

Community groups hold two-day awareness drive to stop wildlife crime near D. Ering Sanctuary

● *A two-day awareness programme aimed at discouraging wildlife crime and enhancing conservation support was conducted around the D. Ering Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh.*

Itanagar, Dec 29: A two-day awareness programme was carried out in villages around the D. Ering Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh to discourage wildlife crime and to strengthen community support for conservation work. The programme was organised by the Community Surveillance & Monitoring Team (CSMT) and the Eco-Development Committee (EDC), with support from the environmental organisation Aaranyak. The awareness drive was held on Thursday and Friday at Sika Tode village on the right bank of the Siang River and Mer village on the left bank of the sanctuary. The main aim of the programme was to explain to villagers why protecting wildlife is important and how collective efforts can help stop hunting and illegal activities in and around the sanctuary. The programme also focused on reducing con-

flicts between people and wild animals. The first day's programme at Sika Tode was led by CSMT/EDC Anchalghat Wildlife Range Unit president Tatem Jamoh and secretary Satish Pao, under the guidance of adviser Nalo Tasing. The meeting was attended by Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of D. Ering Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary, Kempa Ete, Zila Parishad Member from 5-Oyan Zila segment, Annu Paboh Komut, village leaders and local residents. Speaking at the event, DFO Kempa Ete said that wildlife and forest protection cannot succeed without the support of people living near the sanctuary. She noted that the sanctuary has already seen positive changes because communities are cooperating with the department. She also said that with continued support, the sanctuary could become an important wildlife tourism site in the region. She further informed villagers that the compensation amount for crop loss, injury and death caused by wild animals has been increased. She encouraged villagers to follow proper procedures to apply for

compensation instead of resorting to hunting or retaliatory actions. Zila Parishad Member Annu Paboh Komut raised concern about the movement of wild elephants along the Ruksin-Pasighat stretch of National Highway-515 near Poba Reserved Forest. She said that new roadside barricades coming up under the four-lane project should not block elephant corridors that link D. Ering Wildlife Sanctuary with nearby forest areas. CSMT/EDC president Tatem Jamoh urged villagers to cooperate with the forest department and warned that hunting would not be tolerated. The second day of the programme was held at Mer village. It was attended by Range Forest Officer (Jonai/Poba RF) Debabrata Gogoi, RFO Sibiyamukh Wildlife Range Oyem Mize, former Zila Parishad Member and chairman of Kotga Gora Community Reserve, Gumin Tayeng, Sibiyamukh Wildlife Unit president Uneswar Perme, CSMT/EDC coordinator Okii Modi, Honorary Wildlife Warden of East Siang district and CSMT/EDC chairman, Maksam Tayeng, along with representatives from Aaranyak and village elders.



The participants once again stressed the need to stop wildlife crime and protect the rich biodiversity of the sanctuary. The programme ended with a collective understanding that wildlife hunting and illegal activities would not be accepted in the area. After the awareness programme, RFO Debabrata Gogoi visited the Sibiyamukh Wildlife Range

along with CSMT/EDC members and the Honorary Wildlife Warden. The initiative was sponsored by Aaranyak, a conservation NGO based in Guwahati. The CSMT is an important part of Aaranyak's approach to involve local people in wildlife protection by helping them report and prevent illegal activities, while at the same time encouraging sustainable livelihood options.

Manipur solar entrepreneur praised in PM's 'Mann Ki Baat' for powering remote villages

Imphal, Dec 29: A solar energy entrepreneur from Manipur has received national recognition after Prime Minister Narendra Modi mentioned his work during the latest episode of the monthly radio programme Mann Ki Baat. The Prime Minister highlighted the efforts of Moirangthem Seth, who has been working for years to bring solar power to remote and underserved communities in the state. Seth comes from a region where electricity supply has often been weak and unreliable. Many villages still face frequent power cuts, and some remote areas continue to struggle with limited access to the main power grid. After growing up with these challenges, he decided to focus on solar energy as a simple and practical way to support

everyday life in such places. His initiative has slowly grown over time. Today, hundreds of families in interior parts of Manipur are using solar-based systems installed through his efforts. These small but steady improvements have helped households light their homes, charge devices, and carry out daily work without depending fully on grid electricity. Health centres in some rural locations have also benefited from solar installations. With solar support, these facilities are better able to run basic services even during power cuts, which is especially important for patient care, storage of medicines, and emergency needs. Local residents say the change has brought a sense of stability to services that were earlier



disrupted by frequent outages. During the radio address, the Prime Minister said Seth's work shows how locally driven ideas can help solve long-standing challenges. He pointed out that renewable energy is not only environmentally friendly, but also useful for people who live far from major towns and cities. By using solar systems, such communities can gain steady access to electricity without waiting for large proj-

ects or heavy infrastructure. The same episode of Mann Ki Baat also mentioned another Manipur entrepreneur, K. Chokhone Kreechina from Senapati district. She has been working to support rural livelihoods and women-led activities in her area. Her inclusion in the programme highlighted how grassroots initiatives are helping improve income opportunities and community development across the region.

Mizoram leaders condemn attacks on Christians during Christmas celebrations

Aizawl, Dec 29: Mizoram Home Minister K Sapdanga, along with several political leaders in the state, has strongly condemned recent incidents of violence and harassment against Christians during Christmas celebrations in different parts of the country. In a statement issued on Sunday, Sapdanga said he was deeply concerned by reports of attacks on members of the Christian community and attempts to disturb Christmas programmes that were being held peacefully. He referred in particular to an incident at St. Mary's School in Nalbari district of Assam, where members of a fringe organisation allegedly entered the school premises and damaged Christmas decorations on Christmas Eve. The group was also accused of interrupting the Christmas celebration being held there.

Sapdanga said such actions were completely unacceptable in a democratic country like India. He added that these incidents go against the principles of secularism guaranteed by the Constitution. The home minister said that India is home to people from many religions and communities, and all citizens have the right to practise their faith peacefully. He stressed that no one should be allowed to threaten or disturb religious events. Mizoram Congress president Lal Thanzara also condemned the incidents and expressed concern over the growing sense of insecurity among minorities. He said that efforts to disturb Christmas celebrations hurt the sentiments of Christians across the country, including those in Mizoram, which has a Christian majority population.

664 illegal structures cleared from government land in Biswanath's Baghmari



Guwahati, Dec 29: A large eviction drive has been carried out in Biswanath district, where the authorities have removed hundreds of houses that were built on government land at Baghmari. The operation covered around 265 bighas of land that had been officially marked as Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) property. Officials said that a total of 664 illegal structures had come up on the land over time. These houses were built under dag numbers 203 and 189, which fall under protected grazing reserve land meant for community use and for rearing livestock. The administration said such land cannot be used for private settlement. However, the district authorities did not touch 68 families whose cases are still being examined by the courts. These households have been temporarily exempted from eviction until their legal process is complete. The rest of the settlers were removed as part of the ongoing drive. To conduct the operation smoothly, the administration deployed a large number of police personnel along with 40 excavators. Security arrangements were also strengthened in the area to prevent any disturbance during the clearance work.

IIT Guwahati startup engages 2,000 students at inter IIT tech meet

Guwahati, Dec 29: In a significant milestone reflecting the growing culture of student-led entrepreneurship and deep-tech innovation, a startup of IIT Guwahati engaged nearly 2,000 students across 23 IITs at an Inter IIT Tech Meet, offering them hands-on exposure to cutting-edge algorithmic thinking and competitive problem-solving at a national level.

The IIT-Guwahati BioNEST-incubated startup, Genuity IO Pvt. Ltd, co-sponsored the Inter IIT Tech Meet 14.0, the flagship annual technical festival that brings together some of the brightest engineering minds from all the 23 IITs.

Founded by Adari Karthikeya, along with Mr. Shivansh Gupta, third year students at IIT Guwahati, Genuity IO played an active role in the event by designing and releasing a no-prep problem statement on algorithmic optimisation.

"As one of the sponsor-curated challenges, the problem statement encouraged participants to think critically and apply innovative approaches to real-world technical problems," a statement issued by IIT-G on Monday said.

The participation of a student-led, IIT Guwahati BioNEST-incubated startup in a national flagship technical event such as Inter IIT Tech Meet underscores the Institute's robust ecosystem for deep-tech innovation and entrepreneurship.

It also marks one of the few instances where a student-founded startup from IIT Guwahati has not only participated but actively shaped the technical agenda of a national-level IIT competition, traditionally led by established industry players.

Speaking about IIT Guwahati growing entrepreneurial culture, Swapnil Sinha, CEO, IIT Guwahati-BioNEST, said, "North East India's startup eco-

system is rapidly evolving from promise to performance, with founders building scalable, innovation-driven ventures rooted in the region's unique strengths. At IIT Guwahati, this transformation is being propelled by IITG BioNEST, which is enabling researchers and entrepreneurs to translate ideas into market-ready enterprises through structured mentoring, infrastructure, and industry linkages—positioning the North East as an emerging hub for deep-tech and bio-innovation."

Beyond reinforcing IIT Guwahati BioNest position as a hub for innovation, the achievement also enhances the Institute's national visibility as a leading centre for nurturing student startups that contribute meaningfully to India's evolving technological landscape.

Speaking about IIT Guwahati and BioNEST's role in advancing the initiative, Adari Karthikeya, founder and

● *In a significant development for student entrepreneurship, IIT Guwahati's startup, Genuity IO Pvt. Ltd, engaged nearly 2,000 students across 23 IITs at the Inter IIT Tech Meet 14.0. Co-founded by IIT Guwahati students Adari Karthikeya and Shivansh Gupta, the startup contributed by designing a problem statement focused on algorithmic optimization, encouraging innovative solutions to real-world challenges.*

CEO, Genuity IO Pvt. Ltd. said, "We are grateful for the continuous support and guidance from IIT Guwahati and BioNEST. Their encouragement enabled us to contribute to a national platform like the Inter IIT Tech Meet and engage with some of the brightest student innovators across the IIT ecosystem. This opportunity has been both humbling and motivating for our team."

Manipur faces significant healthcare gaps in MMR, meeting held in Bishnupur

Imphal Dec 29: Manipur's Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) stands at a concerning 282 per 100,000 live births, indicating significant gaps in healthcare delivery. Major causes include haemorrhage, according to data from the Health Management Information System (HMIS) for 2025. Official health records show the MMR was around 80 per 100,000 live births during 2010-11. In this context, Bishnupur Deputy Commissioner Pooja Elangbam on Monday chaired

a District-Level Review Meeting of the Maternal Death Committee at the Conference Hall of the Mini Secretariat Complex, Bishnupur. Organised by the District Health Society and the District Family Welfare Bureau (DFWB), Bishnupur, the meeting focused on conducting Maternal Death Reviews (MDR) and Maternal Near Miss (MNM) reviews. Discussions centred on analysing the causes of maternal deaths, identifying systemic failures such as delays and



poor case management, and formulating actionable measures to prevent future incidents.

Addressing the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner said the review mecha-

nism serves as an administrative tool to analyse maternal mortality and prevent future deaths. She emphasised that the process would help reduce preventable mater-

nal deaths by fostering a cycle of learning and continuous improvement in maternal healthcare services at the district level. She further stressed the importance of regular antenatal check-ups for pregnant women and advised against home deliveries without proper consultation with healthcare professionals to avoid untoward incidents.

Co-Chairperson and Chief Medical Officer Dr L. Raichandra, Member Secretary and District Nodal Officer Dr L. Ku-

ber Singh, along with other committee members attended the meeting. Later, the Deputy Commissioner also chaired a review meeting of the District Advisory Committee under the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PC-PNDT) Act at the same venue. During the meeting, District Family Welfare Officer Dr L. Kuber Singh explained that the committee plays a crucial role in curbing prenatal sex determination and sex selection.

In Brief

Ajit-Sharad Pawar Join Hands for Pune Civic Polls

Pune: NCP (SP) leader Rohit Pawar announced an alliance with the NCP led by Ajit Pawar for the Pune civic board elections. The decision reflects the preferences of local party workers in Pune and Pimpri-Chinchwad and aims to enhance both parties' election campaigns. After discussions with party employees, who suggested unity following the departure of NCP (SP) city chief Prashant Jagtap, Rohit emphasized that the decision was made independently of Sharad Pawar. A seat-sharing mechanism has been agreed upon, but specific details were withheld due to the imminent nomination deadline on December 30. Elections for 29 municipal corporations in Maharashtra, including Pune, are scheduled for January 15, with results to be announced the following day.

Amit Shah inaugurates Rs 227-crore redevelopment

Guwahati: Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated a ₹227-crore redevelopment project at Batadrava Than in Assam, the birthplace of Mahapurush Sri-manta Sankardeva. The gathering underscored the site's spiritual significance for the region. Shah praised Assam's cultural heritage and its historical figures, including Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi and Lakshminath Bezbaruah. He highlighted the project's role in preserving Sankardeva's legacy, commended government actions against illegal encroachments, and contrasted current government investments in the Northeast with previous Congress administrations. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma called the inauguration a historic moment and announced government support for visitor expenses to enhance the experience for pilgrims.

Massive amounts of bombs, weapons, and ammo were found

Boko: An abandoned factory near the Saturday weekly market in Boko yielded four rounds of INSAS rifle, explosives, a handgun with five rounds of ammunition, a revolver with one round of ammunition, and 142 rounds of AK-47, according to Kamrup district and metro police on Thursday morning. Renu Kuntala Sital Kumar, the Superintendent (In-Charge), made this announcement at a news conference on Thursday evening. Factory owner Pranab Mahanta, Ketu Rabha, Shivajit Boro, and Amrit Ali were arrested after police raided their location and recovered arms, ammunition, and explosives. The four men were produced before the court and will apply for police custody for five days for further investigation. The incident has caused a stir in the area, and a case 224/2025 has been registered at Boko police station under various sections of the Arms, UAPA, Explosives, and BNS Acts.

Assam woman arrested by ED

Guwahati: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested Rumi Kalita from Assam for her alleged involvement in a cyber fraud case exceeding Rs 7 crore. The case, described as a "digital arrest" scam, tricked industrialist S. P. Oswal into transferring funds by posing as government officials. The ED conducted searches at 11 locations across multiple states, recovering significant documents and digital devices. Kalita is accused of managing mule bank accounts used to facilitate the movement of illicit funds to evade detection.

NE/EAST

Uttarakhand govt over Rs 25,000 reward in Anjel Chakma murder case

Dehradun, Dec 29: Tipra Motha Party founder and Tripura's royal scion Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma on December 29, strongly criticised the Uttarakhand government for announcing a cash reward of Rs 25,000 for information leading to the arrest of the main accused in the murder of Anjel Chakma, calling it an insult to the value of a human life.

Expressing outrage over the move, Pradyot announced a reward of Rs 10 lakh from his own pocket for credible information that leads to the arrest of the prime suspect in the case.

Anjel Chakma, a 24-year-old MBA student from Tripura's Unakoti district, was brutally attacked on December 9 in Dehradun after he allegedly objected to racial slurs hurled at his younger brother, Michael Chakma. Anjel succumbed to his injuries after battling for his life for over two weeks.

Pradyot said he was shocked to learn that the Ut-



tarakhand government had fixed a reward of just Rs 25,000 for information on the main accused.

