, and anyone eligible in the district will be benefited. A survey will also be conducted for this purpose. During the program, necessary information related to

housing approval/fund transfer was also provided to the beneficiaries.

On this occasion, Additional District Magistrate (Finance and Revenue) Dinesh Kumar, Deputy Collector/Project Officer, DUDA Vinod Joshi, Executive Officer of Ghazipur Municipality Dharendra Rai, BJP District General Secretary Praveen Singh, and other officers were present.

## Blanket Distribution in the Presence of MLC Chanchal Ji

**Akhand Bharat Sandesh**

**Ghazipur.** A grand blanket distribution program was organized today in Chakbakar Rajela Gadesar village under Mohammadabad development block of the district. The program was graced by the dignified presence of the Chief Guest, Vishal Singh Chanchal Ji (MLC). In this program, organized with the aim of providing relief to the needy during the biting cold, blankets were distributed to poor and help-



less families. There was an atmosphere of enthusiasm throughout the area during the program, and a large crowd of villagers was seen. The Chief Guest said that "Public service is the greatest religion. It is the responsibility of all of us to help the poor, needy, and helpless people." He appreciated the initiative of the village head and the organizing committee, saying that such programs strengthen the spirit of brotherhood and cooperation in society. The organ-

izers of the program, Village Head Chandra Kala Tiwari and Village Head Representative Sujit Tiwari, warmly welcomed the Chief Guest and expressed their gratitude to all those who contributed to making the program a success. A large number of villagers, including Akhilesh Singh, Bhupendra Singh, Golu Dubey, Bholu Pandey, Triloki Pandey, and Hare Ram, were present at the program and participated in making it a historic event.

**Munish Tripathi Book "Ambedkar, Hindutva and India" Released**

**Dibiyapur**

The book "Ambedkar, Hindutva and India" authored by Dibiyapur-based writer, historian and columnist Munish Tripathi was formally released at the International Book Fair held at Bharat Mandapam, Delhi. The release ceremony witnessed the presence of renowned scholars, intellectuals and a large audience of readers and listeners. A discussion session on the book was also organized on the occasion. The chief guest of the programme was Amitabh Agnihotri.

## Saadat Police's Swift Action: Two Rape Accused Arrested in Encounter Within 12 Hours, Illegal Weapons Recovered

**Akhand Bharat Sandesh**

**Ghazipur:** The Saadat police team of the district, in a police encounter, injured and arrested two notorious criminals involved in a rape incident within 12 hours. Two illegal .315 bore pistols, two spent cartridges, and three live cartridges were recovered from their possession. In a campaign against crime and criminals, on January 18, 2026, the Station House Officer (SHO) of Saadat, along with his team, was patrolling the area when they received information from an informant that the criminals who had committed the rape in the ruins near Saadat station were present in the police station area with the intention of committing another crime, and could be apprehended if quick action was taken. Based on this information, the SHO of Saadat and his police team attempted to surround and arrest the criminals. Near Savas Mod, seeing themselves surrounded, the criminals opened fire on the police



team with the intention of killing them. The police team, in self-defense, fired back, injuring the criminals in their legs. They were immediately sent to the CHC Saadat, Ghazipur for treatment, keeping in mind humanitarian considerations. A case has been registered regarding the police encounter and the recovery of weapons, and legal action is being taken. The encounter team/arresting police team included Station House Officer Saadat, Vagish Vikram Singh, and his team.

## Farmers' Roar from the National Deliberation Camp

### Letter of Demands sent to the Prime Minister, 10 Major Demands from MSP Guarantee to Loan Waiver

**Akhand Bharat Sandesh**

**Prayagraj.** Following a four-day national deliberation camp organized by the Bharatiya Kisan Union in Prayagraj, a detailed letter of demands concerning the problems of farmers, laborers, youth, tribals, and the unemployed has been sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The camp, held from January 15 to 18, 2026, saw representatives from across the country engage in intensive discussions on issues related to agriculture, employment, labor, electricity, disaster management, and the federal structure. The letter states that farmers and laborers, considered the backbone of the country, are currently facing the deepest crisis. If concrete decisions are not taken in time, it will directly impact the country's food security and social balance. Demand for Legal Guarantee of MSP The farmers' union has demanded that laws be enacted in Parliament and state assemblies to guarantee a Minimum Support Price (MSP) of 1.5 times the cost of production (C2+50%) for all crops, along with guaranteed government procurement. They have also demanded the opening of



government markets in all blocks and an increase in the moisture limit from 17 to 22 percent, considering untimely rains. A demand has also been raised to fix the State Advised Price (SAP) for sugarcane at Rs. 500 per quintal and to ensure payment of arrears with interest.

**Loan Waiver and Free Electricity as Key Issues**

The letter of demands includes a comprehensive loan waiver scheme for farmers and agricultural laborers, a ban on the arbitrary practices of microfinance institutions, and interest-free loans. It also demands the withdrawal of the Electricity Bill 2025, a ban on the privatization of electricity and smart meters, and free electricity for domestic consumers up to 300 units and for agri-

cultural purposes. **Emphasis on Employment, Wages, and Social Security**

The demands include the withdrawal of all four labor codes, a ban on the privatization of public sector undertakings, fixing the minimum wage at Rs. 26,000 per month, and a monthly pension of Rs. 10,000 for unorganized sector and agricultural laborers. The letter also calls for ensuring 200 days of work and a daily wage of Rs. 700 under MNREGA.

**Objections to Disaster, Fertilizer, and Trade Policies**

The farmers' union has demanded that the devastating floods and landslides be declared a national disaster, that a judicial inquiry be conducted by a sitting Supreme Court

judge, and that substantial compensation be provided to the disaster-affected states. They have also demanded the restoration of fertilizer subsidies, an end to the black marketing of DAP and urea, and opposed the forced imposition of nano-fertilizers. Furthermore, they have demanded the rejection of free trade agreements with the US and other countries that harm the interests of farmers and laborers. Appeal for the Protection of the Federal Structure The charter emphasizes the protection of states' rights, demanding that the states' share in the divisible pool be increased to 60 percent, that the GST law be amended, and that public investment in the agriculture and cooperative sectors be increased.

**Farmers' Union's Warning Message**

Anuj Singh, the youth president of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Indian Farmers' Union), said that if the government does not seriously consider these demands, farmers, laborers, and the youth will be forced to launch a larger movement to protect their rights. He stated that this charter is the voice of the working class of the country, which cannot be ignored.



## Editorial

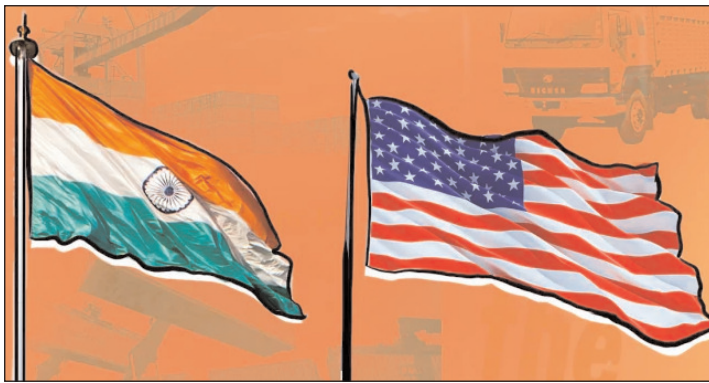
### Priyanka to Sharmila, Kanimozhi to Misa—KCR’s daughter Kavitha is fighting a bigger battle

**KKavitha**, daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, is hurting. She began her 72-hour hunger strike Monday, demanding 42 per cent reservation for backward classes in jobs, educational institutions and local bodies. Her party, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi, is staying away from it. While she is being trolled and ridiculed by political rivals as also party colleagues, nobody has come to her defense. Even her brother and the party’s working president, KT Rama Rao, hasn’t said a word. To make matters worse, she was dropped as honorary president of the Telangana Boggu Ghani Karmika Sangham (TBGKS), a BRS-affiliated trade union. Kavitha, a BRS legislator, has accused “party insiders” of encouraging those attacking her and also questioned the silence of BRS “brothers”. So, what’s happening in the BRS’ ‘first family’? In August last year when she came out of Tihar jail on bail in the alleged liquor scam, her family was waiting for her outside. With tears in her eyes, she kissed her brother KT Rama Rao’s hand. A year later, she is looking isolated and abandoned by the family. The controversy surrounding her ‘letter bomb’ refuses to die down. Not because her father is upset about the letter, in which she expressed disagreement with his way of functioning, but because of how her party has reacted — by virtually abandoning her. Party insiders tell me that while the father did call the daughter “three or four times”, the brother has cut off all communication with her. These developments are being interpreted in political circles as a full-blown succession war between Kavitha and KTR, with cousin Harish Rao keeping his ambitions in abeyance and pledging allegiance to KTR. But it’s not as simple as that. Party insiders close to the BRS first family tell me that the man behind Kavitha’s current woes is not her brother. The one who triggered this storm is someone party circles are calling the ‘VK Pandian of Telangana’ — a reference to the former IAS officer in Odisha whose “control” over ex-CM Naveen Patnaik alienated Biju Janata Dal (BJD) leaders and eventually led to Patnaik’s fall from power. In the case of the BRS’ family feud, it’s not an ex-IAS officer. It’s a close relative and KCR’s trusted confidant who, insiders say, has gained ‘control’ over the former CM. And it’s this person that Kavitha has taken up the cudgels against. She has been hurting ever since her letter to KCR was “leaked” — a letter in which she questioned her father for being soft on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during his speech marking the BRS’ 25th anniversary. She said this gave the impression that the BRS and BJP could work together in the future. The letter also flagged other concerns about the way her party leadership was functioning. It was ‘leaked’ while she was in the US visiting her elder son. Though she had sent the letter before leaving, many might find it strange that she chose to write rather than speak to her father, possibly a sign of a rift. The fact, however, is that she has been writing hand-written letters — not emails, which KCR doesn’t use — for years. The usual practice was that she would hand over a letter during a meeting, which he would read and respond to later. This time, Kavitha sent the letter through her mother, as she was sick and didn’t want to risk infecting her elderly father. But when the letter surfaced just before her return to India, she was furious.