"Is this the value of Anjel Chakma's life? Is this a joke? If a state government believes a life is worth only Rs 25,000, then it is shameful," he said.

Announcing the higher reward, Pradyot said, "I will provide this cash reward from my own pocket, but don't make fun of our people." Tipra Motha Party founder and Tripura's royal scion Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma on December 29, strongly

criticised the Uttarakhand government for announcing a cash reward of Rs 25,000 for information leading to the arrest of the main accused in the murder of Anjel Chakma, calling it an insult to the value of a human life.

The case has sparked widespread outrage, particularly across the Northeast, with growing concerns over racial abuse and the safety of students from the region in other parts of the country. Several accused have been arrested so far, while the prime suspect is believed to have fled the country.

BSF denies B'desh's allegation that murderers entered India

Shillong, Dec 29: Security agencies in Meghalaya on Sunday dismissed claims by the Bangladesh Police that the killers of Inquilab Moncho leader Sharif Osman Hadi had entered the state.

The claims are unfounded and misleading, BSF chief in Meghalaya, Inspector General O P Opadhyay said. A top Dhaka Metropolitan Police officer earlier in the day said that two primary suspects in the Hadi murder case have crossed into Meghalaya via the Haluaghat border "with the help of local associates". "There is no evidence to suggest that any individual crossed the international border from the Haluaghat sector into Meghalaya. The BSF has neither detected nor received any report of such an incident," Opadhyay told PTL. The claims being circulated are unfounded and misleading, he said. A senior Meghalaya police officer also said that there was "no input or intelligence to corroborate" the claim of the suspects' presence in the Garo Hills region. The officer said local police units had not detected any such movement and coordination with central agencies was ongoing.

BSF officials said that the personnel deployed along the international border have been kept on a high state of alert at all times to avert any untoward incident, particularly in view of the unrest and volatile situation prevailing in the



neighbouring country. The force reiterated that the international border in the sector was under constant surveillance and any attempt at illegal cross-border movement would be promptly detected and dealt with. Hadi, 32, was shot in the head on December 12 during an election campaign in Dhaka. He was airlifted to Singapore for advanced treatment but died of his injuries on December 18. Hadi, spokesperson of Inquilab

Moncho, was a prominent youth leader during the July-August 2024 mass street protests that led to the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government last year. He was also a parliamentary candidate for the upcoming February 12 elections. The Garo Hills region falls under Meghalaya's western sector, which shares an international border with Bangladesh and is guarded by the Border Security Force.

Supreme Court stays Sengar's bail in CJI says, 'Even judges can make errors'; survivor vows justice, demands death penalty for convict

Unnao rape case: Delhi High Court order

Uttar Pradesh, Dec 29: The Supreme Court on Monday stayed the Delhi High Court order of cancelling the death sentence of expelled BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar and granting him bail in the 2017 Unnao rape case. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had moved the Supreme Court against the bail plea three days ago. Delhi | On SC staying Delhi HC's decision allowing suspension of Kuldeep Sengar's life sentence in Unnao rape case, the victim's mother says, "I want to thank the Supreme Court for this verdict. The Supreme Court has done justice to me. My family needs security. Our... pic. twitter.com/UunIMWPa9j— ANI (@ANI) December 29, 2025

QuotelImage "I want to thank the Supreme Court for this verdict. The Supreme Court has done justice to me. My family needs security. Our advocates need security. I request that the government keep us all safe. I always used to say that I had faith in the Supreme Court. The two judges of the High Court did us an injustice. They broke my faith in the High Court..." A bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, Justice JK Maheshwari, and Justice Augustine George Masih heard arguments from both sides for around 40 minutes. The Chief Justice observed that while courts generally do not stay orders once a convict or undertrial is released without hearing them, the circumstances in this case are exceptional, as Sengar has already been convicted in a separate case. The bench said important legal



questions in the matter require detailed consideration. The court also highlighted a serious legal concern regarding the definition of "public servant" under the POCSO Act. The Chief Justice questioned why a police constable is considered a public servant while elected representatives such as MLAs or MPs are excluded, describing this disparity as troubling.

Justice JK Maheshwari further asked whether the High Court had explicitly stated whether Sengar was guilty under Section 376(2) (i). Senior advocate Hariharan, appearing for the convict, argued that definitions from other laws cannot be borrowed to interpret a penal statute. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the CBI, described the case as "ter-

rible," noting that charges under Sections 376 of the IPC and the POCSO Act were framed. He added that in such cases, the minimum sentence can be 20 years, extendable to imprisonment for life.

Unnao rape case in 4 points

The crime and initial struggle: The victim was raped by former BJP MLA Kuldeep

Singh Sengar on June 4, 2017. Despite repeatedly approaching police officials, no action was taken. During this period, her father was tied to a tree and beaten, and Sengar's brother Atul and his family members were also attacked. On April 8, 2018, the victim attempted self-immolation in front of the Chief Minister's residence in Lucknow but was rescued by security personnel.

Father's death and CBI investigation: The following day, the victim's father died in police custody. Ten people, including Sengar, his brother, and the SHO of Makhi police station, were accused and later sentenced. Sengar's involvement and the death of the victim's father brought national attention, and the case was transferred to the CBI on April 12, 2018.

Arrest and further tragedy: Sengar was arrested and sent to jail. Meanwhile, the victim's uncle, who had been helping her, was sentenced to 10 years in prison for an unrelated 19-year-old case, leaving the victim alone. On July 28, 2019, while traveling with her aunt, another relative, and her lawyer, the victim was hit by a truck, killing the two relatives. She survived the accident.

Trial and conviction: The case was taken seriously by then Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi and transferred to Delhi's Tis Hazari Court. After a continuous 45-day hearing, Sengar was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment on December 21, 2019.

Cong, a minister in Mizoram, denounces violence over Christmas

Aizawl, Dec 29: Mizoram Home Minister K Sapdanga and other leaders, including state Congress president Lal Thanzara, on Sunday condemned a series of attacks targeting members of Christian community and alleged attempts to disrupt Christmas celebrations in different parts of the country. Sapdanga expressed concern and anguish over the incident at St. Mary's School in Assam's Nalbari district where activists of a fringe outfit allegedly forced their way into the school, vandalising Christmas decorations and disturbing the celebration on the home minister of Mizoram, a Christian-majority state, said in a statement. Citing that Christmas is a time that reminds humanity of peace, goodwill, and compassion, Sapdanga said any attempt to disturb communal harmony and to create fear among worshippers is deeply distressing and unacceptable. He appreciated the authorities in Assam for their timely response and firm action in nabbing the culprits involved in the incident. "The rule of law must prevail, and those responsible should face appropriate legal consequences," he said. Sapdanga also appealed to the people of all religious communities to uphold mutual respect, unity, and understanding.

"Let us continue to work together to ensure that peace, harmony, and the spirit of brotherhood remain the guiding principles of our regions," he said. The Mizoram Pradesh Congress



Committee (MPCC) also condemned the alleged attacks on Christians, vandalism of festival decorations and disruption of Christmas carols in different parts of the country during Christmas. State Congress president Lal Thanzara, in a statement, blamed the BJP for the incidents, saying, "Secularism is being systematically dismantled under its (BJP) rule." Lal Thanzara claimed that Christmas celebrations were being attacked and disturbed allegedly by organisations affiliated with the BJP, like the RSS, Bajrang Dal, and VHP, which was a matter of shame for the country at a time when Christmas was celebrated enthusiastically around the world. He said that the recent atrocities against Christian minority perpetrated allegedly by Hindu vigilante groups have exposed the BJP's failure to protect minorities in the country. "Such incidents are not isolated. In BJP-ruled states, these

organisations have been emboldened to act with impunity. In Assam's Nalbari district, preparation for Christmas celebrations at St. Mary's School was destroyed, exposing the BJP's failure to protect minorities and uphold the constitution," Lal Thanzara said. The Congress president alleged that Christian community faced as many as 834 incidents of persecution in 2024 and children participating in Christmas celebrations were also being assaulted. "This alarming rise in persecution of Christians clearly reflects a pattern of targeted intimidation and religious suppression in the country," he alleged. "We stand in solidarity with all persecuted Christians and demand immediate accountability against those responsible. We urge missionaries and believers to continue their faith and service courageously, without fear or intimidation," Lal Thanzara added.

Arunachal Govt orders reverification of land compensation claims in East Kameng dist

Itanagar, Dec 29: The Arunachal Pradesh Government has constituted reverification committees to carry out physical reverification of land and compensation claims for the Lada-Sarli Frontier Highway Road in East Kameng district, following the recommendations of a fact-finding committee. According to an order issued by the Department of Land Management on December 23, 2025, the reverification will cover Packages I, II, III, IV and V of the project, to be carried out under the supervision of the Deputy Commissioner of East Kameng district. The reverification committees have been tasked with conducting physical verification of every land parcel falling under the Right of Way (RoW) as per the approved strip plan of the Lada-Sarli Frontier Highway. The exercise will be carried out with reference to the award (compensation) prepared earlier by a committee constituted under the chairmanship of the then Deputy Commissioner of East Kameng. As per the order, the committees will prepare a comparative statement in Excel format, detailing the chainage, name of beneficiaries, land area, number and type of standing assets attached to the land, and the compensation amount calculated as per the Manual 2022 rates. The revised figures will be compared with the earlier

the chainage, name of beneficiaries, land area, number, and type of standing assets attached to the land, and the compensation amount calculated as per the Manual 2022 rates. The revised figures will be compared with the earlier



compensation estimates, and any variations will be duly recorded. The entire re-verification process will be video-graphed and documented in accordance with the Ground Survey Report Format (Annexure-7) of Manual 2022. The committees have been directed to submit their reports within 45 days from the date of issue of the order. Separate Re-Verification Committees have been constituted for Package I & II (14.600 km to 43.650 km), Package III & IV ment, PWD, Horticulture, Fisheries, Agriculture and Forest departments, with ADCs and SDOs designated as Chairmen for their respective packages. The order further directs the Chief Engineer, PWD (Highway), Itanagar to engage the Executive Engineer, PWD Rupa Highway Division, along with

consultants, to delineate the Right of Way on the ground as per the approved strip plan to facilitate timely physical verification.

Additionally, the Planning Department has been requested to place an amount of Rs 60 lakh at the disposal of the DC, East Kameng, to meet expenses during the re-verification process. For security arrangements, the Principal Secretary (Home) has been requested to deploy three platoons of CRPF to assist the Re-Verification Committees during the exercise. The case has been registered following a joint complaint submitted by the All Nyishi Youth Association (ANYA), East Kameng Unit, alleging large-scale irregularities in the disbursement of compensation amounts.

River Erosion Control Project Launched in Newajeshpur

Mankachar, Dec 29: Residents of Newajeshpur village under Malir Alga Gaon Panchayat in South Salmara–Mankachar district officially started building a river wall using boulder spurs on Monday in an attempt to stop the Brahmaputra’s severe riverbank erosion. The project has only been carried out with community involvement and donations from the general public. The building project started close to Newajeshpur’s Mathauri neighborhood, where sizable tracts of land have long been susceptible to erosion. Thousands of bighas of agricultural land, homes, and other government and non-government businesses have already been washed away in this area due to the Brahmaputra’s persistent and severe erosion. Locals chose to take the initiative on their own since there were no rapid, comprehensive protection measures in place. In order to avert additional harm to what is

left of their land and communities, the villagers banded together and pooled their own funds to begin the boulder spur project.

During the inauguration, hundreds of people from the surrounding areas were present. In addition to expressing hope that the embankment would lessen erosion and protect their means of subsistence, locals prayed for the project’s success. In the midst of community support and collaborative participation, the work formally began. According to locals, the project is a reflection of the people’s solidarity and resolve, as they had no choice but to take independent action to safeguard their future. Additionally, they emphasized that more farms and villages could be at risk of flooding if prompt action is not taken. Residents of the South Salmara–Mankachar district have been urged by the locals to provide both material and moral sup-



port in order to finish the embankment project. They stated that in order to prevent future loss to the region and

to guarantee long-term protection against the erosion of the Brahmaputra, collective collaboration is crucial.

Tezpur University Protesters Sit on 24-Hour Hunger Strike

Tezpur, Dec 29: In protest of unresolved administrative issues at the university, Tezpur University stakeholders, including the Tezpur University Teachers’ Association (TUTA), the Tezpur University Non-Teaching Employees’ Association (TUNTEA), and members of the student body, started a 24-hour hunger strike on Sunday. The hunger strike, which lasts from 12:00 AM to 11:59 PM, commemorates the university community’s 100 days of continuous protest. The demonstrators claimed that after numerous attempts at nonviolent protests, memoranda, official investigations, and appeals failed to elicit a significant response from the government, they decided to step up their activity. They claim that the protracted quiet has height-

ened annoyance and brought attention to the system’s lack of accountability. Stakeholders are upset with Vice-Chancellor Shambhu Nath Singh’s prolonged absence during the demonstration. They said that administrative devastation has come from higher authorities’ negligence on the matter, negatively impacting student welfare, staff morale, and academic functioning. They said that the public’s confidence in the university’s administration has also been damaged by the circumstances.

The goal of the hunger strike is to raise national awareness of what the demonstrators called a larger governance crisis in which powerful people are protected while institutional integrity and democratic voices are disregarded. They said that the problem



extends beyond Tezpur University and poses grave questions regarding the legitimacy of public institutions and the ethical obligations of the political system. The stake-

holders reaffirmed their determination to carry on the cause until justice is served despite the protracted battle. They urged authorities to take immediate action in the best

interests of the university and its future, claiming that time or weariness would not lessen their desire for responsibility, transparency, and sound governance.

Internet and mobile data services restored in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong

Guwahati, Dec 29: Internet and mobile data services have been restored in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts of Assam after several days of suspension. The government had earlier blocked internet services from December 23, 2025 following a serious law and order situation in the region. According to an official notification issued by the Home and Political Department of the Government of Assam, the authorities reviewed the situation and found that normalcy had largely returned. The government stated that the risk to public peace and safety has reduced, and the situation is now stable enough to allow services to resume. The order restoring internet access came into force from 8:00 AM on December 28, 2025. All mobile service providers operating in the two districts were directed to start internet and mobile data services from that time. The notification, issued in the name of the Governor of Assam, mentioned that the earlier suspension order had been taken under provisions of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 and the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017. The fresh order reversing the ban was signed by Additional Chief Secretary Ajay Tewari.

Biswanath Chariali Municipality Marks 55 Years of Establishment

Biswanath, Dec 29: In order to commemorate 55 years since the town’s civic body was established, the Biswanath Chariali Municipality began its Golden Jubilee celebration with ceremonial and cultural events. The elected officials, senior people, and well-known local figures are all taking part in the two-day festival.

Several visionary dignitaries worked hard to build the Biswanath Chariali Town Committee in 1970.

In 2011, the town committee was elevated to the status of a municipality in recognition of its expansion and administrative improvements. Currently comprising 12 wards, the Biswanath Municipality plays a significant role in regional planning and civic administration. 55 flags were unfurled to commemorate the Golden Jubilee event, which marked the culmination of 55 years as a civic entity. Together, Biswanath Municipality Chairman Amarjyoti Borthakur, Biswanath MLA and President of the Golden Jubilee celebration committee Pramod Borthakur, and fifty-three other notable citizens who have made contributions to the town’s social, cultural, and economic development raised the



flags.