She apparently saw a pattern — and a familiar hand, someone she always suspected of working against her. Party insiders say she suspects her cousin Joginapally Santhosh Kumar to be behind the leak. Santhosh is her mother Shobha’s sister’s son, who is like KCR’s “nurse and PA” who stays with him 24x7, taking care of him — much like Pandian did with Patnaik. KCR has given him untrammelled clout.



## India sees the value of US defence ties, but MAGA-style tariffs threaten long-term stability



India’s defence relationship with the US has been maturing over the last decade — from cautious engagement to structured partnerships, driven by shared strategic interest. What was once a purely transactional partnership, a buyer/seller relationship involving specific procurement contracts, has now assumed a pivotal role in the global geopolitical calculus. However, this evolving alliance is under stress, especially in light of President Donald Trump’s sudden imposition of a 25 per cent tariff on Indian exports, with additional as yet unspecified ‘penalties’ for importing oil from Russia. Yet even as economic ties fray, the depth of security cooperation, and the numerous formal agreements that sustain it, offers India both an opportunity and a challenge. The key question is whether India can deepen its defence cooperation with the US, without ceding its strategic autonomy or aligning it with shifting political agendas. At the heart of India-US defence ties lies an architecture of agreements, joint exercises, and co-development initiatives that extend well beyond symbolism. The signing of foundational accords such as COMCASA (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement), BECA (Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement), and the Industrial Security Annex have facilitated real-time intelligence sharing, logistical interoperability, and protected access to cutting-edge military technology. These treaties, once perceived as

intrusive or incompatible with India’s traditional non-alignment posture, are now actively deployed to bolster maritime surveillance, domain awareness, and air defence capabilities. Operational collaboration has also deepened. India’s acquisition of MQ-9B Predator drones, MH-60R multi-role naval helicopters, and the proposed co-production of GE-414 engines for indigenous fighter jets signal not just defence modernisation, but also a convergence in regional threat assessments, especially vis-à-vis China’s assertive posture in the Indo-Pacific. Initiatives such as INDUS-X and iCET are moving beyond procurement to include co-development, startup incubation, and collaborative research in emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Quantum Computing (QC), and Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS). These engagements point to a long-term strategic partnership rather than short-term expediency. However, there is a fly in the ointment. The July 30 announcement of 25 per cent US tariffs on Indian exports, couched vaguely in terms of India’s ongoing

defence and energy cooperation with Russia, reveals a recurring dilemma: how stable and reliable is US strategic posture and unconditional support when tested by domestic political imperatives or ideological shifts like MAGA? The tariffs, affecting nearly three-quarters of India’s exports, suggest that economic retaliation may be used as a convenient foreign policy tool for strategic coercion. That the current proposed tariffs were triggered not by any rupture in defence ties, but by dissatisfaction over India’s continued import of Russian oil and military platforms, underscores the complexity of American reliability. This tension exposes the somewhat hypocritical duality of US diplomacy, in that it seeks convergence on strategic goals while retaining coercive tools to enforce alignment. For India, such moves raise critical questions and strike at the heart of its policy of strategic autonomy. Can the US-India defence partnership flourish in an environment where India’s broader economic or foreign policy decisions invite punitive countermeasures? Will access to US platforms and supply chains be withdrawn

or restricted, especially in times of conflict, if India continues to pursue a multi-pronged foreign policy that includes countries like Russia and Iran, which the US views as enemies? The answer probably lies in separating the institutional depth of security cooperation from the dynamic volatility arising out of political posturing. Unlike trade, which is often driven by electoral considerations and domestic imperatives like MAGA, defence collaboration is sustained by bureaucratic processes, institutional memory, and mutual threat recognition. The US Defence and State Departments, and India’s Ministries of Defence and External Affairs, operate on longer timelines and are often shielded, though not immune, from the ups and downs arising out of political turnarounds. For example, platforms like the Reciprocal Defence Procurement (RDP), offset clauses, and co-development agreements are more likely to endure and evolve, perhaps with some tweaks, than suffer abrupt reversals. The 2+2 dialogue has endured many political hiccups. The MEA’s statement — “This partnership has weathered several transitions and challenges” — reflects the long-term nature of the relationship. India’s recent strategic decisions suggest a pragmatic reading of this duality. While defence cooperation with the US has accelerated, India continues to diversify its military suppliers, including France (Rafale jets), Israel (missile defence), and Russia (S-400 systems).

This hedging reflects India’s understanding that a strategic partnership does not mean strategic dependence. The refusal to proceed with the proposed F-35 acquisition, despite its symbolic value, signals India’s intent to avoid politically sensitive purchases that may jeopardise its diplomatic flexibility or trigger regional escalations. At the same time, India could astutely use its defence commitments as a bargaining tool. By advertising possible future purchases — from Predator drones and GE-414 engines to naval platforms — as strategic inducements, India has levers to secure tariff concessions, obtain market access, and reduce regulatory barriers in trade negotiations with the US. The trade-off is clear. Defence offsets, which require US firms to invest a portion of contract value in India, can be portrayed domestically in the US as job-creating and strategically aligned, softening opposition to trade waivers or procurement reciprocity. Yet this ‘carrot’ strategy can only go so far. US negotiators remain dissatisfied with India’s high tariffs on agriculture, digital localisation policies, and resistance to GM crops, which are seen as barriers to open trade. Even if India were to boost its defence purchases from the US, these unresolved economic grievances will persist. More critically, India’s energy and defence ties with Russia and its refusal to adhere to US-driven sanctions create minefields that defence collaboration alone may not be able to navigate.

### Geopolitical forces beyond New Delhi’s control are at play in Trump’s approach to India

US President Donald Trump reignited trade tensions with India on 30 July, accusing it of imposing “far too high” tariffs and threatening a 25 per cent levy starting 1 August. Despite ongoing efforts toward a mini trade deal and a \$500 billion trade target by 2030, Trump’s obsession with trade reciprocity and a “messianic” zeal to correct any trade imbalance overnight with partner countries, looms large over the relationship. He also criticised India’s defense and oil ties with Russia, hinting at potential penalties. Still, in typical Trump fashion, he later softened his stance, saying India was now willing to reduce tariffs “very substantially,” adding, “We’re talking to India now — we’ll see what happens.” That Trump is displeased with a number of allies and partners has almost become a constant fixture in his second term, and India does not enjoy any special privilege. So, there are two ways of looking at the current spat and the low point in the India-US partnership. First, there is a broader geopol-

itics reshaping Trump’s almost pretzelian foreign policy twists. Second, a painful road awaits as Washington-New Delhi negotiations over a mini trade deal whose terms and conditions will remain uncertain, and even if agreed upon, will remain largely ad hoc and piecemeal. Behind Trump’s fresh round of rants and wrath aimed at India lies a broader geopolitical curve in Trump’s foreign and national security policy. In Trump’s first as well second terms, his positive vibe towards President Vladimir Putin of Russia, otherwise an eyesore for America’s western allies, has been relatively more welcomed in India. Compared to the Biden presidency, which was crystal clear on confronting Russia and supporting Ukraine sans conditions, the Trump presidency was more forthcoming on talking to Moscow and more circumscribed in its support for Ukraine. However, of late, amid dwindling prospects of a peace deal with Putin, Trump has taken a U-turn in his approach to the Russia-Ukraine war.