The statue of Seniram Das, the founding president of the previous town committee and generally seen as the architect of contemporary Biswanath Chariali, received flower tributes after the flag-raising ceremony. Zubeen Garg, a beloved late artist from Assam, was also honored with tributes that recognized his contribution to the region’s social and cultural life. Additionally, a Zubeen Garg Memorial Cultural Evening has been planned. Cultural performances by regional performers are part of the

program. The audience participated in the event in enormous numbers. According to the celebration committee, the second day of the Golden Jubilee celebration will begin with a cultural procession that highlights the collective spirit and legacy of the Biswanath Chariali people.

In addition to honoring the municipality’s accomplishments during the previous 50 years, the Golden Jubilee celebration serves as a chance to reaffirm promises to inclusive growth and better civic services in the years to come.

Demow Hospital Reports Five Years Snakebite-Free

Guwahati, Dce 29: In a landmark public health achievement, Demow Rural Hospital in Assam has recorded zero snakebite-related deaths for five consecutive years (2021–2025)—a rare feat for a rural healthcare facility operating without intensive care infrastructure. Snakebite continues to be a major public health threat in Assam, disproportionately impacting rural and economically vulnerable communities. Demow’s experience, however, shows that timely, protocol-based care at the rural level can dramatically reduce mortality, challenging the long-held dependence on tertiary referrals. Snakebite treatment services were initiated at Demow in 2018. Prior to that, patients were routinely referred to higher centres due to limited local capacity. Over time, systematic training, case reviews and community engagement led to the development of a standardised treatment guideline—the “Demow Protocol.”

The protocol emphasises early hospital reporting through community participation, mandatory 24-hour observation after a bite, timely administration of anti-snake venom based on clinical indication, uniform treatment irrespective of socioeconomic status, and syndrome-based management tailored to Assam’s snake fauna.

Explaining the significance of the milestone, Surajit Giri, who leads the snakebite programme at Demow, also said: “Snakebite deaths are largely preventable. Our experience shows that if patients reach the hospital early and treatment protocols are followed strictly, lives can be saved even in rural hospitals without ICU facilities. The credit goes to our healthcare workers and the community, who now trust medical care over delay or unsafe practices.” Between 2018 and 2025, the hospital managed 3,560 snakebite cases, with reporting rising sharply as community confidence grew.

Assam reported around 10,650 snakebite cases in 2024 and 11,250



in 2025, with deaths declining steadily—from over 150 in 2022 to 27 in 2025. Health officials further say the strengthening of rural snakebite services, inspired by the Demow model, has contributed to this trend. The Demow model has also received attention at state, national and international platforms. The Indian Council of Medical Research has also undertaken a scientific evaluation, and the approach has been discussed in government forums and academic conferences. Several rural and district hospitals in Assam have since upgraded their snakebite management systems based on this experience. As Dr Giri further notes, “Demow proves that with training, discipline and community cooperation, rural hospitals can eliminate preventable snakebite deaths.” For a state battling one of India’s highest snakebite burdens, Demow now stands as a scalable, life-saving public health model.

Most cases at the centre occurred during the monsoon months, with green pit vipers (*Trimeresurus* spp.) being the most common culprit, followed by cobras, kraits, and the red-necked keelback. Patients showing early signs of envenomation were administered polyvalent antivenom under a standardized treatment protocol developed in-house. The study attributes the success to a three-pronged system. This system includes community awareness campaigns launched since 2018, a Venom Response Team (VRT) linking villagers with the hospital through WhatsApp and phone alerts, and a Fast Response Team (FRT) of well-trained health workers ensuring quick antivenom management.

Minor Schoolgirl Assaulted in Nagaon’s Rajagaon Area

Nagaon, Dec 29: Widespread public outrage and demands for severe punishment have been sparked by a startling case of attack on a young schoolgirl from Rajagaon hamlet under the Kachua Police Station in Nagaon district. Police have started a thorough investigation, but the accused young person has allegedly been running away since the event.

Local sources claim that a local kid named Tutu Sharma, son of Amrit Sharma of Rajagaon, had been harassing the victim, a Class VIII student, nonstop for about a year. Despite the girl’s repeated refusal, the accused is alleged to have frequently followed her to and from school, verbally abused her, made lewd gestures, and attempted to frighten her.

The accused allegedly started harassing the girl by capturing pictures without her permission and threatening to post them on social media after his advances were turned down. Additionally, he allegedly wrote obscene messages and made lewd phone calls, which severely stressed the minor’s mental state.

The victim didn’t say anything because she was afraid of her father’s severe behavior and social pressure.

But on December 21, when the girl was allegedly stopped by the accused on her way home from school, things took a dramatic turn. The young person allegedly viciously attacked her when she rejected him once more, slapping and punching her before kicking her in the knees and stomach. According to reports, the girl passed out at the side of the road. The accused fled after locals who saw the occurrence hurried to the scene and intervened. After being saved by the townspeople, the wounded girl eventually recovered consciousness.

Following the incident, the victim told her family, and her father formally complained to the Kachua Police Station. According to police officials, a case has been filed and attempts are being made to apprehend the culprit as soon as possible.

Local organizations and citizens have strongly protested the tragedy, calling for prompt justice and more robust safety measures for school-age girls. Police have promised that strict legal action will be taken and that no one will be spared.

Major Police Crackdown on Drugs and Crime in Assam

Guwahati, Dec 29: Police units in numerous Assamese districts have successfully cracked down on drug trafficking and other criminal activities in a series of swift and coordinated police operations. Numerous suspects have been apprehended, and drugs, guns, and stolen goods have been seized. This comes after growing worries about young people being more involved in drug addiction and criminal activity.

The Officer-in-Charge of Nagarbera PS and its employees launched a raid in response to detailed inputs, and one person was taken into custody for selling drugs. Five vials containing 6.22 grams of drugs were found during the operation. To find the source, more research is being done. In another operation, the In-Charge of Jorshimulu Outpost and his personnel raided Haticholapam based on reliable intelligence. Eighty-two plastic vials of suspected NDPS chemicals were found after an accused person was taken into custo-



dy. Cases have been filed under the relevant legal provisions.

But the Baihata Police Station crew also stopped a severe crime by thwarting the intentions for a da-coity with a nighttime pursuit. The police stopped a suspicious car after receiving information, detained the three suspects, and confiscated several weapons. The crime would have had serious repercussions, but the police took action, and they are still looking for further accomplices. Two suspects engaged in multiple mobile snatching crimes were apprehended by a police unit in Nagaon town under the direction of the Itachali Outpost In-Charge. They were found

to have six cell phones and a motorcycle. They have been the subject of lawsuits.

These occurrences typically highlight a concerning trend of rising drug use and criminal activity among young people, which could lead to serious societal and law-and-order issues. The promise of easy money and the availability of narcotics are increasingly luring young people to commit crimes. However, it should be mentioned that the Assam Police forces’ diligence, professionalism, and dedication are also demonstrated by their successful operation. They have also assisted in preventing crimes and ensuring public safety through their proactive measures, prompt collecting, and prompt execution. In addition to making a special plea to the public to join them with their assistance in order to create a safer society, police authorities have once again underlined their will to keep up their tough actions against drug dealers and criminal gangs.

Free Health Camp Serves Around 100 Patients in Bongaigaon

Bongaigaon, Dec 29: The Rakhal Das Gupta Foundation (RDF), Bongaigaon, held a free health examination and diagnosis camp on December 28, 2025, from 9.30 AM to 2:00 PM at R D Memorial Hall, Railway Old Colony, Bongaigaon.

All members of society were welcome to attend the camp, which was organized in partnership with the N.F. Railway Mazdoor Union, Bongaigaon Branch, and Swagat Hospital & Research Center, Bongaigaon.

Speaking during the event, Ashish Biswas stated that the health camp’s goal was to provide basic medical care at no cost to the general public. Initiatives of this kind are crucial for reaching those who have difficulty accessing healthcare. We’ll keep planning such public benefit initiatives in the future,” he continued. Drs. Nayan Jyoti Barman and Ajman Moidy from New Bongaigaon Railway Hospital,

Subhradeep Biswas and Anjuma Jesmin from Swagat Hospital, and Debopriya Dhar provided medical assistance at the camp.

There was also a full medical team from Swagat Hospital. The free medical examinations and diagnostic services benefited about 100 patients. “RDF is dedicated to serving society through healthcare, education, and social awareness programs,” said Dr. P. K. Dhar, Chairman of the Rakhal Das Gupta Foundation.

We are motivated to increase our community service efforts by the positive response to this health camp. Additionally, he told us that Rakhal Das Gupta’s Birth Anniversary Memorial Open Meeting is scheduled on December 30.

Both locals and participants praised the initiative for its seamless operation and significant contribution to public health.

Mizoram Opens Animal Rescue Shelter for Public

Aizawl, Dec 29: The JB Foundation, the first privately run animal rescue facility in Mizoram, opened its Animal Rescue Shelter to the public. Visitors can observe rescue operations, make donations, and adopt animals in need of care. Ezrela Dalidia Fanai, who died on December 25, was honored with the open shelter day. According to the charity, the gesture honored her close involvement with the shelter’s work over the years and her regular reporting on animal welfare issues. According to the charity, all of the money made through its animal hospital was used for rescue, care, and shelter operations. The foundation saw an increase in rescued dogs as a result of illegal importation from outside the state and an increase in recorded incidences of animal abuse, even though Mizoram did not have a major stray dog epidemic. It also indicated an increasing number of stray and abandoned cats being adopted.

EDITORIAL

With your help, charities can help to repair the social fabric

Austerity, cost of living pressures and a chronic lack of investment have damaged the physical and social fabric of some UK towns and neighbourhoods far more than others. In places where large numbers of people feel disheartened about living standards and prospects, and disenchanting by democratic politics as a result, a whole range of grievances can take hold. This year’s Guardian charity appeal is all about countering the alarming rise of far-right, anti-migrant and other extremist politics – and the misconceptions that fuel them. We and our partners are convinced that the fraying threads of communities can be woven back together with effort and imagination, supported by your

generous donations.

If polarisation is fuelled by digital capitalism’s commodification of attention – as illustrated by the role of social media in inflaming anti-migrant protests – cohesion and cooperation increase when people build bridges in real life. The charities and projects in this year’s appeal in this year’s appeal make and strengthen connections. Drawing on a range of techniques and activities, they seek to enhance confidence and reduce antagonism. The charity Locality advocates on behalf of 2,000 local organisations, ensuring that grassroots, bottom-up initiatives are not crowded out by bigger ones. The pioneering community housing provider Back on the Map is a case

in point. It has regenerated a declining and fractured part of Sunderland not for the benefit of property developers but for the people who live there. The neighbourhood is “making leaps and bounds”, one resident told our reporter. Citizens UK will use funds raised to train organisers who play a key role in harnessing community power to come up with projects such as the one above. The Hope Unlimited Charitable Trust gives grants to groups and schemes that counter division and hostility to migrants, and replace grievance with hope. Our other two partners are innovators in the north of England.

The Linking Network has shown that tackling the kinds of divisions that see too many children liv-

ing in separate community silos can be life-enhancing as well as worthwhile. Who is Your Neighbour? promotes conversations with a focus on resolving conflicts. The charity sector has itself been under huge pressure since the financial crisis and the Conservative austerity programme that followed. As the local arms of the state were whittled away, the voluntary sector was expected to pick up what councils could no longer support. The limited redistribution of health and other budgets from richer to poorer areas that Labour has embarked on with schemes such as Pride in Place and changes to council funding should alleviate some of the worst injustices and hardships. But further reform of lo-

cal government finance will be needed, not least because of the impossible burden placed on councils by central government failures on social care and special educational needs. Charities such as the ones we are asking our readers to support can help to knit back together the strands of a stressed society in a spirit of hopefulness. While they are not a substitute for democratically accountable politicians and services, they play a unique role of their own. With more than £500,000 raised, we thank you for your generosity so far. Donate to the Guardian charity appeal 2025 here: [org](#) In 1936, John Scott, son of the late Guardian owner and legendary editor CP Scott, did something unheard of for a media

heir: he gave up his stake for the greater good. After inheriting the newspaper, Scott renounced all financial benefit – bar his salary – in the Guardian (worth £1m at the time and around £62m today) and passed ownership over to the newly formed Scott Trust.

The Trust would evolve to have one key mission: to secure the financial and editorial independence of the Guardian in perpetuity. That means the Guardian can’t be bought. Not by private equity, not by a conglomerate, and definitely not by a billionaire looking for a political mouthpiece. Our independence means we can say what we want, report on who we want, challenge who we want, and stand up at a time when others are sitting down.

Social scourge: On India and child marriages



India has committed to end child marriage by 2030 through the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and while it has made comprehensive strides, there are still miles to go to achieve the target. The Union government recently marked the first anniversary of its Bal Vivah Mukti Bharat Abhiyan with a 100-day awareness campaign for a country free of child marriage. It is a fact that child marriages have been consistently dropping, from 47.4% in 2005-06 to 23.3% in 2019-21, according to National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data. But in a diverse country of a population of 146 crore, the ground reality is that progress is varied and uneven across States and socio-economic demographics. While the highest child marriage rates among women aged 18 to 29 years are prevalent in West Bengal, Bihar and Tripura, States such as Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are not far behind. There is a direct co-relation between child marriage, poverty and education, as the UN Population Fund’s analysis of NFHS data shows. While 40% of girls from the lowest quintile of the household wealth index married before they became adults, in comparison to just 8% of those from the highest quintile, 48% of girls with no education were married below 18 years in comparison to only 4% among those with higher education. The Prevention of

Child Marriage Act, 2006, is the flagship law to end the practice, but figures from National Crime Bureau Records indicate infrequent application of the law and a low conviction rate. Also, the use of laws such as the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, which are stringent and provide no leeway for consenting sexual adolescents, has led to other concerns. Afraid of triggering harsh punishments from the criminal justice system, many underage girls are turning to unregistered, unprofessional help, endangering their health further. Already, it is established that child marriages can lead to poor maternal and child health. In this backdrop, it is imperative to study why States such as West Bengal, which incentivises girls to study with a cash scheme, still has a high incidence of child marriage. The Centre’s ‘Beti Bachao Beti Padhao’ campaign has to do much more to reach the most vulnerable communities, and ensure that infrastructure, including clean toilets and safe public transport, are in place to keep girls at school. According to Girls Not Brides, a global partnership, at least nine of the 17 SDGs will not be achieved without ending child marriage. In India, unless the several factors driving child marriage — poverty, and education, health and gender inequality — are addressed, it will be impossible to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

Govt must act now to curb air pollution

With the arrival of winter, air pollution in Dhaka and across the country has once again reached hazardous levels. On Sunday morning, Dhaka was ranked as the world’s third most polluted city, with an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 216. Classified as “very unhealthy,” such air poses serious risks to children, the elderly, and people with heart or respiratory diseases. This should set off alarms at the highest levels of the government. Unfortunately, while this is every winter’s grim reality, it is met with little to no action from the authorities. While Dhaka is the hardest hit by air pollution, the rest of the country is also in a bad situation. Even more concerning is that air pollution is no longer just a seasonal problem; it affects us year-round, with Bangladesh ranked as the worst-affected country in South Asia, according to a recent World Bank report. The sources of pollution are well known: industrial emissions, brick kilns, outdated vehicles, construction dust,

household cooking, agricultural burning, and polluting power plants. Moreover, about 40 percent of Dhaka’s pollution is reportedly transboundary. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), air pollution causes an estimated seven million premature deaths worldwide each year, primarily from stroke, heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, and acute respiratory infections. Numerous studies over the years have shown that air pollution remains a silent, pervasive threat in the country. Yet the government’s response remains lacklustre. While some initiatives were taken to shut down illegal brick kilns and promote environment-friendly alternatives, the goals have largely remained unfulfilled. Outdated vehicles continue to operate on city streets, and hundreds of construction sites remain uncovered, contributing heavily to dust pollution. The impact of these failures is devastating, particularly for children.

Security lapses ahead of polls disturbing

We’re alarmed by the reported discovery of an explosives cache in a place of learning as well as the killing of a pedestrian in a flyover bomb blast. Both incidents, occurring within a span of 48 hours in Dhaka, have come as warnings that the stability of the pre-election period is far more fragile than the government would like to admit. In South Keraniganj, a madrasa erupted on Friday, injuring two children. When police sifted through the ruins, they unearthed something sinister: four bomb-like objects and 400 litres of chemicals, believed to be hydrogen peroxide, stored in drums. The key suspect, Al Amin Sheikh, is a man of varied identities: a madrasa director, an Uber driver and, according to police, a figure with a history of terror charges linked to the banned Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh. That a known crime suspect, previously arrested in 2017 and 2020, could quietly stockpile industrial accelerants in a residential building raises uncomfortable questions about the government’s surveillance of extremists. Police suspect the chemicals were intended for “sabotage” ahead of the upcoming elections. Just two



days prior to this blast, Siam Majumder, a 21-year-old shop worker, was killed on the New Eskaton Road when a crude bomb was hurled from the Moghbazar-Mouchak flyover. As Siam’s father asked, “Why do bombs fall on the heads of ordinary people?” It is a question that resonates uneasily across the capital. The two incidents, though distinct, paint a gloomy picture of the country’s security apparatus, just as the hazards are multiplying. On the ground in Keraniganj, a crime den operated under the nose

of a landlord who believed she was renting her house to an orphanage. On the flyover, authorities have admitted, a large section of the lights had been turned off, and CCTV cameras were absent. Meanwhile, police have later confirmed that six individuals have been arrested with ties to the madrasa blast in a widening dragnet. A formal case has now been registered against seven named people—with the absconding suspect, Al Amin Sheikh, at the top of the list—alongside a shadowy cohort of unidentified accomplices. Whether the danger is stockpiled in the capital’s periphery or dropped from a city flyover, such violence suggests that the road to the February elections will be perilous. The government must, therefore, pivot from reactive containment to proactive vigilance. The intelligence failure in Keraniganj about the existence of bombs indicates that the government’s gaze is not firmly fixed on public safety threats. Law-enforcement agencies must urgently recalibrate their priorities, ensuring that surveillance tracks criminals on the loose. It is all the more urgent because, ultimately, a successful election rests on the peace of the streets.

The emergence of romance literature and its eventual recognition

At last, the perception of popular fiction by women as “silly novels by lady novelists”, as George Eliot sniffily put it back in 1856, is changing. Next year, the British Book Awards will recognise romantic fiction for the first time. The recognition is long overdue. This welcome news came in the same week as the deaths of two doyennes of the form, Joanna Trollope and, at just 55, Sophie Kinsella, only a couple of months after the loss of national treasure Dame Jilly Cooper. Between them these publishing power houses produced more than 100 books, sold millions of copies, and inspired hit films and TV series, most recently last year’s star-studded adaptation of Cooper’s 1985 Riders. Few writers have such a defining impact that they create a whole new genre: the bonkbuster, or Aga saga, as the novels of Cooper and Trollope patronisingly came to be known. The first of Kinsella’s mega-selling Shopaholic novels in 2000 followed hot on the heels of Helen Fielding’s Bridget Jones and the birth of “chick-lit”. Jane Austen, whose 250th anniversary was celebrated this week, has mischievously been called the original chick-lit novelist. Her genius was to invent a form of storytelling that kept readers enraptured by seemingly trivial matters. Since then, as Sally Rooney has pointed out, the stakes of the English-language novel have been love and marriage. With their acute awareness of money and class, seasoned with a generous sprinkling of wit, Cooper, Trollope and Kinsella are very much part of this tradition. As with Austen, their fiction tells you what life was really like at a certain period – especially for women – better than any history book. In her sex-and-champers sagas of the upper classes, Cooper distilled the competitiveness and excess of the Thatcherite 80s. Trollope’s darker tales of desperate housewives in country towns embraced the changing shape of modern families. And Kinsella’s Shopaholic series spoke to young women with small flats and big overdrafts in the noughties, when credit was cheap and the high street thrived. They all captured the zeitgeist.

Some of the criticisms levelled against these novels are fair. Cooper’s attitudes on gender

stereotypes and race now seem dated at best. Although, as Trollope insisted, Agas are only mentioned twice in her work, her fictional worlds are financially well insulated. And Kinsella’s novels unapologetically romanticise consumerism. None of these writers claimed great literary prowess. “I’m no lyrical stylist... and I certainly wouldn’t describe my novels as intellectual,” Trollope admitted in a Guardian interview. Instead, they wanted to comfort and entertain; “to cheer people up”, as Cooper said. Romance is all about escapism, so it is no surprise that the genre is flourishing today. While publishing, crime fiction aside, is struggling, sales of romantic novels have soared since 2020 alongside online communities like BookTok that have enthusiastically popularised them. Last year saw the biggest sales since records began, thanks mainly to the rise of another new genre, romantasy. In the run-up to Christmas, Onyx Storm by Rebecca Yarros had earned more than any book, in any category, this year.

There has also been no shortage of more conventional romance, including Jessica Stanley’s hit debut Consider Yourself Kissed and novels from the established names Emily Henry, Ali Hazelwood, Jojo Moyes and Marian Keyes. Without romantic fiction, the book world would be much poorer in every sense. No wonder it is being taken seriously at last. In 1936, John Scott, son of the late Guardian owner and legendary editor CP Scott, did something unheard of for a media heir: he gave up his stake for the greater good. After inheriting the newspaper, Scott renounced all financial benefit – bar his salary – in the Guardian (worth £1m at the time and around £62m today) and passed ownership over to the newly formed Scott Trust. The Trust would evolve to have one key mission: to secure the financial and editorial independence of the Guardian in perpetuity. That means the Guardian can’t be bought. Not by private equity, not by a conglomerate, and definitely not by a billionaire looking for a political mouthpiece. Our independence means we can say what we want, report on who we want, challenge who we want, and stand up at a time when others are sitting down.

The Guardian view on the new space race: humanity risks exporting its old politics to the moon

During the cold war’s space race, the Apollo moon missions were driven by the need to prove American superiority. Having made that political and technological point with the 1969 moon landing, the contest between Moscow and Washington petered out. A new dash across the skies kicks off in 2026, reigniting geopolitical competition under the guise of “peaceful exploration”. The moon’s south pole is emerging as the most valuable real estate in the solar system, offering “peaks of eternal light” for solar arrays and ice deposits in craters shielded from the sun. The US and a China-led bloc are eyeing the lunar surface and its potential to control a post-terrestrial economy. Space had been humanity’s last commons, supposedly shielded by the 1967 UN outer space treaty that bans state exploitation of the heavens.

It is vague, however, on private claims – a loophole that is now fuelling a tycoon-led scramble for the stars. The aim is obvious: to act first, shape norms and dare others to object. Two lunar missions launching next year – NASA’s Artemis II and China’s Chang’e 7 – are competing for strategic supremacy. To hasten the commercialisation of space, Donald Trump is shrinking state support for NASA, which will have its smallest budget since 1961.

Washington wants space exploration to be led by the private sector, a wish anchored in the Artemis accords. Signed by more than 40 nations, the accords are a vision of extending earthly ownership structures into space – and one embraced by tech moguls such as Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos. Little wonder, then, that Mr Musk aims to float his space exploration firm SpaceX in 2026 for \$1.5tn. By contrast, the International Lunar Research Station – China’s

joint effort with Russia and global-south partners – embodies a stated-led approach that seeks to escape an American-led system. China and Russia say that they are complying with UN rules because their lunar bases will be under an international “collaborative” consortium not any one state’s control. The result is a rivalry with two camps both publicly invoking “peaceful exploration” while engaging in strategic competition for lunar resources. Already there are claims that water could produce rocket fuel and sustain life. Others speculate whether moon rock might be useful for construction. These are essentially rhetorical claims – like the oft-repeated assertion that space’s helium-3 is a potential fusion fuel.

These are arguments, however thin, for governments to justify lunar spending with the promise of future potential. Nuclear fission on the moon, by contrast, is a concrete engineering race, with the US and China-Russia already funding reactor designs necessary to support human lunar colonies. NASA intends to do so within five years; China and Russia say theirs will be running by 2035.

The technology is not new: small fission reactors in space were part of cold war duelling. But the moon looks like a proving ground. Reliable nuclear power during the 14-day lunar night would be needed for permanent human bases. Once solved, the same power technology can be taken to Mars. Mr Trump has already said US astronauts will plant the stars and stripes on Mars. The 1992 UN principles relevant to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space provide a framework for safety and risk reduction, but not a regulator. The nation that works out how to achieve reliable off-world energy systems could determine the balance of industrial

and digital power for the next century.

The drive to leave Earth is often characterised as humans’ need for discovery and exploration. But there may be something more pressing: humanity is using up natural resources 1.7 times faster than our planet’s biocapacity can regenerate them. There are essentially three ways out: become more efficient by squeezing more GDP per unit of energy; green the production, distribution and consumption of the economy to bring capitalism in line with ecological limits; or move energy-intensive processes off-world. Much of Silicon Valley favours the last techno-optimist option rather than the first two Earth-based approaches. Google wants datacentres in orbit powered by solar energy.

Energy and computer arms races have merged in a startling admission that Earth-based datacentres are approaching ecological and political limits. The answer: Google is to put them in the skies. As artificial-intelligence demand and electrification accelerate faster than terrestrial grids can decarbonise, the incentive for off-Earth, continuous solar energy will grow stronger. What begins as pragmatic innovation could end as a new phase of extraction: a search for energy and compute capacity once Earth’s limits have been reached. Life may be imitating art. Kim Stanley Robinson’s classic sci-fi Mars trilogy opens in 2026 with humanity’s first colonial voyage to the planet. In its first book, Red Mars shows Earth’s nations and corporations over decades compete to control the new frontier. Robinson’s “Transnats” foreshadow today’s private contractors and state conglomerates.

Echoes of the novel’s debates – nuclear versus solar, terraforming versus preservation – can be found in the

real space race today. And just as the colonisation of Mars was justified by Earth’s ecological decline, today’s lunar exploration is rationalised by “resource utilisation” – using the moon’s resources to reduce dependence on the home planet. The logic subtly inverts the problem: planetary overshoot becomes a licence to expand it. Red Mars ultimately warns that humanity would export its old politics to new worlds with disastrous results. Before occupying another planet, the novel’s message is that we must first learn to live sustainably on our own. We can escape Earth but, the novel asks, can we escape ourselves? Yet today, space law is being fashioned to allow appropriation under the guise of peaceful, commercial activity. The US’s 2015 Space Act permits the mining of asteroids as if they were open seams of ore.

NASA’s moon rock returns helped the US Congress justify space property rights – opening the door for humanity’s last commons to slide into corporate hands. In the last instalment of Robinson’s trilogy, Blue Mars, by the year 2225 settlers are living in harmony with the world they have made. Humans terraform Mars and begin, at last, to inhabit it responsibly. One can only hope we understand that far sooner.

In 1936, John Scott, son of the late Guardian owner and legendary editor CP Scott, did something unheard of for a media heir: he gave up his stake for the greater good. After inheriting the newspaper, Scott renounced all financial benefit – bar his salary – in the Guardian (worth £1m at the time and around £62m today) and passed ownership over to the newly formed Scott Trust. The Trust would evolve to have one key mission: to secure the financial and editorial independence of the Guardian in perpetuity.

When Will the December Quarter Results for TCS Q3 2026 Be Released

An explanation of the record date

New Delhi: Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), India's largest IT services firm, has announced the schedule for declaring its December quarter financial results. The company shared the update through a regulatory filing on Wednesday, December 24. According to the filing, the TCS board of directors will meet on Monday, January 12, 2026, to review and approve the company's financial performance for the third quarter of FY26. According to the filing, the TCS board of directors will meet on Monday, January 12, 2026, to review and approve the company's financial performance for the third quarter of FY26. TCS has fixed Saturday, January 17, 2026, as the record date for determining eligible shareholders. Investors whose names appear in the company's records on this date will be entitled to receive the interim dividend, subject to approval. In the previous quarter (Q2FY26), TCS had announced an interim dividend of ₹11 per share. For the September quarter (Q2FY26), TCS reported a 2.4% year-on-year increase in revenue, which stood at ₹65,799 crore. Growth was primarily driven by the banking, financial services, and insurance (BFSI) segment, which contributes nearly one-third of

the company's total revenue and posted a 1% rise. However, revenues from the consumer, healthcare, and manufacturing segments declined by 2.9%, 2.2%, and 1.1%, respectively. On the profitability front, consolidated net profit rose 1.4% to ₹2,075 crore, though it fell short of analysts' expectations due to higher severance-related costs. Investors will now closely watch the January 12 board meeting for insights into TCS's Q3 performance and the interim dividend announcement. As investors await the January 12 board meeting, all eyes will be on TCS's Q3 FY26 performance and its decision on the interim dividend. The announcement will offer key insights into the IT major's growth outlook, demand trends across sectors, and shareholder returns. With the record date already set, market participants and shareholders will be closely tracking developments as TCS prepares to reveal its December quarter results. TCS will announce its Q3 FY2026 (December quarter) results on January 12, 2026, alongside a potential third interim dividend. The record date for dividend eligibility is set for January 17, 2026. The results will cover the period ending December 31, 2025, and include



a board review. The record date (January 17, 2026) is the specific date set by the company to determine which shareholders are eligible to receive the dividend

Funds are gaining traction: Low risk

New Delhi: Equity arbitrage funds are drawing renewed attention from investors and policymakers alike, emerging as a rare corner of the mutual fund universe where investor incentives, market efficiency and government revenue align neatly. These funds, which profit from price differences between the cash and derivatives markets, are increasingly being viewed as a low-volatility parking option with relatively attractive post-tax outcomes tax brackets. Kotak Mutual Fund Managing Director Nilesh Shah recently highlighted this balance, describing equity arbitrage.