### Trump tariff forces India to shed illusion. Stop conflating status with power

India now faces what can be best described as the Trump pill — a bracing dose of transactional geopolitics and neo-mercantilist tariffs that upend the diplomatic comfort of the past decade. With sweeping 25 per cent tariffs targeting Indian exports, our longstanding belief in strategic autonomy and global goodwill is being challenged by the brutal arithmetic of trade imbalances and national interests. This isn’t just a policy shift; it’s a call to recalibrate how India positions itself economically and diplomatically in a world now shaped by profit-first diplomacy. The newly announced tariffs by the Trump administration pose a direct threat to India’s export competitiveness. Sectors such as electronics, smartphones, automobile parts, and gemstones will be hit hardest. Comparatively, Vietnam faces only 20 per cent tariffs, and economies like Indonesia enjoy relatively lighter penalties. While pharmaceutical products, semiconductors, and critical rare earths remain exempt for now, there is a growing uncertainty about India’s continued access to these carve-outs, particularly as Trump intensifies his focus on bilateral trade “wins.” Further compounding this threat is the ambiguity around secondary sanctions tied to India’s oil imports from Russia. A punitive surcharge, conveyed repeatedly but not yet formalised, could be crippling. As we shall see, this issue is not merely economic — it strikes at the heart of India’s strategic alignment. The stakes for India are high. Without a trade deal with the United States, economic ramifications could be severe. Capital flows may dry up, leading to a weakening rupee. Stock markets are already reflecting investor nervousness, and early estimates suggest India’s GDP could suffer a 0.2–0.5 per cent contraction. Unlike Brazil,

which enjoys a trade surplus with the US, or China, which retains leverage through its monopoly over rare earth elements, India finds itself in a vulnerable middle. India has little immediate leverage in trade. Brazil, for example, will enjoy strategic concessions from Washington, thanks to the US having a trade surplus with it. China, with its iron grip over rare earth supplies, forced the US to capitulate during past confrontations. Meanwhile, Trump has succeeded in strong-arming traditional allies. He finalised a trade agreement with the EU after imposing 25 per cent tariffs on select sectors and billions of dollars promised in investment. He has also coaxed Japan into signing a deal with 15 per cent tariffs and \$550 billion in investments. Likewise, he has already finalised a deal with Indonesia and Vietnam, both with lesser tariffs than India’s. With India, however, talks have hit roadblocks — both economic and geopolitical. The US’ objections to India’s protectionism in agriculture and dairy are longstanding. But the deeper threat comes from Washington’s insistence on penalising Indian oil imports from Russia. Trump’s sudden support for the Blumenthal-Graham bill,

, threatening secondary sanctions on nations buying discounted Russian crude, marks a shift. Initially dismissed due to Trump’s own ambivalence toward Ukraine and open admiration for Vladimir Putin, the bill has reemerged as Trump pivots back toward Europe, leaving India exposed. India’s rise on the global stage in the past decade owed much to its favorable geopolitical moment. As the Indo-Pacific became the centre of global strategic focus, India was cast as a vital counterweight to China. Western powers embraced New Delhi’s role, drawn by its demographic strength, huge market, and democratic credentials.

## Do Chola kings represent a culturally united Hindu India? It’s a modern fantasy

History has rarely been away from the headlines over the last few weeks, whether through the rewriting of NCERT textbooks or PM Modi’s tribute to the Chola dynasty of medieval South India. The coming month will see the millennial celebrations of the 11th-century Chola emperor Rajendra I, specifically of his conquests in Southeast Asia. There is a loud chorus, at least on social media, that the Cholas—and South India in general—haven’t gotten their due in the national historical imagina-

tion. But there’s more going on than meets the eye. The fact is that celebrating the conquests of the Cholas misses the woods for the trees. Rather than encourage a deeper understanding of regional histories, we are instead forcing a remarkable medieval society into today’s culture wars. To understand the recent political bonanza about the Cholas, first we need to understand what they’ve left behind—and the many ways in which we’ve understood this over the decades. Most of what we

know about the Cholas derives from donative inscriptions that adorn the walls of medieval Tamil temples. Interestingly, most Chola-period donative inscriptions were not commissioned by the Chola court, but a broad, shifting spectrum of Tamil-speaking society.

Through these inscriptions, we can see broad social trends. As historians Noboru Karashima, Y Subbarayalu, and James Heitzman have shown, most temple affairs—and, by extension, village affairs—depended on local collectives,

rather than royal officials. These might be collectives of Vellala cultivator families, or Brahmin landlords, or merchants. These collectives, as we’ll see soon, were not mute recipients of royal commandments. Temple donors were fairly diverse in the early 10th century (when the Chola dynasty was rising), sometimes including shepherds and washer-people. Over time, temple activities were steadily taken over by men of elite martial or landed backgrounds, often linked to the Chola court.



## India wants Rs 3 lakh cr in defense manufacturing

**Delhi:** The government wants to produce Rs 3 lakh crore in defence by 2029, strengthening India's standing as a global powerhouse. Now, 65% of defense equipment is made locally, up from 65-70% import dependency. According to the Ministry of Defence, 16 DPSUs, over 430 licensed enterprises, and 16,000 MSMEs boost indigenous production capabilities. "The private sector contributes 21% to total defence production, fostering innovation and efficiency," it said. The government wants to expand defence exports to Rs 50,000 crore by 2029, strengthening India's position as a global manufacturing hub and supporting economic growth. Defence exports rose 32.5% to Rs 21,083 crore in FY 2023-24 from Rs 15,920 crore in FY 2022-23. Indian defence exports increased 21 times from Rs 4,312 crore in



2004-14 to Rs 88,319 crore in 2014-24, demonstrating its growing involvement in the global security sector. India exports defense equipment to over 100 nations, with the US, France, and Armenia buying most in 2023-24. In 2024-25, the Ministry of Defence signed a record 193 contracts worth Rs 2,09,050 crore, nearly doubling the previous record. These include 177 contracts, 92% awarded to the domestic industry for Rs 1,68,922 crore, 81% of the overall contract value. This emphasis on indigenous manufacture supports defence production self-reliance.

### Centre will borrow 8L cr, 54% of the objective

The government plans to borrow Rs 8 lakh crore, 54% of its Rs 14.8 lakh crore FY26 borrowing, in the first half. It didn't front-load the borrowing program to avoid raising rates while the RBI pumped record liquidity into the system. Since the market reported little demand for 30-year and longer bonds, the government announced it would borrow less in FY26. Thus, front-loading of the borrowing program has been avoided due to government (fiscal consolidation without compromising quality of expenditure).

## Kotak highlights the risk in the lending business strategy

**Delhi:** Veteran banker Uday Kotak has expressed worries about the banks business model, pointing out the shrinking gap between deposit and lending rates, ahead of an anticipated rate decrease by the RBI, despite the fact that liquidity is still limited. According to Kotak, leading banks are increasing one-year wholesale deposits by about 8%, which, when accounting for CRR, SLR, deposit insurance, and priority sector lending requirements (but not operational costs), results in a marginal deposit cost of more than 9%. The system as a whole has restrained



growth in low-cost retail deposits (CASA non-wholesale). However, banks are offering home loans at a variable rate of 8.5%. Take out a loan at 8.5% and borrow at 9%, Spread is negative by 0.5%. Additionally, repo rates are probably going to decline. Kotak warned that if the tight deposit situation continues, it may make it difficult for banks to maintain their

business model and asked how they would handle credit and operational expenses. The majority of banks are required to connect their retail floating rate loans to the repo rate. The remarks coincided with a sharp decline in bond yields as investors awaited the RBI's next liquidity injection before its monetary policy committee's decision.

## Bank loan growth drops for eighth straight month in February, RBI data reveals

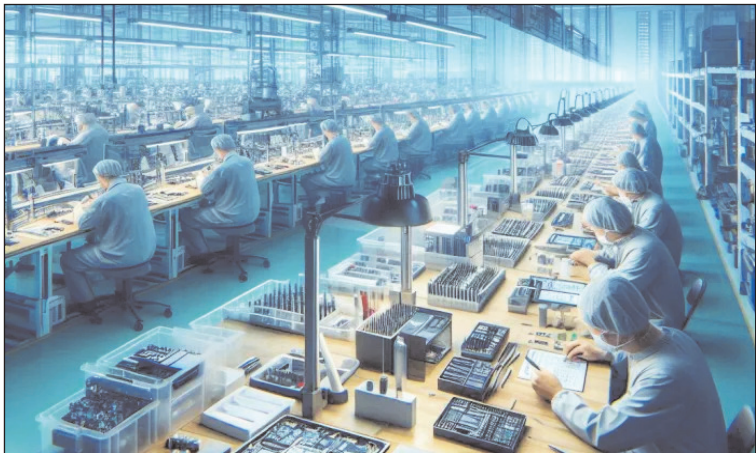
**Delhi:** Central bank statistics revealed that personal and credit card loans fell for the eighth straight month in February due to Reserve Bank of India tougher policies. Last month, banks' credit rose 12% year-over-year, slower than 16.6% a year earlier,

excluding HDFC Bank's merger. Housing Development Finance Corp, Loans rose 11% in February, compared to 20.5% a year earlier, including the merger. In January, loan growth fell to 12.5% excluding the merger and 11.4% including it. Retail

demand for unsecured loans drove strong loan growth for several years in the banking sector. However, in late 2023, the RBI tightened capital requirements for personal, credit card, and non-banking finance company loans. in its Mumbai headquarters.

## Cabinet approves electronic component program

**Delhi:** The Union Cabinet approved a six-year Rs 22,919 crore incentive program for electronic component manufacture. The initiative seeks to increase India's domestic value addition and global value chain participation. The Indian Express originally revealed that the government was developing the system, its costs, and its details. The government wants at least 91,600 direct jobs from the scheme and has tied participating firms' annual payments to job creation. Rs 4.56 lakh crore in production and Rs 59,350 crore in investment are envisaged from the scheme. The government wants to target display modules, sub assembly camera modules,



printed circuit board assemblies, lithium cell enclosures, resistors, capacitors, and ferrites.

These are utilized in cell-phones, laptops, microwave ovens, refrigerators, and toasters. "This scheme will reduce component imports. We must

abandon import substitution and promote exports. After mass production, viability follows. Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said electronics production is \$120 billion and hopes to reach \$500 billion in the next years.

### Gautam Adani Is India's Biggest Wealth Gainer

**Delhi:** According to the 'Hurun Global Rich List 2025', Gautam Adani, Adani Group Chairman, is India's greatest wealth gainer, increasing his net worth by approximately Rs 1 lakh crore. The ranking showed Adani's fortune rising 13%. Second-richest Indian on the global list, his total is Rs 8.4 lakh crore. Meanwhile, Indian billionaire Mukesh Ambani fell off of the top 10 richest list. However, he leads Asia. The Hurun list ranks India third in billionaires. Tesla-SpaceX CEO Elon Musk tops Hurun Global Rich List 2025. India has 284 billionaires, 13 more than previous year.

## Airtel prepaid 5,985 crore spectrum dues but stock remains unchanged



**Delhi:** Bharti Airtel Ltd. shares closed flat after the company and its subsidiary Bharti Hexacom Ltd. prepaid Rs 5,985 crore to the Department of Telecom, fully prepaying the 8.65% high-cost interest liabilities for the 2024 auctions. Airtel subsidiary Network i2i Ltd. voluntarily called and redeemed \$1 billion in Perpetual Notes. BSE Bharti Airtel shares down 0.04% to Rs 1,733. Large cap stock has gained 8.58 percent this year and 42.51% in a year. The market cap of Bharti

Airtel decreased to Rs 9.88 lakh billion. On BSE, 1.11 lakh shares traded for Rs 19.33 crore. Bharti Airtel stock has a one-year beta of 1, indicating average volatility. Technically, Bharti Airtel's RSI is 64.3, indicating it's neither overbought or oversold. The recent payment means Airtel has prepaid Rs 25,981 crore of

high-cost spectrum commitments for the 2025 fiscal year and Rs 66,665 crores overall. The average cumulative liability prepaid interest rate was 9.74%. Airtel had entirely prepaid liabilities with 10%, 9.75%, and 9.3% interest rates. Prepayments were made 7 years before average residual maturities. Airtel prepaid Rs 116,405 crores of scheduled instalments that would have been due on their various dates over the obligations' original lifespan. Airtel's cost of debt on spectrum liabilities.

## The Reserve Bank of India will increase the price for using an ATM from Rs 21 to Rs 23

**Delhi:** News broke from India's central bank. There will be a cost of Rs 23 per transaction for clients using ATM banking services from May 1, 2025. The previous amount was Rs 21 for each transaction. The central bank announced that customers will still be able to use their own bank's ATMs for five free transactions per month, regardless of whether they are financial or not. There are three ATMs in major cities and five in smaller towns where they can use their card for free transactions. According to ET, a two rupee hike to the ATM interchange fee for cash withdrawals has been authorized by the Reserve Bank of India and the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI). The revised fees were



### Greater Noida Authority board authorizes Rs 5,600 crore land acquisition, important projects

**Delhi:** The Greater Noida Authority's 138th Board meeting approved a Rs 5,600 crore budget for 2025-26. Manoj Kumar Singh, Uttar Pradesh Chief Secretary and Authority Chairman, chaired the meeting. Budget priorities include land acquisition, development, and construction. The approved budget allocates Rs 1,400 crore for land acquisition and Rs 1,973 crore for development.

announced to member banks by NPCI and are scheduled to be implemented on May 1, 2025. An increase of Rs 19 for domestic finan-

cial transactions and Rs 7 for non-financial transactions has been agreed by the National Financial Switch Steering Committee.

## Income Tax wants Rs 2,209 crore from Yes Bank

**Delhi:** Union Minister of State for Power Yesso Naik urged state power companies to become more profitable. AI and digital technologies and cost-reflective pricing are crucial for electricity sector financial stability, the Minister said. These steps will help utilities



become financially stable, he said. He also suggested India's Ujwal DISCOM Assurance

Yojana (UDAY) for DISCOM financial turnaround and rehabilitation. The Energy Ministers of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra, top officials from the Central and State governments, State Power Utilities, PFC Ltd., and

REC Ltd. attended the conference. Special invitee TATA Power Distribution, Odisha, shared their best practices and journey to prosperous DISCOMS. Member States actively engaged and presented State DISCOM overviews. They give DISCOMS good

## 1 in 5 Indians with over Rs 5 crore worth plans to relocate overseas



**Delhi:** One in five ultra-rich Indians with a net worth over Rs 25 crore plans to settle abroad for investment opportunities, tax advantages, and greater global connectivity, according to a Kotak Mahindra Bank private banking survey. The first two quarters of 2024-25 survey interviewed 150 ultra-high networth people (UHNIs) and private bankers in 12 cities. EY ordered and validated the findings with industry. For this report, those worth over Rs 25 crore were canvassed.

However, Kotak's private banking division targets individuals worth over Rs 300 crore. Many UHNIs buy abroad property for migration and permanent residency. "Ultra-HNIs are diversifying their portfolios and embracing domestic and global assets, setting the stage for a sig-

nificant increase. Alternative assets and equities are becoming more popular in domestic and international markets. Nearly a third of India's Ultra-HNIs own worldwide assets. With two in three ultra-HNIs planning structured wealth transition, succession planning is crucial.

### JB Chemicals' promoter KKR will sell 10% of the company for 2,6k crore rupees

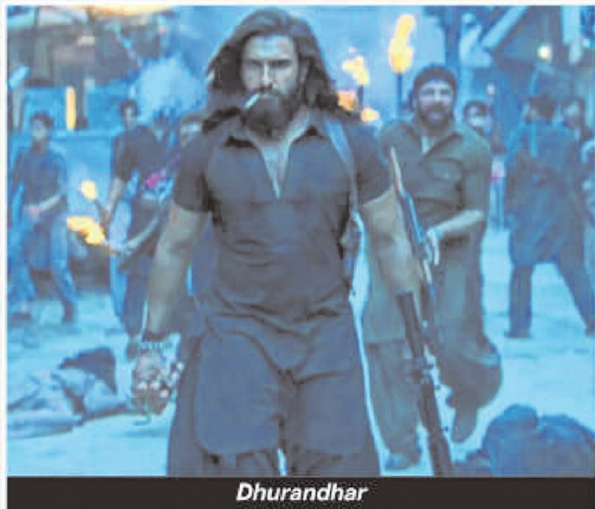
**Delhi:** In a series of block agreements, the promoter of JB Chemicals — Tatu Investment Holdings, a subsidiary of global private equity giant KKR — is selling around 1.6 crore shares, or 10.2% of the firm, for approximately Rs 2,575 crore (\$300 million). According to the deal's term sheet, the minimum price at which the shares can be sold is Rs 1,625—a 5%

reduction to JB Chem's closing price of Rs 1,709 on Wednesday on the NSE. Shareholding reports on the BSE indicate that as of December 31, 2024, KKR owned 53.7% of the pharmaceutical company situated in the city. Midway through 2020, at a share price of Rs 745, the PE giant had taken over the pharmaceutical manufacturer.





Dashavatar



Dhurandhar



Raktabeej 2

## Single-language, massive impact

From *Dhurandhar* to *Raktabeej 2*, here are the top monolingual films that dominated theatres on their own terms

**A**t a time when multilingual releases are often seen as the ultimate marker of success, several monolingual films across languages proved that strong storytelling and cultural rootedness can drive massive box-office numbers on their own. From Gujarat to Bengal, Maharashtra to Punjab, these films became local phenomena, drawing packed theatres and loyal audiences, without relying on nationwide releases.