PNB, MCX, Coforge, Shree Cement, Timex Group among stocks in focus

New Delhi: Domestic equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty wrapped up the holiday-shortened week in the green, but the early optimism failed to sustain as the week progressed. The markets kicked off with a bullish undertone, only to slip into a narrow range amid thin year-end volumes and a lack of meaningful domestic cues. Caution ahead of the upcoming earnings season further capped upside. Corporate actions: Multi Commodity Exchange of India (MCX), A-1 Ltd, Avasara Finance, Alps Industries, and Magnanimous Trade & Finance are among stocks which would turn ex-dates for corporate actions next week, BSE data showed. Punjab National Bank (PNB): Shares of PNB are likely to be in focus on Dalal Street next week, following a significant disclosure by the public sector lender. In a regulatory filing submitted post-market hours on

Friday, December 26, the bank reported a borrowing fraud worth Rs 2,434 crore involving the erstwhile promoters of two SREI Group entities.

Coforge: Coforge has announced the acquisition of Encora for an enterprise value of \$2.35 billion, a strategic consolidation set to create a combined tech powerhouse with annual revenues approaching \$2.5 billion. Vikran Engineering: The company on Friday, post-market hours, announced securing Letters of Awards (LOAs) for solar power projects totalling 45.75 MW in Madhya Pradesh.

Aurobindo Pharma: The pharma major announced on Saturday that its wholly-owned subsidiary, CuraTeQ Biologics, has mutually agreed to terminate its licensing agreement with US-based BioFactura Inc regarding the development of BFI-751, a proposed biosimilar to Stelara (Ustekinumab).



Solarworld Energy Solutions: Solarworld has secured a major order worth approximately Rs 725.33 crore from NTPC Renewable Energy Limited for the development of a 250 MWac grid-connected solar PV project. Tamilnad Mercantile Bank (TMB): TMB is set to expand its domestic footprint with the opening of five new branches on December 29, 2025, according to a regulatory filing submitted to the exchanges post market hours on Friday.

Loan Growth In India To Be Strong In Q3 FY26 With Improved Net Interest

New Delhi: System loan growth has picked up and Q3 FY26 is expected to show better loan growth and improved net interest margins, a report said on Saturday. The report from Elara Capital said the quarter should also see lower slippages in unsecured and microfinance institutional loans and steady recovery trends that may benefit credit costs. "Even with better Q3 outlook, we expect certain pressure points on deposits and anticipate NIM revisions for FY27, which could lead to earnings revision," the brokerage said.

The report noted that PSU banks are expected to report a steady quarter, with impressive performance from ICICI Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank and SBI among larger banks. It favoured Karur Vysya Bank and AU Small Finance Bank among mid-sized banks. "While we expect earnings to be resilient for most frontline private banks, we see softer earnings for a few private and mid-sized banks," it added. Asset quality is expected to be steady for most banks, except some surge in seasonal agri slippages, the brokerage said, adding, Q3 will likely be characterized by steady recovery trends, which will help cushion credit cost impact. The firm forecasted H2FY26 to be stronger but cautioned



that FY27 earnings expectations may need reassessment. Risk-reward seems to be sharply tilted towards frontline private banks with strong earnings resilience and reasonable valuation. HSBC Mutual Fund said in a recent report that it is overweight on banks and non-bank financial companies (NBFCs), arguing net interest margins for banks should improve in FY27. Private banks' asset quality is expected to recover and drive mid-teens earnings growth in FY27 after a slow FY26, the report said. NBFCs are delivering strong earnings growth driven by strong credit demand and improving margins on the back of decline in interest rates.

India's GDP projected to grow 7.4% in FY26, RBI to keep rates unchanged in Feb

Mumbai: Additionally, mining and construction activity as well as electricity demand are set to witness a seasonal pick up in the coming months, after the easing owing to rainfall-related disruptions, it said. "Cement production is expected to grow 6.5-7.5 per cent in FY26. Steel demand growth may moderate to 7-8 per cent after the strong previous years. Electricity demand growth is muted at 1.5-2 per cent for FY26," the report noted. India's real GDP growth is projected at 7.4 per cent for FY26, up from 6.5 per cent in FY25, a report has said, highlighting a seasonal pick-up in electricity, mining and construction sectors. The report from ICRA said that growth is expected to ease below 7 per cent in H2 FY26 from 8 per cent in H1 because of an unfavourable base effect and moderation in exports. The report expects a pause in the February



2026 policy review by the RBI, with future decisions to be guided by the FY27 Union Budget and evolving inflation-growth dynamics. Meanwhile, economic activity remained healthy in Q3 FY26, aided by GST rate cut-led festive demand and seasonal upticks in some sectors. ICRA expects consumption volumes of

goods and services, as well as manufacturing volumes, to have benefited from GST cuts and festival demand in Q3, though the export drag may intensify in H2 unless a US trade deal materialises. The firm forecasts CPI inflation to plunge to 2 per cent in FY26 from 4.6 per cent in FY25, with WPI at 0.4 per cent.

CPI rose to 0.7 per cent in November 2025 from 0.3 per cent in October, due to a narrower deflation in food and beverages. Additionally, mining and construction activity as well as electricity demand are set to witness a seasonal pick up in the coming months, after the easing owing to rainfall-related disruptions, it said. "Cement production is expected to grow 6.5-7.5 per cent in FY26. Steel demand growth may moderate to 7-8 per cent after the strong previous years. Electricity demand growth is muted at 1.5-2 per cent for FY26," the report noted. It also flagged external risks, including delays in the US-India trade deal, and global policy changes affecting service exports. Domestic risks encompass subdued export growth, monsoon variability, fiscal constraints, and inflationary pressures from commodity prices.

Silver soars Rs 9,350 to record Rs 2.36L; up 15.8% in 4 sessions

New Delhi: Silver prices soared by Rs 9,350 to hit a fresh lifetime high of Rs 2,36,350 per kg in the national capital on Friday, tracking strong global cues. The white metal had closed at Rs 2,27,000 per kilogram on Wednesday. Over the past the four sessions, silver prices have added Rs 32,250, or 15.8 per cent, from Rs 2,04,100 per kg since December 19. During the calendar year, the white metal had risen Rs 1,46,650, or 163.5 per cent, from Rs 89,700 per kg recorded on December 31, 2024. Meanwhile, gold prices maintained their upward momentum in the local bullion market. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity jumped Rs 1,500 to touch a new record of Rs 1,42,300 per 10 gm (inclusive of all taxes). It had finished at Rs 1,40,800 per 10 gm in the previous market session. In the international markets, spot gold rose \$50.87 or 1.13 per cent to hit a new lifetime high of \$4,530.42 per ounce. "Gold continues to trade at a record high of \$4,530 per ounce, buoyed by the Fed rate cut expectations and positive undertone in



the commodities market. Thin trading condition due to the year-end holidays is exaggerating the moves," Praveen Singh, head, commodities and currencies, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said. So far this year, gold prices have added Rs 63,350, or 80.24 per cent, from Rs 78,950 recorded on December 31, 2024. "The precious metals rally continued on the last trading day of the week, with gold and silver reaching new record highs once again," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst, commodities, at HDFC Securities, said.

FII's set for biggest exit from Indian Rs 1.58 lakh crore



New Delhi: Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) are set to mark their biggest-ever exit from Indian stocks in 2025. They have pulled out Rs 1,58,407 crore, making it the largest withdrawal since they started investing in India. This record outflow combines Rs 2,31,990 crore in stock market sales and Rs 73,583 crore in primary market investments up to December 27, as reported by Economic Times. The amount of the offloading is striking when compared to the previous year. In 2024, while FIIs sold Rs

1,21,210 crore through stock exchanges, they balanced it with primary market investments of Rs 1,21,637 crore, resulting in a positive net flow. "As the year 2025 draws to a close, FII selling in India is on track to set a new record in FII outflows... FIIs have contributed significantly to the sharp depreciation in INR this year," also said Vijayakumar. Robust GDP growth and prospects of improvement in corporate earnings in 2026 augur well for positive FII flows in 2026," he explained.

India's Forex Reserves Jump USD 4.36 Billion To USD 693.32 Billion

New Delhi: India's foreign exchange reserves rose sharply by USD 4.36 billion to USD 693.32 billion for the week ending December 19, according to data released by Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday. The increase reflects the central bank's efforts to manage liquidity and maintain stability in the foreign exchange market. The RBI said it closely tracks developments in the forex market and steps in whenever required to ensure orderly trading conditions. These interventions are aimed at reducing excessive volatility in the rupee's movement and are not linked to any fixed exchange rate target.

The latest jump in reserves was largely driven by the RBI's USD/INR buy-sell swap auction worth USD 5 billion, conducted on December 16 to inject liquidity into the banking system. Under this arrangement, banks sold US dollars to the central bank in exchange for rupees and agreed to buy back the same amount of dollars at the end of the swap period.

The transaction was settled on December 18, adding to the overall reserve position.

In the previous week ending December 12, India's forex reserves had increased by USD 1.689 billion to USD 688.94 billion.



During that week, gold reserves rose by USD 758 million to USD 107.741 billion, while Special Drawing Rights increased marginally to \$18.735 billion. A week earlier, reserves had climbed by nearly USD 1.03 billion to USD 687.26 billion, supported by a rise in gold holdings and SDRs. The steady rise in foreign exchange reserves comes amid strong capital inflows into the country. India has seen a notable surge in foreign direct investment com-

mitments during the current financial year. Total FDI inflows in the first half of FY2025-26 stood at USD 50.36 billion, marking a 16 per cent increase compared to the same period last year and the highest ever for the first half of any financial year. Official data also show that gross FDI inflows have grown significantly over the years, rising from over USD 34 billion in 2012-13 to more than USD 80 billion in 2024-25.

School Assembly News (Dec 29) Thought of the Day



If you're a student on the lookout for news headlines to read out in your school assembly, you're at the right place! We've compiled a list of the most important national, international, and sports-related news items to keep students well-informed about the latest events happening both within the country and across the world.

PM Modi Urges Caution Against Indiscriminate Use of Antibiotics Made in India Must Become a Global Symbol of Quality and Excellence: PMSouthern Railway to Double Train Capacity in Chennai, Coimbatore, and Kochi by 2030UP SIR: Nearly 2.89 Crore Names Deleted from Draft Voter ListDelhi Government Explores AI Collaboration with IIT Kanpur to Identify Pollution SourcesMPCB Shuts Four Non-Compliant Concrete Plants in Mumbai to Curb Air Pollution-Assam: Over 87 Acres of Grazing Land Cleared in Eviction DriveAmit Shah Likely to Visit West Bengal on December 29 for a Three-Day TourInternational NewsZelensky to Meet Donald Trump as Efforts to End Russia-Ukraine War ContinueWinter Rains Flood Gaza Camps as Netanyahu Heads to US for Key MeetingDhaka Rejects India's Remarks on Alleged Hostilities Against

Minorities in BangladeshMyanmar Holds First Election Since Military Takeover; Critics Call It a ShamThailand and Cambodia's Top Diplomats Meet in China to Strengthen CeasefireBangladesh Uprising Figure Distances Himself from NCP Over Jamaat AllianceElon Musk Criticises Canadian Healthcare After Death of Indian-Origin PatientRussia Launches 52 Satellites from Eastern SpaceportNew York Subway Ends MetroCard Era, Switches Fully to Tap-and-Go System India Beat Sri Lanka by 30 Runs to Take 4-0 Lead in Women's T20I SeriesHarmanpreet Kaur Expresses Concern Over India's Over-Rate in Fourth T20IHumpy Koneru Wins Bronze; Arjun Erigaisi Finishes Third at World Rapid ChampionshipSurya and Rithvik Win Women's and Men's Titles at National Badminton ChampionshipsSG Pipers Defeat Ranchi Royals 2-0 in Women's Hockey India League OpenerYuvraj Sandhu Wins Tata Open, Claims Record Seventh Title in 2025Former England Cricketer and Administrator Hugh Morris Dies at 62Pakistani Kabaddi Player Banned Indefinitely for Playing for Indian Team in Private Event.

Trump and Netanyahu are to meet in Florida at a crucial moment for the U.S.-backed Gaza

America: His name might not be familiar to many, but his songs are sung by millions around the world. Today, we take a journey through the life and work of Yip Harburg, the Broadway lyricist who wrote such hits as "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" and who put the music into The Wizard of Oz, the movie that inspired the hit Broadway musical and now Hollywood blockbuster, Wicked. Born into poverty on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, Harburg always included a strong social and political component to his work, fighting racism and poverty. A lifelong socialist, Harburg was blacklisted and hounded throughout much of his life. We speak with Harburg's son, Ernie Harburg, about the music and politics of his father. Then we take an in-depth look at The Wizard of Oz, and hear a medley of Harburg's Broadway songs and the politics of the times in which they were created.

AMY GOODMAN: "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" may well be a new anthem for many Americans. The lyrics to that classic American song were written by Yip Harburg. He was blacklisted during the McCarthy era. During his career as a lyricist, Yip Harburg used his words to express antiracist, pro-worker messages. He's best known for writing the lyrics to The Wizard of Oz, the movie that inspired the hit Broadway musical and now the Hollywood blockbuster film Wicked. Yip Harburg also had two hits on Broadway: Bloomer Girls, about the women's suffrage movement, and Finian's Rainbow, a kind of immigrants' anthem about race and class and so much else. Today, in this Democracy Now! special, we pay tribute to Yip Harburg's life. Ernie Harburg is Yip's son and biographer. He co-wrote the book Who Put the Rainbow in The Wizard of Oz?: Yip Harburg, Lyricist. I met up with Ernie Harburg at the New York Public Library for Performing Arts at Lincoln Center years ago when they are exhibiting Yip Harburg's work. Ernie Harburg took me on a tour. **ERNIE HARBURG:** The first place is business about words, and one of them is that the songs, when they were written back in those days, anyhow, always had a lyricist and a composer, and neither one of them wrote the song.



They both wrote the song. However, in the English language, you know, you have "This is Gershwin's song," or "This is" — they usually say the composer's song. I've rarely ever heard somebody say, "This is Yip Harburg's song" or "Ira Gershwin's song." Both of them would be wrong. The fact is, two people write a song. So I'm going to talk about Yip's lyrics and then lyrics in the song. Now the first thing we're looking at here is an expression really of Yip's philosophy and background, which he brings to writing lyrics for the songs. And what it says here is that songs have always been man's anodyne against tyranny and terror. The artist is on the side of humanity from the time that he was born a hundred years ago in the dire depths of poverty that only the ones came over here and settled in that area, what we now know as the East Village. And Yip knew poverty deeply, and he quoted Bernard Shaw as saying that the chill of poverty never leaves your bones. And it was the basis of Yip's understanding of life as struggle. **ERNIE HARBURG:** Yip was, at a very early age, interested in poetry, and he used to go to the Tompkins Square Library

to read, and the librarians just fed him these things. And he got hooked on every one of the English poets, and especially O. Henry, the ending. He always has a little great ending on the end of each of his songs. And he got hooked on W.S. Gilbert, The Bab Ballads. And then, when he went to Townsend High School, they had them sitting in the seats by alphabetical order, so Yip was "H" and Gershwin was "G", so Ira sat next to Yip. One day, Yip walked in with The Bab Ballads, and Ira, who was very shy and hardly spoke with anybody, just suddenly lit up and said, "Do you like those?" And they got into a conversation, and Ira then said, "Do you know there's music to that?" And Yip said, "No." He said, "Well, come on home."