Hindi cinema saw a content-driven win with *Dhurandhar*,

which continues to perform exceptionally well in global and international markets. Despite not being released in multi-languages, the film's intense narrative, layered performances, flawless casting and gripping subject matter helped it pull audiences to theatres, proving that focused releases can still deliver solid returns.

*Laalo* emerged as a major success in Gujarati cinema, striking a chord with audiences through its emotional depth and relatable storytelling. The film's strong word-of-mouth and cultural connect ensured a steady theatrical run, reaffirming that Gujarati films rooted in local sensibilities continue to thrive at the box office.

In Marathi cinema, *Dashavatar* delivered an impressive theatrical performance. Known for its spiritual and philosophical undertones, the film resonated deeply with Marathi-speaking audiences, turning into a box-office success driven by faith, tradition, and strong storytelling rather than large-scale marketing.

Bengali blockbuster *Raktabeej 2* by Nandita Roy and Shiboprosad Mukherjee, further strengthened

this trend. The film dominated the West Bengal box office with packed houses and sustained collections, showcasing how regional political thrillers can command massive audience interest when rooted in local realities and strong performances.

Punjabi cinema added to the list with the National-award winning, *Godday Godday Cha 2*, which enjoyed a robust theatrical run driven by humour, cultural familiarity, and franchise goodwill. Its success once again highlighted the loyal audience base Punjabi films enjoy within their core markets.

Together, these films underline a crucial shift in Indian cinema, regional films no longer need pan-India launches to be commercially successful. With authentic stories, cultural resonance, and strong audience loyalty, cinema continues to prove that local stories, when told honestly, can create extraordinary box-office moments.



Laalo



Godday Godday Cha 2



AP Dhillon with Tara Sutaria

## Tara Sutaria hits back

Actress Tara Sutaria and boyfriend Veer Pahariya sparked social media chatter after a viral clip from singer AP Dhillon's December 26 Mumbai concert showed Veer looking uncomfortable as Tara appeared flirty with AP during Thodi Si Daaru performance

**A**ctress Tara Sutaria and her boyfriend Veer Pahariya have been at the centre of social media chatter following a moment from AP Dhillon's Mumbai concert on December 26. A viral clip from the event showed Veer allegedly looking uncomfortable after Tara's on-stage appearance with AP Dhillon. During the performance, the duo appeared flirty, with Tara wrapping her arms around AP as they enjoyed a live rendition of their chart-topping track, Thodi Si Daaru. Towards the end of the performance, AP also planted a kiss on Tara's cheek.

Now, Tara has finally reacted to the trolls following her onstage moment with AP,

hitting back at them and calling Veer's viral clip an example of 'clever editing.' Sharing a video from the show, the actress wrote, "P.S - False narratives, 'clever editing' and paid PR campaigns by folks won't and don't shake us up! In the end, love and the truth always wins. So the joke's on the bullies."

Veer responded in the comments section to his viral concert clip. He wrote, "Not to mention the reaction footage of me was taken during another song not even Thodi si daaru. Jokers."

Tara also wrote in the caption, "Loud and proud and in it together!!! @apdhillon FAV!!! What a night! Thank you Mumbai for SO much love for our song and here's to more music and memories together."



Veer Pahariya

## Actress Nandini CM commits suicide



**K**annada and Tamil television actor Nandini CM died by suicide at her residence in Bengaluru, sending shockwaves across the television fraternity. Her untimely death has sparked conversations within the industry and among viewers, as colleagues and fans struggle to come to terms with the loss.

According to reports, a death note addressed to her parents was recovered, in which Nandini reportedly spoke about being under pressure to get married despite not being mentally prepared for it. The note also mentioned that she had been battling depression and emotional distress due to other personal issues.

However, the police have not yet issued an official statement confirming the exact circumstances surrounding her death. Authorities have stated that details will be shared once the investigation progresses, and the contents of the note are currently being examined as part of the probe.

Meanwhile, attention has turned to Nandini's re-

cent work in the Tamil television serial *Gowri*. Reports suggest that her character in the show was part of a sequence involving the consumption of poison. While this has led to speculation online, officials have clarified that there is no established link between her on-screen role and the circumstances of her death.

At the time of her passing, Nandini was playing the lead role in *Gowri*, portraying a demanding dual character - Kanaka and Durga.

Originally from Kottur, Nandini had been living in Bengaluru and had built a steady career in television. She appeared in several well-known Kannada serials in supporting roles, including *Jeeva Hoovagide*, *Sangharsha*, *Madhumagalu*, and *Neenade Naa*.

Over the years, she earned a reputation as a committed performer and was respected within the Kannada entertainment industry.

Nandini CM's death has left the television community grieving the loss of a talented actor whose work connected with audiences. As the investigation continues, more clarity is awaited from the authorities.

## Mini Mathur supports delivery workers' strike

Mini Mathur voiced her support for the nationwide strike called by delivery workers on New Year's Eve, lending her voice to growing concerns around working conditions



**A**ctor, television host and former MTV VJ Mini Mathur has voiced her support for the nationwide strike called by delivery workers on New Year's Eve, lending her voice to growing concerns around working conditions in India's gig economy.

Taking to her Instagram stories on Tuesday (December 30), Mini backed the move by delivery workers and urged users to show empathy towards those working under intense pressure.

"Truly in support of this strike. We need more human practices. Transferring your lack of planning and pressure on to an exhausted worker who rushes on

your behalf is unfair & unkind. Their safety and health matter. Go buy your own 10 minute emergency stuff bros," she wrote.

The strike has been called by the Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers to highlight the challenges faced by delivery personnel despite long hours and physically demanding work.

According to the union, workers continue to struggle with low pay, high work pressure, job insecurity, safety risks, and physical and mental health issues, along with the absence of adequate legal protection. Delivery partners associated with major platforms such as Zomato, Swiggy, Blinkit, Zepto and Amazon are expected to participate in the strike on December 31. The timing of the protest is significant, as New Year's Eve traditionally sees one of the highest order volumes of the year.

## PETA slams Kim Kardashian



Views

Kim Kardashian recently gifted her four children, North, Saint, Chicago and Psalm, their own puppies for Christmas

**A**merican media personality, actress, and entrepreneur Kim Kardashian recently gifted her four children, North, 12, Saint, 10, Chicago, 7, and Psalm, 6, their own puppies for Christmas. The Keeping Up With the Kardashians star also shared a photo of the four puppies cuddled together on her Instagram Stories, writing, "Each kid got a puppy."

However, Kim has now been called out by PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) for gifting puppies to her children. In a statement shared with PEOPLE on Sunday, Dec. 28, PETA founder Ingrid Newkirk lashed out at Kim and said, "Puppies are not plushies, and it's a damn shame that Kim missed the chance to be a spokesperson for shelter pups and instead is being rightly slammed on social media for that."

Further, Newkirk said that, just like Kim, her sister Khloe Kardashian also gifted a dog to her family

for Christmas, urging them to "call PETA or a local shelter the next time" they want to add another dog to their family.

"(They can) try to make some amends now by sending their kids to volunteer at a local shelter or paying for a local shelter adopt-a-thon or at least one spay day to help stop the growing homeless puppy crisis," the PETA founder said.

Kim Kardashian, who has been studying law for the last six years, revealed that she failed her California bar exam, which she took on July 29 and July 30.

The SKIMS founder wrote on her Instagram story, "Well...I'm not a lawyer yet, I just play a very well-dressed one on TV. Six years into this law journey, and I'm still all in until I pass the bar. No shortcuts, no giving up - just more studying and even more determination. Thank you to everyone who has supported and encouraged me along the way so far. Falling short isn't failure - it's fuel. I was so close to passing the exam and that only motivated me even more. Let's go!"







**Welcoming NY**  
Auckland was the 1st major city to ring in 2026 with a downtown fireworks display launched from NZ's tallest structure, Sky Tower, followed by a defiant celebration in Australia in the aftermath of its worst mass shooting.

## Mamdani's wearing

Zohran Mamdani will become mayor of New York City as the clock ticks over into 2026 — but the celebrations are set to last through New Year's Day. The Democrat's team is planning separate swearing-ins on Thursday — a small, private one with his family in an old subway station around midnight, followed by a large event in the afternoon that will include a public block party outside City Hall. As a new mayor's term begins with the new year, it has been customary for the incoming leaders to hold two events.

## Thailand frees 18 PoWs

Thailand on Wednesday released 18 Cambodian prisoners of war held for 5 months, fulfilling the terms of a ceasefire agreement the two countries signed to end bitter fighting along their border. The release was stipulated in the ceasefire pact signed on Saturday by the defence ministers of the countries.

## Peru train crash kills 1

A train driver has died and at least 40 people have been injured in a head-on rail collision near Peru's most popular tourist attraction Machu Picchu. Two trains collided on the single track leading to the ancient Inca town on Tuesday. The US embassy in Peru said its citizens were injured, while the UK Foreign Office said it was "supporting a number of British nationals involved".

## Travel ban on US nationals

Mali and Burkina Faso said late on Tuesday they would ban US citizens from entering their countries in retaliation for President Trump's decision to ban Malian and Burkinabe citizens from entering the US. The announcements were made in statements by the foreign ministers of the West African countries.

## US freezes care funds

President Donald Trump's administration announced it was freezing child care funds to Minnesota after a series of fraud schemes in recent years. Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services Jim O'Neill said on X the step is in response to "blatant fraud that appears to be rampant in Minnesota and in the US."

## Eurostar snag fixed

Channel Tunnel's operator said trains through the undersea link between continental Europe and the UK were running again on Wednesday after a day of travel chaos caused by a power malfunction. Eurostar, which runs passenger trains through the tunnel, said its services were operating again but warned "knock on impacts" following the disruptions on Tuesday could still cause delays and cancellations.

## Iran appoints cent bank gov

Iran named Abdolnasser Hemmati, a former economics minister, as new governor to central bank after the former one quit following a record currency fall against the US dollar.

**CATASTROPHIC SITUATION** | Tel Aviv says organisations fail to meet 'stringent requirements'; 10 nations warn of suffering

# Israel to ban dozens of aid agencies from Gaza

TEL AVIV

Israel has announced it will stop dozens of aid organisations working in Gaza within 36 hours for failing to meet stringent new requirements to hand over personal details of Palestinian and international staff deployed in the devastated territory, "The Guardian" reported.

The list of groups hit by the ban include some of the world's best known humanitarian organisations such as ActionAid, International Rescue Committee and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

Tuesday's announcement by the ministry of diaspora affairs comes amid recent fierce storms, which destroyed thousands of tents in Gaza, exacerbating an already acute humanitarian crisis.

Foreign ministers of 10 nations expressed "serious concerns" about a "renewed deterioration of the humanitarian situation" in the devastated territory, saying the situation was "catastrophic".



A Palestinian boy collects water from a tank amid the rubble of destroyed buildings in Gaza City.

"As winter draws in, civilians in Gaza are facing appalling conditions with heavy rainfall and temperatures dropping," the ministers of Britain, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Japan, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland said in a joint statement released by the UK's Foreign Office.

The statement added, "1.3 million people still require urgent shelter support. More than half of health facilities are

only partially functional and face shortages of essential medical equipment and supplies. The total collapse of sanitation infrastructure has left 740,000 people vulnerable to toxic flooding."

The ministers called for the UN and its partners to continue their work in Gaza, and for the lifting of "unreasonable [Israeli] restrictions on imports considered to have a dual use". Hundreds of items have been blocked by Israel from



The target of 4,200 trucks per week, including an allocation of 250 UN trucks per day, should be a floor not a ceiling. The targets should be lifted so we can be sure the vital supplies are getting in at the vast scale needed.

### A statement

entering Gaza on the basis they may be used by Hamas to rebuild tunnels or for military purposes. The items include vitally needed medical and shelter equipment.

The ministers called for the opening of crossings to increase the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza, saying corridors for moving goods remained closed or severely restricted for humanitarian aid, including Rafah, the biggest entry point that leads directly to Egypt. "Bureaucratic customs processes and extensive screenings are causing delays, while commercial cargo is being allowed in freely," the statement said.



## Granddaughter of JFK no more

**Tatiana Schlossberg**, the granddaughter of former US President John F. Kennedy, has died at 35. Her family announced her death in a social media post shared by the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation, writing: "Our beautiful Tatiana passed away this morning. She will always be in our hearts."

In November, Schlossberg, a climate journalist, announced her diagnosis of an aggressive form of cancer. She said in an essay she had been given less than a year to live.

Schlossberg was the daughter of designer Edwin Schlossberg and diplomat Caroline Kennedy, and is survived by her husband George Moran and their children, Edwin, 3, and Josephine, 1.

In a 'New Yorker' article 'A Battle With My Blood' last month, Schlossberg revealed she had been diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia in May 2024, after giving birth to her second child.

## 2026: FAST FORWARD

The year is packed with major global events

### POLITICS

- Thailand general election (**Feb 8**)
- Bangladesh general election (**Feb 12**)
- Nepal general election (**March 5**)
- Hungary parliamentary election (**April 12**)
- Colombia presidential election (**May 31**)
- Ethiopia general election (**June 1**)
- Armenia parliamentary elections (**June 7**)
- Sweden general election (**Sept 13**)
- Brazil presidential election (**Oct 4**)
- Israel Knesset election (**Oct 27**)
- US midterm elections (**Nov 3**)

### MUSIC

- Madonna to release sequel to Confessions On A Dancefloor.
- BTS to launch new album & tour after military service.
- Lana Del Rey to launch Stove, a country/Southern Gothic project.
- Robbie Williams to release Britpop album on Feb 6.

### SPACE

- Nasa's Artemis II mission, likely in February, will take four astronauts on a 10-day voyage around the moon.
- Chinese astronauts on board Chang'e 7 will study the moon's south pole.
- SpaceX set to debut a new version of its Starship megarocket.
- Boeing's Starliner spacecraft is scheduled for an uncrewed test flight to ISS.



**Release of Avengers: Domsday, Spider-Man: Brand New Day, Toy Story 5, and The Hunger Games: Sunrise on the Reaping**

**Marilyn Monroe's 100th: Centennial celebrations.**

# Hadi murder suspect in Dubai

**Dhaka:** In the Bangladeshi student leader Osman Hadi's murder case, prime accused Faisal Karim Masud has denied any role, claiming he was in Dubai, contradicting Bangladesh police's allegations about his presence in India, reports said. In a viral video (veracity was not verified), Masud said he did not kill Hadi, claiming a radical political group was involved.

Masud accepted he went to Hadi's office before the shooting but insisted his relations with Inqilab Moncho spokesperson was business related. The video has sparked fresh debate and uncertainty over what really happened.

"I am Faisal Karim Masud. I want to state I am not involved in the murder of Hadi in any

way. This case is completely false and based on a fabricated conspiracy," Masud said. "Because of this false implication, I was forced to flee the country and come to Dubai. I came here with great difficulty, though I held a valid 5-year Dubai visa," he added.

He claimed his family was being falsely implicated and is being severely harassed and tortured, despite being completely innocent. "They have no involvement whatsoever. This kind of inhumane treatment of my family is unjust and unacceptable. I strongly protest against it," he said.

About ties with Hadi, Masud said, "Yes, I did go to Hadi's office. I am a businessman; I own an IT firm. I was previously employed at ministry

of finance. I went to meet Hadi about a job. He promised to arrange it and asked for an advance payment."

"Accordingly, I gave him 500,000 taka. He asked me to donate to his programmes, and I provided funds whenever he requested. Last Friday, I gave him money for one of his programmes," he added.

Masud accused Jamaat of Hadi's murder, saying, the student leader was "a product of Jamaat" and he was killed by "Jamaati elements". "This incident is the work of Jamaat. Neither I nor my younger brother was on that motorcycle, and we have been deliberately framed. My family is suffering unjustly. This level of harassment is disturbing and unacceptable." —**Agencies**

# France to ban social media for U-15s

PARIS

The French government on Wednesday said it would ban social media for children Under-15. If the bill is passed, France would be one of the first democracies to do so.

The bill, scheduled to be presented in Parliament in January, and, if passed, to be enforced in September 2026, is a two-fold initiative. The law will ban social media sites from serving anyone under 15, in addition to enforcing the long-standing prohibition on mobile phone usage in high schools. The proposal follows Australia's decision to prevent its young citizens from accessing social networking sites, which has stirred a controversy over the use of social media and its impact on mental health.

According to **President Emmanuel Macron** and his cabinet, the law is intended to ensure "appropriate



measures are put in place to protect youngsters from inappropriate content, bullying, and sleep disturbances that have become distressingly frequent in adolescents."

There is increasing evidence, over the past decade, of the consequences of excessive social media exposure on the health and well-being of adolescents and also adults. There is mounting research evidence in Europe, the US, Australia, and Asia of increasing levels of teenagers suf-

fering from anxiety, body image disturbances and self-harm.

The implementation of the ban is not going to be easy. According to teachers' unions, the use of phones, although banned in middle schools, is not implemented consistently. High schools are expected to be more problematic, since students are older and independent.

"We do not have the human and technical capacity to implement it," said Jean-Rémi Girard, head of National Union of High School, Middle School, Primary Schools, and Higher Education (SNALC). Whether the policy is right is no longer the question, the challenge is to make it practical.

Notably, under-16s in Australia were banned from using major social media sites, including TikTok, X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat and Threads on December 10. The ban is the first of its kind and was being watched closely by other countries.