So they went to Ira's home, which was on 2nd Avenue and 5th Street which is sort of upper from Yip's poverty at 11th and C. And they had a Victrola, which is like having, you know, huge instruments today, and played him H.M.S. Pinafore. Well, Yip was just absolutely flabbergasted, knocked out. And that did it. That's shades of 1968 and the Vietnam War, right.

China launches war games around Taiwan as island vows to defend democracy

Beijing: China staged live-fire drills around Taiwan on Monday (Dec 29), deploying troops, warships, fighter jets and artillery for its Justice Mission 2025 exercises, as the island scrambled soldiers and show-cased United States-made hardware to rehearse repelling an attack. The Eastern Theatre Command said it had concentrated forces to the north and southwest of the Taiwan Strait and carried out live firing and simulated strikes on land and maritime targets. The drills would continue on Tuesday and include exercises to blockade the island's main ports and encircle it. A senior Taiwan security official told Reuters that dozens of Chinese military boats and aircraft were operating around the island, some of which were "deliberately closing in" on Taiwan's contiguous zone, defined as 24

nautical miles (around 44km) from its coast. This marks China's sixth major round of war games since 2022 after then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited the self-governed island, and follows a rise in Chinese rhetoric over Beijing's territorial claims after Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi suggested a hypothetical Chinese attack on Taiwan could trigger a military response from Tokyo. Analysts say Beijing's drills increasingly blur the line between routine military training exercises and what could be stage-setting for an attack, a strategy intended to give the US and its allies minimal warning of an assault. China's military said it had deployed fighter jets, bombers, unmanned aerial vehicles, and long-range rockets, and would practice striking mobile land-based targets while simulating



a coordinated assault on the island from multiple directions. "This (the drills) serves as a serious warning to 'Taiwan Independence' separatist forces and external interference forces," said Shi Yi, a spokesperson for China's Eastern Theatre Command. Taiwan's government condemned the drills, while its defence ministry

posted a video on Facebook showcasing various weapons, including US-made HIMARS rocket systems, a highly mobile artillery system with a range of about 300km that could hit coastal targets in China's southern province of Fujian, on the other side of the Taiwan Strait, in the event of a conflict.

Big ambitions meet Qianhai returns China's opening-up

China: His As the familiar strains of the classic Cantonese tune Red Sun echoed over the waterfront, dancers moved across a glowing circular stage while beams of light fanned out across the bay. Staging the high-profile event there was no coincidence, they add, but part of a deliberate effort to push Qianhai back into the national spotlight after years of rapid expansion and policy experimentation.

This spectacle played out during the closing ceremony of China's 2025 National Games, staged at the newly built Happy Theatre in Qianhai - a 120 sq km strategic zone in Shenzhen that the country has been elevating as a showcase for its next phase of opening up, say analysts. By the numbers, China's long-standing ambition for Qianhai to be a bridge linking Hong Kong, the mainland and the wider world has been taking shape, reflected in investment flows and startup activity. Yet experts warn that the

central test remains unresolved: whether it can move beyond policy-driven inflows and Hong Kong-centric networks to be a genuine international hub. "Qianhai is becoming more international, but much of its external orientation still runs through Hong Kong and Chinese networks rather than a broad, diversified roster of global multinationals," Alejandro Reyes, an adjunct professor at the University of Hong Kong (HKU), told CNA.

"To truly meet the original ambition, it will need not only more foreign firms on the ground, but also a regulatory and lifestyle environment that feels genuinely predictable and attractive to international talent, not just to mainland and Hong Kong players. First established in 2010, Qianhai has long been positioned by Beijing as an "institutional laboratory" - a place where new rules are tested first before wider roll-out - while developing into a hub for modern services, finance, logistics and digital trade.

A Tribute to Blacklisted Lyricist Yip Harburg: The Man Who Put the Rainbow in The Wizard of Oz

New Work: His name might not be familiar to many, but his songs are sung by millions around the world. Today, we take a journey through the life and work of Yip Harburg, the Broadway lyricist who wrote such hits as "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" and who put the music into The Wizard of Oz, the movie that inspired the hit Broadway musical and now Hollywood blockbuster, Wicked. Born into poverty on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, Harburg always included a strong social and political component to his work, fighting racism and poverty. A lifelong socialist, Harburg was blacklisted and hounded throughout much of his life. We speak with Harburg's son, Ernie Harburg, about the music and politics of his father. Then we take an in-depth look at The Wizard of Oz, and hear a medley of Harburg's Broadway songs and the politics of the times in which they were created.

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at here is an expression really of Yip's philosophy and background, which he brings to writing lyrics for the songs. And what it says here is that songs have always been man's anodyne against tyranny and terror. The artist is on the side of humanity from the time that he was born a hundred years ago in the dire depths of poverty that only the Lower East Side in Manhattan could have when the Russian Jews, about 2 million of them, got up out of the Russian shtetls and ghettos, and the courageous ones came over here and settled in that area, what we now know as the East Village. And Yip knew poverty deeply, and he quoted Bernard Shaw as saying that the chill of poverty never leaves your bones. And it was the basis of Yip's understanding of life as struggle. **ERNIE HARBURG:** Yip was, at a very early age, interested in poetry, and he used to go to the Tompkins Square Library

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So they went to Ira's home, which was on 2nd Avenue and 5th Street which is sort of upper from Yip's poverty at 11th and C. And they had a Victrola, which is like having, you know, huge instruments today, and played him H.M.S. Pinafore. Well, Yip was just absolutely flabbergasted, knocked out. And that did it. I mean, for the both of them, because Ira was intensely interested that thing, too. That began their lifelong friendship. Then Ira went on to be one of the pioneers, with 25 other guys, Jewish Russian immigrants, who developed the American Musical Theater. And it was only after started writing together. **ERNIE HARBURG:** Yip's career took a kind of detour, because when the war, World War I, came and Yip was a socialist and did not believe in the war, he took a boat down to Uruguay for three years. I mean, he refused to fight in the thing. That's shades of 1968 and the Vietnam War, right?

PM Wong to deliver 2026 Budget Statement



Singapore: Prime Minister and Finance Minister Lawrence Wong will deliver Singapore's 2026 Budget Statement in parliament on Feb 12 next year, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) said on Monday (Dec 29).

Budget 2026 will be broadcast live on TV and radio. It will also be streamed live on the Singapore Budget website. The full Budget Statement will be published on the Singapore Budget website after delivery. "For real-time updates of key Budget announcements, the public can follow the Ministry of Finance's Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp channel, LinkedIn and X account," MOF said. "More information on Budget can also be found on the Singapore Budget website." MOF also invited members of the public to share their views on and suggestions for Budget 2026 online through REACH's Budget 2026 microsite, Facebook page and Instagram page, and the ShareYourViews webpage of the People's Association (PA) between now and Jan 12, 2026. "REACH, the Singapore government's feedback and engagement unit, will be conducting a physical pre-Budget Listening Point on Jan 21, 2026, at Geneo," MOF said. "PA and its grassroots organisations will also be conducting physical ShareYourViews touchpoints at the heartlands."

Details of these engagements are available on REACH's Budget 2026 microsite and via PA's ShareYourViews webpage. Community Development Council (CDC) vouchers and rebates on utilities were increased. Mr Wong had also announced SG60 credits and handouts in celebration of Singapore's 60th year of independence.

Psychologist Shares 2 Tips For Couples To Be Happy, In Sync Ahead Of Christmas



Holidays can be hectic, with parties, get-togethers with family and holidays with friends. Add to it that emotions are running high as we reach the end of the year. There is a lot happening, and things can escalate. If any of those cliché Christmas movies have taught us anything is that you need to expect the unexpected.“For couples, holidays are a scary time because they often call for revealing a new side of yourself to your partner,” Sabrina Romanoff, a Harvard-trained clinical psychologist, professor and researcher from New York, tells CNBC Make It. Every family has their own way of doing things, celebrating festivals and upholding traditions. While you might be excited to introduce your partner to all the things you have been doing since childhood, it also works the same way for them. It is important that you be mindful of their choices, too.To have a smooth holiday season, being flexible is key. “Ultimately, the goal is to blend each other’s cultures and worlds,” says Romanoff. Here’s how suc-

cessful couples tackle tough decisions and come out stronger during this festive time of year. Every couple have their own baggage – which can be good or bad – that they bring into their relationship. It includes past experiences, family traditions, life goals, habits and ways of doing things. But when you get into a relationship, it is vital that you compromise, unlearn and try new things together. Being open to new experiences and forming core memories with each other is what keeps a couple together.Sabrina Romanoff shares what defines a successfully happy couple – they create new traditions together. “That could mean going to see the tree together at Rockefeller Centre or getting an ornament together,” says Sabrina Romanoff. It could also mean taking a vacation for the holidays, cooking the holiday meal, going on a hot chocolate crawl or even just taking a photograph at the same place every year. Building something new together is a bonding experience, and “that’s what brings security”

in the relationship. Ask any couple – your grandparents, parents, uncles or aunts – who’ve been married for a long time, and they will tell you that the secret to a happy and long union is communication. Both partners have to communicate with each other about their likes, dislikes and desires. For that, one needs to know what they want in the first place. Whether it is splitting time with the in-laws, how much to spend on gifts, going on vacation and skipping the festive get-togethers – it is important that you tell your partner what you want from them. “You are better off being direct and honest with your partner, so you both can really get what you both need,” shares Sabrina Romanoff.And it is also vital to keep an open mind and be flexible with the ideas. The final decision needs to be agreed upon by both sides. “I think the healthiest couples are those who can get creative and compromise,” she says, adding, “There’s only one Christmas Eve; there’s only one Christmas Day.”

For most people, the holiday season is defined by spending time with their near and dear ones, indulging in feasts made by their mum, and just letting loose after a long year of constantly having to stay at the top of their game. So it is obvious that you will find yourself reaching for those sugary mithais, a glass or two of wine and even a carb-laden plate because these foods give you comfort. Add to the fact that it is the winter season, and your body will be craving some warmth regardless, which comes in the form of rich foods. While there is no harm in treating yourself, and it is hard to stick to a strict diet during the holiday season, things can very quickly get out of hand for your gut if you don’t set some boundaries. Instead of completely ruling out all the fun for yourself this festive season, make small swaps. Nutritionist Mugdha Pradhan tells Hindustan Times Lifestyle that one needs to follow 5 simple habits to help them live a gut-healthy life, especially when on vacation or during the festive period: Give your day a warm start by having a warm beverage in the morning. Choose a drink you like – tea, coffee, matcha or even a glass of warm water. The nutritionist recommended having a warm drink as it would keep the bowels regular and reduce bloating from the night before. She adds, “Warm water

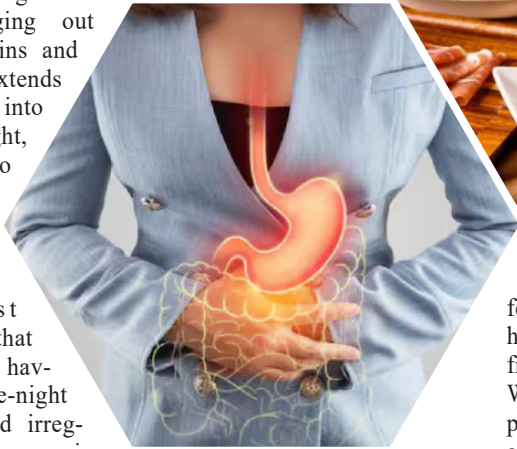
LIFESTYLE & HEALTH

These 5 Easy Tips Will Keep Your Gut Healthy And Happy This Festive Season



with a pinch of lemon or a spoon of soaked chia seeds is enough to wake up your digestive system gently.” f your calendar is filled with parties, sleep is often sacrificed. If you have headed home for the holiday season, meeting friends and hanging out with cousins and family extends till late into the night, leading to disrupted sleeping hours. The nutritionist warns that constantly having late-night parties and irregular sleep can increase cortisol levels and affect your digestion and slowing it, while also making you prone to crav-

ings. Instead, she recommends, “A calm



wind-down ritual that is an early dinner, dim lights, and no screens for 30 minutes

keeps your gut hormones in balance.” Holiday feasts are indulgent and have a variety of dishes, from appetisers to desserts. When eating, one should prioritise protein and fibre at every meal. Eat eggs, chicken, meat, etc, along with fibrous foods such as salads, veggies, chia, and flaxseeds. This will slow

the spike in sugar and keep you full for longer and prevent overeating. The nutritionist reveals what to limit: “Most festive foods are carb-heavy, like sweets, fried snacks, parathas, biryani, kachoris, which lead to quick blood sugar spikes and sluggish digestion.”Eat Mindfully, Consume Healthy Fats There are 2 kinds of fats – healthy and unhealthy fats. Mugdha shares, “A2 ghee, coconut oil, nuts, seeds, and free-range eggs, as well as fatty fish, are gentle on digestion and also help in reducing inflammation.” The healthy fats support the gut lining, which can get irritated with excess sugar, spicy foods, or alcohol. Do not overeat or consume the food too quickly. Make it a habit to eat slowly and mindfully, stopping when you are comfortably full. After you have eaten food, try to get some movement and make this a non-negotiable habit. The nutritionist recommends, “Even a-minute walk after heavy festive lunches or dinners can drastically improve gut motility.” By walking, it helps your body move glucose into the muscles, reduces gas buildup, eases acidity, and prevents uncomfortable post-meal bloating.

Fitness Boom See Rise In Gym Injuries Among Under-35s



With the new year fast approaching, gyms will soon be filled with well-meaning individuals who want to stick to their resolutions and get into shape and live a healthy life. With fitness culture continuing to gain momentum across India, orthopaedic specialists are raising concerns over a parallel and worrying trend – a noticeable rise in gym-related injuries, particularly among young adults.Hospitals across the country report an increasing number of young professionals and students seeking treatment for musculoskeletal injuries linked to excessive or improper workout practices. Orthopaedic observations in 2025 indicate a clear surge in injuries involving muscles, ligaments, and joints, with patients under 35 years accounting for a significant proportion of cases. Doctors attribute this trend to high-intensity training, poor exercise form, lack of professional supervision, and insufficient recovery time, which result in injuries that were earlier more commonly seen in older age groups. Commenting on the trend, Dr Simon Thomas, Senior Director – Robotics & Orthopaedics, Max Hospital Shalimar Bagh, said, “We’ve seen a significant rise in gym-related injuries among young Indians, with almost half of our orthopaedic patients being under 35. What’s striking is that these are moti-

vated young professionals and students who are genuinely trying to stay healthy. In their quest for quick results, many push their bodies too hard without giving themselves enough rest, without supervision, and without paying proper attention to their form. As a result, we’re seeing more ligament sprains, shoulder and knee injuries, back pain, and even early cartilage damage, issues we earlier associated with older patients.” The good news is that most of this is preventable. Slowing down, focusing on correct technique, allowing the body time to recover, and seeking proper supervision can go a long way. Fitness should support you for life, not break you down in your youth.Echoing this concern, Dr Vivek Logani, Senior Director of Orthopaedics at Paras Health, said, “In 2025, we have observed a 25–30% increase in gym-related musculoskeletal injuries compared to last year. Nearly one in three patients presenting with sports or fitness injuries report excessive or improper gym training as the primary cause. Common injuries include muscle tears, ligament and



injuries.” The orthopaedist goes on to caution that while the growing focus on fitness is encouraging, overtraining, lifting heavy weights without supervision, and skipping warm-up or recovery phases are leading to preventable long-term damage.Experts emphasise that while the increased interest in fitness is a positive shift, it must be supported by awareness and safe training practices. They advise gym-goers to focus on correct technique, gradual progression, adequate rest, and professional supervision to reduce injury risk. As more young Indians embrace fitness as a lifestyle, orthopaedic specialists stress that sustainable training is key to protecting long-term musculoskeletal health.