## UKRAINIAN UAV ATTACK ON PUTIN'S RESIDENCE

# Russia releases video proof

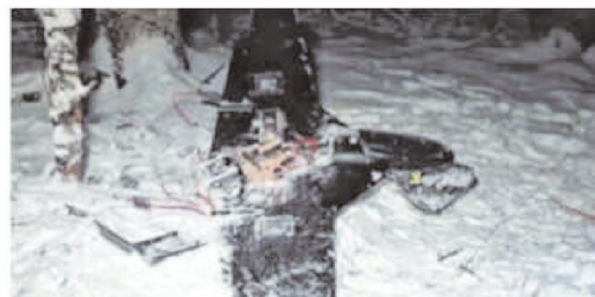
MOSCOW

Russia on Wednesday published video proof of its claims, showing a downed drone it said was launched by Ukraine at President Vladimir Putin's residence in the north-west.

The video, released by Russia's defence ministry, shows the damaged drone lying in snow. It described the incident as a "targeted, carefully planned" attack that had been "carried out in stages".

Officials said the UAV was part of a mass drone launch aimed at Putin's residence. They claimed the home was not damaged, and Putin's whereabouts at the time were not revealed.

Moscow called the alleged drone attack a "terrorist act" and a "personal attack" on Putin. In response, Russia said



it would harden its stance in peace talks concerning the Ukraine war. The US-based Institute for the Study of War expressed scepticism over Russia's claims, saying there was no supporting footage or evidence associated with deep strikes from Ukrainian forces to back up the assertion Putin's house had been targeted.

**RUSSIAN DRONES BLAST ODESA, INJURE 6, INCLUDING CHILDREN**  
Russian drones blasted apart-

ment buildings and the power grid in Ukraine's Odesa in an overnight attack that injured six people, including a toddler and two kids, officials said.

Four apartment buildings were damaged, according to regional military administration head Oleh Kiper.

Power company DTEK said two of its energy facilities suffered significant damage.

The company said 10 substations that distribute electricity in Odesa were damaged in December alone.

## NY speech: Xi vows to reunify China & Taiwan

**Beijing:** Chinese President **Xi Jinping** in his New Year address on Wednesday said Taiwan's reunification with China is "unstoppable" while projecting the country's growing defence advances, and highlighted the construction of the world's largest dam over Brahmaputra river.

Chinese people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait share a bond of blood and kinship, Xi said in his 2026 New Year message.

"The reunification of our motherland, a trend of the times, is unstoppable," Xi said amid stepped up high-powered drills by the Chinese military in the last three days around the self-governing island, which China claims as part of its mainland. This is the sixth time since 2022 that China held intensified military drills using the latest air force jets, aircraft carriers, missiles and drones practising the capture of Taiwan.



Xi, 72, the longest-serving leader of the People's Republic of China sought to project Beijing's economic, defence and tech advancements. "Construction of hydropower project at the lower reaches of Yarlung Zangbo (Brahmaputra river) began," he said.

China began the construction of \$170 billion dam over Brahmaputra in ecologically fragile Tibet, near the Indian border in Arunachal, which evoked concerns of flooding in India and Bangladesh. Xi spoke of the commissioning of China's first aircraft carrier equipped with an electromagnetic catapult system.

# Jailed Lai's teeth rotting, fingernails falling off: Daughter

The daughter of **Jimmy Lai**, the pro-democracy tycoon jailed in Hong Kong, has expressed concerns about her father's deteriorating health in prison, saying his fingernails "sometimes fall off" and his teeth are rotting.

Lai, 78, has been detained since December 2020 and faces life in prison. Earlier this month he was convicted of colluding with foreign forces under the city's controversial national security law.

Hong Kong and Chinese authorities have denied that Lai has been mistreated in prison, saying he is in "good health". The BBC has seen a letter written by Lai's family urging UK PM Keir Starmer call for Lai's release when he meets Chinese President Xi Jinping next month.

His daughter Claire Lai, who's in exile in London, said she fears she "may never see



him again". "Of course I worry that my father is going to be a martyr, and I don't want him to be a martyr. But I would not be here today. I would not be speaking out if I didn't think this was his best chance of reuniting with our family."

"He is diabetic, he has heart issues which he never had in the past. He has fingernails that turn purplish grey and sometimes fall off. He has teeth that are rotting. He has back and waist pains. Some days it's painful for him to stand. Sometimes he can't stand. And some days he can't even get out of bed," she said.

## Isiah Whitlock Jr, 'The Wire' and 'Veep' actor, dies at 71

**Isiah Whitlock Jr.**, known for his memorable acting roles on 'The Wire' and 'Veep', has died at the age of 71, according to his manager. "It is with tremendous sadness I share the passing of my dear friend and client Isiah Whitlock Jr.," manager Brian Liebman wrote on Instagram.

Whitlock, who also featured in 'Goodfellas' and 'The Chappelle Show', was a long-time collaborator with director Spike Lee, who also shared a heartfelt tribute to him.

"Today I learned of the passing of my dear beloved brother Isiah Whitlock. God bless," Lee wrote, alongside a photo of the two men shaking hands. "If you knew him — you loved him. A brilliant actor and even better person," Liebman wrote.

In statements to Hollywood news outlets, he added Whitlock passed away in New York after a short illness.





## Briefs

NEW DELHI

## Lin Chun-Yi clinches India Open title



Chinese Taipei's Lin Chun-Yi claimed his maiden Super 750 title in men's singles, while world number one An Se Young of South Korea underlined her supremacy by securing the women's singles crown at the USD 950,000 India Open here on Sunday. The 26-year-old Lin, currently ranked 12, completed a sharp turnaround from an early exit at last week's Malaysia Open Super 1000, powering his way to the men's singles title with a 21-10, 21-18 win.

WIJK AAN ZEE (NED)

## Erigaisi beats Pragg, Gukesh held



Top seed Arjun Erigaisi scored a convincing victory over compatriot R Praggnandhaa, while World Champion D Gukesh played out a hard-fought draw against World Cup winner Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan in the first round of the Tata Steel Masters here. After a delayed start caused by environmental activists' protest, the world's oldest running super tournament finally took off and the first round had enough excitement to keep the chess buffs glued to their screens.

SURAT

## Majhi Mumbai clinch big victory



Majhi Mumbai delivered a disciplined all-round performance to defeat Srinagar Ke Veer by 7 wickets in their ISPL Season 3 encounter at the Lalbhai Contractor Stadium on Sunday to jump to the top of the points table. Chasing a modest target of 71, Mumbai crossed the line with 13 balls to spare, finishing at 74 for 3 in 7.5 overs. Mumbai now have 8 points in six games, with four wins. Opting to bowl first, the Mumbai attack

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## RCB look to continue winning run against GG

Unbeaten Royal Challengers are the team to beat in the tournament

VADODARA

On a roll, the Smriti Mandhana-led Royal Challengers Bengaluru will look to extend their winning run when they face Gujarat Giants in the Women's Premier League here on Monday.

Unbeaten RCB are the team to beat in the tournament, having registered their fourth consecutive win on Saturday.

GG, on the other hand, started on a bright note, winning their first two games before losing the next two to be placed third in the WPL table.

The icing on the cake for RCB is skipper Mandhana's return to form as she struck a match-defining 96 against Delhi Capitals in their emphatic eight-wicket win on Saturday.

Opener Grace Harris too has got good starts in the four matches but failed to convert them into big scores, while Georgia Voll too rose to the occasion with an unbeaten 54. RCB boast of a strong batting line-up in the form of hard-hitting wicket-keeper batter Richa Ghosh, Nadine de Klerk, Gautami Naik and Radha Yadav.

While RCB's bowling unit too is a potent force with the likes of Lauren Bell and Sayali Satghare providing the initial impetus.

Match starts  
at 7.30 P.M.  
Live on Star  
Sports

## Teams

## Gujarat Giants:

Ashleigh Gardner (c), Beth Mooney, Sophie Devine, Renuka Singh Thakur, Bharti Fulmali, Titas Sadhu, Kashee Gautam, Kanika Ahuja, Tanuja Kanwer, Georgia Wareham, Anushka Sharma, Happy Kumari, Kim Garth, Yastika Bhatia, Shivani Singh, Danni Wyatt-Hodge, Rajeshwari Gayakwad and Ayushi Soni.

## Royal Challengers Bengaluru:

Smriti Mandhana (c), Richa Ghosh, Shreyanka Patil, Georgia Voll, Nadine de Klerk, Radha Yadav, Lauren Bell, Linsey Smith, Prema Rawat, Arundhati Reddy, Pooja Vastrakar, Grace Harris, Gautami Naik, Prathyoosha Kumar, D. Hemalatha and Sayali Satghare.



## HISTORY | Visitors register 41-run victory as Kohli's 54th ton goes in vain

## NZ clinch first ODI series win

INDORE

Daryl Mitchell's second consecutive hundred and Glenn Phillips' blistering century and some sharp bowling powered New Zealand to a 41-run victory that saw them record a historic first-ever ODI series win in India in the series-deciding third ODI here on Sunday.

Virat Kohli's 54th ODI hundred was just not enough in the end as he ran out of partners apart from Harshit Rana (52) as India were bowled out for 296 in 46 overs.

Earlier, Mitchell (137) and Phillips (106) stitched together a 219-run partnership for the fourth wicket that turned the innings on its head.

Calm and authoritative, Mitchell anchored the stand while Phillips provided the momentum, allowing New Zealand to shift gears after a cautious start.

## In response

India were controlling the innings at one stage, having reduced the visitors to 58 for three but Mitchell and Phillips made it a contest.

Left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh, brought in for Prasidh Krishna, made an immediate impact by removing Henry Nicholls (0) with a beauty in the opening over.

Coming closer to the off-stump, Arshdeep (3/63) shaped the ball away to perfection as Nicholls, caught in two minds, withdrew his bat late and saw the delivery take the inside edge and crash into the leg-stump.

Arshdeep and fellow seamer Harshit Rana (3/84) hit the deck hard and extracted just enough movement to keep the New Zealand batters under check early on.

The visitors managed only 47 runs in the first 10 overs, losing both openers cheaply. Harshit dismissed Devon Conway (5) for the third



New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell plays a shot during the third ODI. PTI

## Scoreboard

**NEW ZEALAND:** D Conway c Rohit b Rana 5, H Nicholls b Arshdeep 0, W Young c Jadeja b Rana 30, D Mitchell c Kuldeep b Siraj 137, G Phillips c Rahul b Arshdeep 106, M Bracewell (not out) 28, M Hay lbw Kuldeep 2, Z Foulkes c Kuldeep b Arshdeep 10, K Clarke b Rana 11, K Jamieson (not out) 0. **Extras:** 8 (B-5, NB-2, W-1). **Total** (For 8 wks, 50 overs) 337 **Fall of wickets:** 1-5, 2-5, 3-58, 4-277, 5-283, 6-286, 7-304, 8-327 **Bowling:** A Singh 10-1-63-3, H Rana 10-0-84-3, M Siraj 10-0-43-1, N Kumar Reddy 8-0-53-0, K Yadav 6-0-48-1, R Jadeja 6-0-41-0.

**INDIA:** R Sharma c Clarke b Foulkes 11, S Gill b Jamieson 23, V Kohli c Mitchell b Clarke 124, S Iyer c Foulkes b Clarke 3, KL Rahul c Phillips b Lennox 1, N Kumar Reddy c Young b Clarke 53, R Jadeja c Young b Lennox 12, H Rana c Nicholls b Foulkes 52, M Siraj c Hay b Foulkes 0, K Yadav (run out) 5, A Singh (not out) 4. **Extras** (LB-1, NB-1, W-6) 8. **Total** (all out, 45.6 overs) 296. **Fall of wickets:** 1-28, 2-45, 3-68, 4-71, 5-159, 6-178, 7-277, 8-277, 9-292 **Bowling:** K Jamieson 9-0-58-1, Z Foulkes 9-0-77-3, K Clarke 8.6-0-54-3, J Lennox 10-0-42-2, D Mitchell 1-0-10-0, G Phillips 8-0-54-0

straight time, inducing an edge with a back-of-a-length delivery that was safely taken in the slips.

Will Young (30) attempted to break the shackles with a six over deep backward point off Harshit but the bowler had the last laugh.

Harshit broke the 53-run stand between Young and Mitchell when the former cut

firmly to the right of Ravindra Jadeja at backward point, where the Indian all-rounder took a comfortable catch.

Mitchell once again set the tone for New Zealand's recovery by taking on Kuldeep Yadav early, launching the left-arm wrist-spinner for a towering six.

Kuldeep adjusted well thereafter, flattening his tra-

jectory and pulling back his length to apply the brakes. Mitchell brought up his half-century with a boundary off Kuldeep when the spinner strayed down the leg side.

With the ball getting softer after the 34th over, stroke-making became harder, but the short boundaries at the Holkar Stadium encouraged risk-taking. Mitchell con-

tinued to counter-attack, hitting Nitish Kumar Reddy for a flat six, while Phillips also took on the medium-pacer, surviving a chance when Harshit could not get close enough to a ballooned edge.

Phillips later pulled Mohammed Siraj (1/43) for a boundary and launched Arshdeep straight down the ground for a six.

## Miss American Pie triumphs in feature event

MUMBAI

Tote favourite Miss American Pie lived up to expectations as she clinched the Mulraj Goculdas Trophy, the feature event on the eighth day of the Mumbai racing season, at the Mahalaxmi Racecourse on Sunday.

With the city still basking in the afterglow of the 21st edition of the Tata Mumbai Marathon, attention swiftly shifted to the turf, where the racecourse turned into a happy hunting ground for favourites. It proved to be a rewarding day for punters, as all three favourites obliged in their respective races on a seven-race card, making it a memorable outing for race-goers.

Ridden with confidence by seasoned jockey David Allan, Miss American Pie produced a telling late surge in the final 80-odd metres to snatch victory in a thrilling finish.

The favourite showed remarkable acceleration at the business end to edge past Market King, who had looked the likely winner for most of the stretch run. Son Of A Gun stayed on resolutely to finish third.

## Taide's century leads Vidarbha to triumph

Saurashtra fought gamely for a large part despite slipping to 30 for two early that became 112/4

BENGALURU

Atharva Taide's hundred of rare brilliance in alliance with a disciplined bowling effort powered Vidarbha to a facile 38-run win over Saurashtra and to their maiden Vijay Hazare Trophy title here on Sunday.

Once Vidarbha made a daunting 317 for eight riding on Taide's 128 (118 balls, 15x4, 3x6), the task was cut out for Saurashtra and they failed to cross the line, ending up at 279 all out in 48.5 overs.

But Saurashtra fought gamely for a large part despite slipping to 30 for two early, which soon became a discomfiting 112 for four in 22.4 overs. The heartbeat of Saurashtra's fight was determined fifties by Prerak Mankad (88, 92 balls) and Chirag Jani (64, 63 balls) and their 93-run fifth wicket stand.

Their venture was built more on common sense rather than flourish, and they



Vidarbha's Atharva Taide in action. PTI

were also helped to a good extent by Vidarbha's sloppy fielding. There were a couple of grassed catches and numerous misfields from Vidarbha fielders in the middle overs.

Mankad was given a life on 70 off Harsh Dubey at mid-wicket and Jani was dropped on 14 off Parth Rekhade at long-on, which helped Saurashtra drag the match much longer than it was expected.

But eventually, the flickering flame was snuffed out with Mankad's dismissal. The right-hander rocked back to

cut left-arm spinner Dubey (1/59) but missed the line to get caught plumb in front of the wicket.

Pacer Darshan Nalkande soon ousted Jani, whose ill-timed swipe found Aman Mokhadde near sweeper cover. Pacers Yash Thakur (4/50) and Nachiket Bhute (3/46) then mopped up the later order to cap Vidarbha's memorable night which celebrated with flair and gusto. But before the bowlers joined the act, Taide played a textbook one-day innings to take Vidarbha to a competitive total.

## homecoming

## Netravalkar awaits reconnect with Wankhede

NEW DELHI

Mumbai-born USA pacer Saurabh Netravalkar has visualised his full circle moment when he takes the field for his side's T20 World Cup opener against India at the Wankhede Stadium on February 7, a ground where it all began for him as a cricketer before leaving 'home' for an alternate career.

The 34-year-old played a first-class game for Mumbai

alongside the likes of Suryakumar Yadav and Shardul Thakur back in 2013 but he was not able to graduate to the Indian team after representing the country in the 2010 U-19 World Cup.

Netravalkar eventually decided to pursue higher studies in the United States after getting an offer from the reputed Cornell University for a master's degree in computer science in 2015.

Considering the path he chose for himself, playing

cricket again was not even a thought in Netravalkar's mind but fate ensured that he reunited with the sport that he started playing on the busy streets of Mumbai.

Now an integral part of the USA squad and a star of their 2024 T20 World Cup campaign, Netravalkar reckons emotions might get the better of him when he steps on to the revered turf of Wankhede.

"I wouldn't know how I would react there. But it is an emotional moment, for sure.

Kind of like a full circle moment because I started playing cricket in Mumbai and gave up on the sport and moved to the US and never even expected to play cricket again. International (cricket) wasn't even a thought," he told PTI from Colombo where the USA squad is training.

"So, it's like a second innings, that cricket gave me that chance and brought me back to Mumbai. So, in that sense, it's nostalgic and emotional, but it's not playing on

my mind per se." Has he visualised playing at the venue in front of his family and friends? "Kind of, yes. I wouldn't say in this particular way, but as a kid, obviously, growing up in Mumbai, I have always, since I started playing cricket, dreamt about playing for the country and hopefully at Wankhede. We've been training at Wankhede since our under-15 days.

"Very grateful that this opportunity has come about whilst playing for the USA."