Micellar Water Explained: Dermatologists Decode The French Pharmacy Favourite

Once confined to French pharmacies, micellar water has become a global skincare staple, lining bathroom shelves and makeup kits alike. Loved for its no-rinse convenience and gentle promise, it’s often positioned as the ultimate multitasker – cleanser, makeup remover, and skin soother rolled into one. But as skincare trends accelerate and marketing claims grow louder, the question remains: does micellar water truly deserve its cult status, or is it simply clever branding?Dermatologists largely agree on one thing. Micellar water is grounded in science. Its effectiveness, however, depends on how and when it’s used. “Micellar water is a gentle cleansing solution made of micelles, tiny oil molecules suspended in soft water, that attract dirt, makeup, and excess oil without disrupting the skin barrier,” explains Dr. Priyanka Sharma, Director & Chief Dermatologist at V6 Clinics, Gurugram.These micelles act like magnets, lifting impurities without the friction or foaming action typical of traditional cleansers. This mechanism is what makes micellar water particularly appealing for sensitive or compromised skin. Echoing this, Dr. Navjot Arora, Consultant Dermatologist at Dermaheal Skin and Clinic, Dwarka, adds, “Micellar water lifts dirt, excess oil, makeup, and pollution from the skin without disrupting the natural skin barrier, making it suitable for dry, acne-prone, or rosacea-prone skin types.”

Why Dermatologists Still Recommend It

Micellar water’s biggest strength lies in its gentleness. “From a dermatologist’s lens, this is



what makes it especially effective for sensitive, acne-prone, or post-procedure skin,” says Dr. Sharma.Dr. Tejaswi Cherukuri, Consultant Dermatologist at Apollo Speciality Hospitals, OMR, Chennai, agrees. She notes, “It is a gentle and non-irritating cleanser that can be used for refreshing purposes or even as the first step in a double-cleansing routine.”Its versatility also earns points. Dr. Cherukuri highlights its usefulness during travel, after workouts, or in situations where water isn’t easily available – making it a practical, skin-respecting option rather than a harsh quick fix. Where Micellar Water Falls ShortDespite its benefits, micellar water isn’t a universal solution. “It works beautifully as a mild cleanser or first cleanse, but it doesn’t always replace a

thorough wash for heavy makeup, sunscreen, or pollution exposure,” cautions Dr. Sharma. Dr. Cherukuri reinforces this limitation, stating that while micellar water is effective for light makeup and sunscreens, it does not work well for waterproof or heavy makeup. This is where double cleansing, using micellar water followed by a gentle face wash, becomes essential.Dr. Arora also points out that micellar water works best as a morning cleanse or mid-day refresh, especially for those who cleanse multiple times a day and want to avoid over-stripping the skin. How To Choose The Right FormulNot all micellar waters are created equal. According to Dr. Sharma, the hype often comes from overpromising instant results, when in reality,

skincare is about consistency and formulation quality. Dermatologists recommend choosing formulas free from harsh alcohols, unnecessary fragrance, and irritants – especially for sensitive skin types.Used correctly, micellar water can even help prevent over-cleansing, a common cause of barrier damage in urban skincare routines. So, Hype Or HeroMicellar water may not be a miracle product, but it isn’t a gimmick either. Rooted in dermatological science and refined through thoughtful formulation, it earns its place as a supportive, everyday cleanser rather than a standalone solution. When used strategically, as a first cleanse, gentle refresher, or travel essential, it delivers exactly what it promises: clean skin, minus the drama.

ENTERTAINMENT

Ananya Panday and Kartik Aaryan’s film makes Rs 24 crore



Mumbai: Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri, starring Kartik Aaryan and Ananya Panday, is still doing well at the box office. According to a report by trade tracker Sacnilk, the Sameer Vidwans-directed film made Rs 5.25 crore on its opening Sunday. As a result, the love drama has made a total of Rs 23.75 crore in the domestic market thus far.Tu Meri Main Tera reported an overall occupancy rate of 24.85% on Day 4. The morning pro-

grams started out at a low 8.44%, but in the afternoon they significantly increased to 27.82%. The highest occupancy rate was 39.03% for evening shows and 24.11% for night shows. On Thursday, the film starring Kartik Aaryan and Ananya Panday made Rs 7.75 crore; on Friday, it made Rs 5.25 crore; on Saturday, it made Rs 5.5 crore; and on Sunday, it made about Rs 5.25 crore. As a result, the movie has made a total of Rs 23.75 crore. Dhu-

randhar is a fierce rival to the movie at the box office. In just 24 days, Dhurandhar made Rs 730.70 crore at the domestic box office. Kartik Aaryan plays Rehaan “Ray” Mehra in Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri, while Ananya Panday plays Rumi Wardhan Singh. The movie chronicles the journey of two individuals who fall in love but are driven apart by familial demands. With sad hearts, they part ways, clinging to the hope that one day fate will reunite them. Ananya Panday and Kartik Aaryan collaborated on the 2019 movie Pati Patni Aur Woh prior to Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri. In a conversation with Filmfare, Kartik was asked if Ananya had changed since they last worked together. The actor responded by saying, “I kept saying even back then that she was really good, even when we were doing Pati Patni Aur Woh, we had a lot of fun doing that film.”

Day 24 box office receipts for Dhurandhar worldwide
7th-highest-grossing Indian film in history



Mumbai: Dhurandhar, Aditya Dhar’s unstoppable juggernaut, has reached yet another box office high. The movie surpassed two major blockbusters and became the seventh highest-grossing

Indian movie ever on December 28, its fourth Sunday, when it exceeded the ₹1050-crore threshold at the global box office. In addition to setting box office records for the

second and third weeks, Dhurandhar enjoyed a fantastic fourth weekend. Before this, no Indian movie had made more than ₹30 crore in its fourth weekend. However, the Ranveer Singh movie broke that record, earning ₹62 crore on days 22–24. As a result, the domestic box office receipts for the movie have increased to ₹690.25 crore net (₹828.25 crore gross). By Tuesday, if not Monday, Dhurandhar should surpass ₹700 crore. After the dubbed version of Pushpa 2, it will only be the second Hindi movie to accomplish this feat.Due to this week’s Christmas holidays, the movie’s international box office receipts have increased. Because of this, the movie has made over \$26 million in foreign box office receipts. As a result, after 24 days, Dhurandhar’s global gross is ₹1064 crore. On Sunday, Dhurandhar made over ₹30 crore globally, surpassing the final earnings of Shah Rukh Khan’s Pathaan (₹1055 crore) and Prabhas’ Kalki 2898 AD (₹1042 crore). The movie is currently targeting the final earnings of RRR (₹1230 crore), KGF Chapter 2 (₹1215 crore), and Jawan (₹1160 crore). The top three, Dangal, Baahubali 2, and Pushpa 2, have all made more over ₹1700 crore and are probably out of Dhurandhar’s price range.Ranveer plays Hamza, an Indian agent infiltrating Karachi’s gang and terror networks, in the film Dhurandhar. R Madhavan, Arjun Rampal, Sanjay Dutt, and Akshaye Khanna play important parts in Aditya Dhar’s spy thriller. March 2026 will see the release of Part 2.

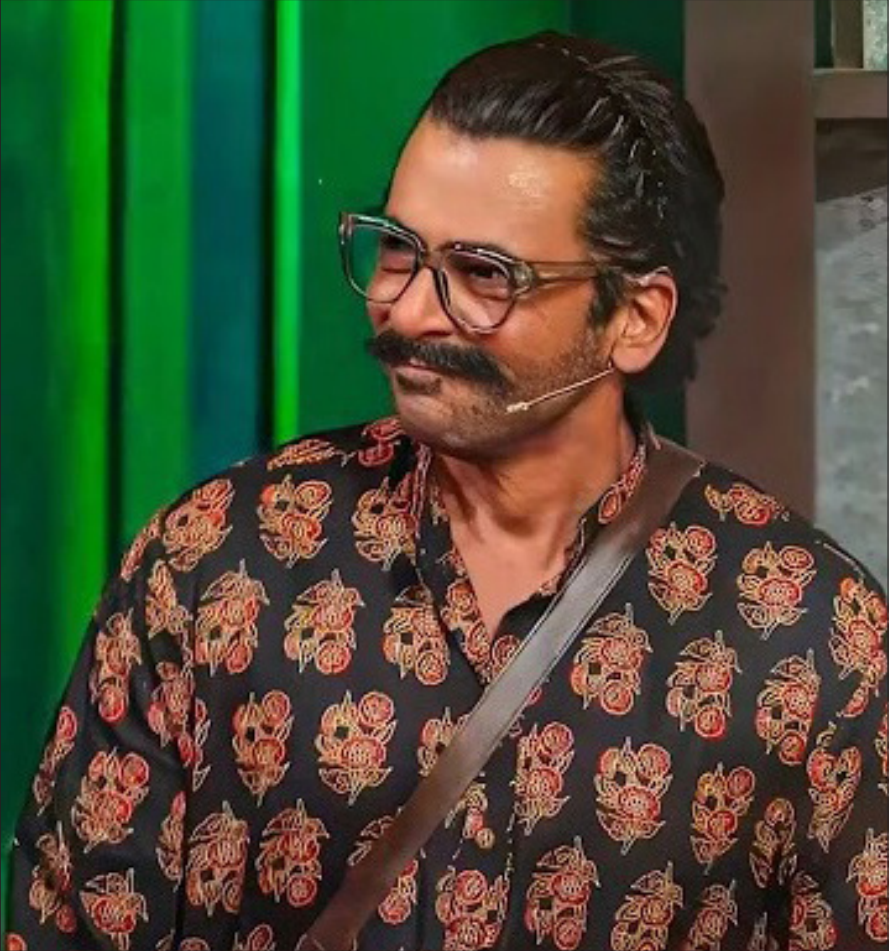
Varun Dhawan Posts a Heartfelt Message for His Pet

Mumbai: Angel, Varun Dhawan’s fur baby, passed away. He expressed his sadness and thanked Angel for being a wonderful pet and a wonderful sister to Joey, his other animal companion. Varun posted a video collection of some of his most treasured moments with Angel throughout the years on his official Instagram account. In a poignant farewell letter, the October actor wrote, “RIP angel. Heaven welcomed a new angel today. We appreciate you being a fantastic dog and Joey’s sister; we shall miss you. I’ll see you later.Actress Mouni Roy responded to the sad news by saying, “I’m so terribly sorry.” “WHAT” Mrunal Thakur continued.Varun has consistently expressed his passion for his animals. He revealed that he has the same affection for his dog and daughter Lara during a recent appearance with Alia Bhatt on the celebrity



chat show Two Much With Kajol and Twinkle.“What about Lara?” host Twinkle Khanna asked Varun as he revealed that he would do everything for his cat Joey. ”To be honest, and I am not just saying this because we are on camera to sound cool, I don’t differentiate between both of them,” Varun responded. I am unable to. I have an unprecedented relationship with him because he is my first puppy. I doubt that I could have it with any other living thing.”Varun went on to discuss how the introduction of his pet Joey has affected him personally.“When I received my dog, Joey, my puppy, I changed a lot. “I changed when I got him,” he remarked. Twinkle said, perplexed, “One second, you didn’t change when you had a baby, but you changed for the puppy.” “Joey came first!” Alia clarified at this point.

Sunil Grover dazzles with flawless mimicry of Aamir Khan



Mumbai: Actor and comedian Sunil Grover has developed the habit of shocking audiences every week with breathtaking imitations of Bollywood’s biggest stars. Although he was well-known for his Shah Rukh Khan act for many years, he has recently performed with Salman Khan, Gulzar, SS Rajamouli, and other actors on the Great Indian Kapil Show. He changed into Aamir Khan this week with such ease that the internet nearly thought it was the celebrity. This week, Kartik Aaryan and Ananya Panday will appear as guests on Kapil Sharma’s Great Indian Kapil Show to promote their upcoming

movie, Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri. Arriving to mingle with the guests, Sunil, dressed as Aamir, makes jokes about the celebrity’s numerous marriages and offers marital advise. He even makes fun of the title of Kartik and Ananya’s movie. Fans expressed amazement when the teaser for Sunil’s encounter with the celebrities was shared on social media. One wrote, “Abe mujhe laga real wala aamir aagaya same (I thought it’s the real Aamir).” The sentiment was echoed by many others. Another person commented, “He looks more Aamir than Aamir Khan himself.” Sunil’s nearly perfect trans-

formations led many others to equate him to A.I. One joked, “AI takes prompts from Sunil Grover.” Sunil, an actor with more than 20 years of cinema experience, is most recognized for his comedic style. Over the years, he has hosted award ceremonies and reality shows in addition to working on a number of TV series. The actor has played a villainous part in Jawan and a merciless drug lord in the Netflix series Dabba Cartel in recent years, experimenting with different genres. He may presently be seen on Netflix’s latest season of The Great Indian Kapil Show.

After Homebound, Vishal Jethwa discloses that he had different movie offers

Mumbai: After acting in Neeraj Ghaywan’s Homebound, actor Vishal Jethwa disclosed how his film offers altered. Vishal stated that he “started getting a lot of different kinds of films that were not coming out till now.” Additionally, he stated that Homebound will always hold a special place in his heart. “I started getting a lot of different kinds of films that were not coming out till now,” he responded when asked if his life had altered following the success of Homebound. You ask yourself, “What should I do now?” in the same genre. You should avoid staying in the same genre all the time. The same type of employment is not what you want to do. However, the type of writing I’m currently reading differs slightly from what I used to do. Thus, the answer is yes. I’ve gained a lot from Homebound’s success. I now have a great job thanks to it. It has helped me succeed professionally. I now have a name thanks to it.I’ve received good offers from



it. Additionally, Homebound will always hold a special place in my heart.He was questioned about whether he regretted any scenes from the movie that were left out of the final cut. “I have no regrets about any scene. Many of the shots we took have been edited. because a movie must be a specific length. I

therefore don’t regret it. However, there were some really lovely passages with Janhvi. My mother was involved in a scene. The scene was quite dramatic. It was unsuccessful. Additionally, several of my other montages with Ishan were left out of the final cut. I have no regrets about that. Be-

cause we are finally serving the movie,” he continued. Janhvi Kapoor, Vishal Jethwa, and Ishaan Khatter are homebound talents. It centers on two boyhood friends, Shoaib (Ishaan Khatter) and Chandan (Vishal Jethwa), whose aspiration to become police officers influences their lives.

An internet leak of the third Avengers Doomsday trailer

Mumbai: Doomsday in terms of the movie’s teaser trailers. A third teaser has now emerged, providing a clear glimpse at the delayed entry of X-Men in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), following the online release of individual teasers hinting at the comebacks of Chris Evans and Chris Hemsworth. The trailer revealing the X-Men’s role in the movie was shared on a number of social media sites on Sunday night. The teaser depicts the burning Xavier School for Mutants and appears to be captured on a phone inside a theater. Patrick Stewart’s voice-over can be heard speculating about who will prevail in this conflict. We see Ian McKellen’s Magneto talking with Patrick’s Professor Charles Xavier. Before Cyclops lets go with the strongest blast from his eyes ever captured on camera, a stray clip shows the Sentinels causing mayhem. By Monday morning, numerous social media accounts had shared



AI-modified versions of the film with high-resolution stills and videos, despite the original video’s poor quality.The teaser, which hinted at Steve Rogers and Thor’s homecoming, has received a lot of positive reviews on the internet. Online, the Cyclops revelation in particular has received a lot of attention; several people have described it as “better than anything Fox ever did.” After acquiring the rights to the characters from Marvel in the 1990s, 20th Century Fox produced the X-Men movies.

Kiran Rao shares a photo after undergoing appendix surgery

Mumbai: Filmmaker Kiran Rao posted an update on Instagram after being admitted to the hospital for appendix surgery. She shared a video and a few photos from a Mumbai hospital on Sunday. Kiran shared a glimpse of the scene outside her hospital room in the first footage. In addition, she posted a photo in which she pouted for the camera and a close-up of her hospital name badge, which said “Kiran Aamir Rao Khan.” In the last picture, she was having a lunch inside the hospital while grinning while sitting on a couch. Kiran detailed her health problem in a lengthy caption. Kiran began by saying, “Here I was, all ready to party my way into 2026, when my appendix sent me a reminder to slow down, breathe deep, and give thanks.” She concluded, “Immense gratitude for: - modern medicine (still can’t understand how that whole 12mm dia appendix came out through a 10.5mm catheter, thank god I’m not a doctor), - Dr Kayomarz Kapadia and the whole



surgical team, - Ira, Popeye and Shefali for tlc and hospital sleepover fun, - Sir HN Reliance Foundation Hospital’s super care.””The timely intervention of my friends and family (Aamir, Charles & Amin who sprang into action), and my other loved ones who mostly came around

to laugh at my plumped lips - an allergic reaction, sadly they’re back to normal and unglam now...” Kiran stated in her article. ”Well, I’ve been discharged and I’m back home, ready to ease myself into the new year,” Kiran continued. I hope 2026 will be loving, enjoyable, full of love, and BETTER AQI for everyone. 2025 has been nice for me and my. “PS - the pics are: views from my hosp room, my Kim K lips (not quite), my name on the hospital ID tag, and me enjoying one of my first meals,” Kiran said as she wrapped up her post. On December 28, 2005, Aamir Khan and Kiran Rao tied the knot in a private ceremony at Aamir’s Mumbai residence. Kiran was an assistant director on the sets of Lagaan (2001), where the two first crossed paths. The pair released a joint statement announcing their separation in July 2021.Regarding work, Kiran’s movie Laapataa Ladies was chosen as India’s official submission for the 97th Academy Awards’ Best International Feature Film category in 2024.

Everything About The Engine-Less Ship That Will Travel From India To Oman

New Delhi, Dec 29: To test India’s long-standing maritime customs, the Indian Navy’s INSV Kaundinya will set out on Monday from Porbandar in Gujarat to Muscat in Oman. The INSV Kaundinya lacks an engine, metal nails, and contemporary propulsion, in contrast to contemporary navy vessels. It relies solely on wind, sails, and a shipbuilding technique that dates back more than 1,500 years. The stitched sail ship INSV Kaundinya was constructed using methods thought to have been employed in India in the fifth century CE. The ships depicted in the Ajanta cave paintings serve as the primary inspiration for the design, which also incorporates descriptions from historical writings and stories from foreign explorers. Because coir (coconut fiber) ropes are

used to sew the ship’s hardwood planks together rather than iron nails, it is known as a “stitched ship.” The hull is sealed and rendered seaworthy using natural resin, cotton, and oils. INSV Kaundinya is not a combat vessel, despite being a part of the Indian Navy. The dimensions of INSV Kaundinya are approximately 19.6 meters in length, 6.5 meters in width, and 3.33 meters in draft. It has a crew of roughly fifteen sailors and is entirely propelled by sails. The ship is built using the Tankai method, a traditional Indian shipbuilding technique that completely eschews metal. To increase the structure’s flexibility, the ribs are inserted after the hull has been stitched. This adaptability prevents the ship from collapsing under strain and allows it to absorb power-

ful waves. Among the materials utilized are: wooden planks, coconut fiber-based coir rope, Natural waterproofing oils and resins. The Indian Navy, Hodi Innovations, and the Ministry of Culture came to an agreement in July 2023 to start the project, which was funded by the Ministry of Culture. The ship was hand-stitched by a group of Kerala traditional craftsmen under the direction of master shipwright Babu Sankaran. Since there are no surviving blueprints, the Indian Navy used visual aids to replicate the design and carried out scientific testing, including hydrodynamic research at IIT Madras, to guarantee stability and safety. Launched in February 2025, the ship was formally admitted into the Navy in May in Karwar, Karnataka.

Rajkumar Bafna, President of Akums Drugs Finance, Resigns Due to “Delhi Pollution Level”

New Delhi, Dec 29: Due to the extreme air pollution in Delhi, Rajkumar Bafna, the President of Finance at Akums Drugs and Pharmaceuticals, resigned. With serious effects on daily life and health, the city’s Air Quality Index (AQI) has been hovering around 460, firmly in the “hazardous” category. Bafna specifically cited Delhi’s pollution levels as the reason for his resignation in an email dated December 3. The company acknowledged in a regulatory statement that his resignation was accepted on December 12 and that his last day of employment was scheduled for December 31, 2025. “I would like to notify you that I am leaving my role as President of Finance owing to the level of pollution in Delhi. Please release me right away. If I can help in any way throughout this change. In his resignation letter to Chief Financial Officer Sumeet Sood, he wrote, “Please let me know.” “Though we regret your decision, however, given your health issue, we will not be able to persuade you,” Sood wrote in response to the resignation. Bafna, who had just moved from Mumbai, had respiratory problems and a persistent cough that were made worse by the air quality, according to a corporate official. On August 8, 2025, Bafna became the financial president of Akums Drugs. He had previously worked for Heranba Industries for four years as a top executive



until leaving on June 30, 2025. An executive’s resignation citing environmental concerns is considered an uncommon occurrence in Indian corporate history. Delhi’s Air Quality Index (AQI) was 402 at 7 a.m. on Monday, falling into the “severe” category due to the dense layer of pollution that covered the city. At seven in the morning, more than half of Delhi’s monitoring stations (25 out of 40) reported AQI in the “severe” category.

Notably, CPCB standards classify an AQI between 0 and 50 as “good,” 51 to 100 as “satisfactory,” 101 to 200 as “moderate,” 201 to 300 as “poor,” 301 to 400 as “very poor,” and 401 to 500 as “severe.” Pollution has far-reaching effects, including a rise in respiratory, cardiovascular, and even mental health problems. Experts advise adopting preventative measures to protect health, like wearing N95 masks, utilizing air purifiers, and staying indoors during periods of high pollution.

Two people were detained in Gujarat through digital arrest

Gujarat, Dec 29: Two Gujarati individuals were detained by police on Monday in relation to a “digital arrest” cyber fraud case in which a local woman was defrauded of Rs 1.95 crore. The accused, who allegedly played a significant part in the fraud by utilizing several mule bank accounts to receive and remove the stolen funds, was captured by the cyber-crime police. According to a statement from Deputy Commissioner of Police V Aravind Babu, the money was thereafter sent via Hawala networks to cybercriminals in Dubai. The accused are repeat cybercriminals, according to the police, and their bank accounts are connected to 22 instances. In a complaint filed on December 13, the victim claimed that she was imprisoned under the guise of a “digital arrest.” She claimed to have received numerous calls from unidentified individuals posing as telecom and government representatives. According to investigators, the scammers created anxiety and panic by falsely accusing her spouse of major crimes and threatening to arrest him right away. The fraudsters ordered her to send money on the pretense of confirming currency serial numbers, case



inquiries, and clearing processes through staged calls made under false identities. “Believing their claims and acting under coercion, the victim transferred a total amount of Rs 1.95 crore through RTGS from her bank accounts to accounts provided by the fraudsters,” police stated. The Cyber Crime Police filed a case and detained the two, who are now listed as the third and fourth accused, in response to the complaint. According to the police,

the third accused received a 15% commission on deposits made through the accounts he controlled while helping to open mule bank accounts for fraudulent purposes and facilitating the withdrawal of criminal earnings. The fourth accused allegedly controlled mule accounts, carried out orders from higher-level operations, and made sure that money was transferred to foreign scammers via Hawala methods.

An ex-England star told Gautam Gambhir to “become Ranji Trophy Coach.”

New Delhi: Gautam Gambhir should lead a Ranji Trophy squad to have a deeper understanding of red-ball cricket, according to former England spinner Monty Panesar. Although Gambhir is a successful white-ball coach, Panesar pointed out that he would be able to confer with other coaches and learn how to assemble a team for the longest format if he spent time with a Ranji team. These remarks come after it was reported that Indian legend VVS Laxman was approached by the BCCI about being the new head coach of Test cricket. Gambhir has been heavily criticized for India’s recent tough Test series defeat against South Africa. “Gautam Gambhir’s success makes him an excellent white-ball cricket coach. He should, however, speak with people who have coached in the Ranji Trophy on how to



construct a red-ball cricket team since he might gain from doing so. The Indian team is currently lacking in Test cricket. This is the actual situation. It will require some time. It becomes challenging to keep the re-

maining players prepared when you retire three major players,” Panesar stated in an interview. Additionally, Panesar described Shubman Gill, the Test captain for India, as a “complacent” cricket player, implying that

he might not be prepared to lead or play in all international forms. Panesar praised Gill’s skill but pointed out that he frequently makes “lazy shots” during games. He compared this to Virat Kohli, whose aggressiveness and intensity are still apparent in all formats—qualities Panesar feels Gill currently lacks. “As a cricket player, he is complacent. Despite his great talent, he begins to play lazy shots. Shubman Gill is unable to match Virat Kohli’s passion and aggression in any format. He can’t be the captain in every format; it is too much of a responsibility for him,” Panesar continued. Under Gambhir’s leadership, Team India has had difficulties in Test cricket. Under his direction, the Asian powerhouses have lost two straight games: 2-0 to South Africa and 3-0 to New Zealand.

Gulf Giants are defeated by Abu Dhabi Knight Riders by 32

New Delhi: In the last league game, Abu Dhabi Knight Riders defeated Gulf Giants by 32 runs to earn a spot in the ILT20 Playoffs. On January 1, the Knight Riders will now play the Dubai Capitals in the Eliminator. In Qualifier 1 on Tuesday, the Desert Vipers will play MI Emirates in an attempt to advance to the final. The Knight Riders gained momentum thanks to a massive 131-run partnership between Phil Salt (72 not out off 56 balls) and Michael Pepper (83 off 51). The Knight Riders shot up to an impressive 179/1 thanks to their knocks. Jason Holder, who was defending 180, set the tone early by dismissing James Vince (19 off 10) after removing Rahmanullah Gurbaz for a duck in the first over.

With a counterattacking effort, Moeen Ali (79 off 49) kept the Giants’ innings together. He scored 45 runs in 31 balls alongside Kyle Mayers (6 off 10) in a short but fruitful partnership to complete his half-century in 31 balls. But in the fifteenth over, Sunil Narine struck again, dismissing Mayers and then Sean Dickson for a duck, strengthening the Knight Riders’ hold. However, in the 18th over, the game took a critical turn. The Giants ended up at 147/9 as Andre Russell delivered the decisive punch by dismissing Moeen and then Aayan Khan (0 off 1) in successive balls. Openers Salt and Pepper raced to a 56-run partnership earlier in the Knight Riders powerplay, setting the tone for the crucial match.

Target Series Whitewash for India, Hunt Consolation Win for Sri Lanka

New Delhi: In the fifth and final women’s T20 International on Tuesday, India will try to maintain their aggressive intent and finish a 5-0 series whitewash over a defeated Sri Lanka. A major component of India’s preparation for the T20 World Cup in England in June and July of next year is the five-match series. Before the main event, India will play three Twenty20 Internationals each in Australia and England after Tuesday’s match. India changed their strategy and adopted a more aggressive style of play after losing in the group stage of the 2024 T20 World Cup. This change has resulted in two series victories this year. For all of us, it was a fantastic series. After winning the series against the Islanders, skipper Harmanpreet Kaur stated, “That’s what we discussed after the World Cup – that we have to raise our standards and be more aggressive in T20s.” With hitters having relatively little to do in the first three games, India’s bowlers have been the main architects of the dominant run. However, the powerful Shafali Verma has made an impression. Fielding is still a problem, though. India struggled once more in the previous game, losing two catches and a stumping opportunity, following a careless performance in the series opener. Additionally, there have been a number of advantages. After a year away from the format, pacer Renuka Singh Thakur has returned with success, and the dependable Deepti Sharma is still producing reliably. Vaishnavi Sharma, a 20-year-old left-arm spinner making her debut, has also fulfilled her promise. With four wickets at an economy rate of 5.73, she is currently the series’ joint-highest wicket-taker. Shafali has been a persistent threat for Sri Lanka with the bat, amassing three half-centuries at a scorching strike rate of 185.82 in

just four games. The hosts also benefited greatly from vice captain Smriti Mandhana’s return to form following a difficult period. The sophisticated left-hander will be hoping to maintain the momentum after her impressive performance in the fourth Twenty20 International, scoring 80 off 48 balls. In the fourth T20I, Shafali and Mandhana put up 162 runs off just 92 balls, which is India’s greatest opening partnership in women’s T20 Internationals. This was a masterpiece in aggressive batting. Richa Ghosh’s promotion to No. 3 by India also paid off handsomely, as the wicketkeeper batsman smashed an undefeated 40 off just 16 deliveries. The fourth Twenty20 International was a run-

fest, with both India and Sri Lanka recording their highest-ever totals in the format after the first three games were low-scoring affairs. Even though Sri Lanka only achieved 191 for 6 against India’s 221 for 2, the Islanders would take heart from their significantly improved batting performance as they look for a consolation victory. Chamari Athapaththu, the captain of Sri Lanka, has frequently led from the front, and her run of low scores has damaged the team. With a 37-ball 52 in the last game, Athapaththu also broke the slump, and Sri Lanka will expect for a better performance in the series decider with more help from the other hitters.



Mohsin Naqvi, takes a direct stance against India’s “no-handshake” policy against Pakistan

New Delhi: Mohsin Naqvi, the head of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), has spoken out over India’s “no-handshake” policy, saying that if the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) keeps its existing position, Pakistan is okay with not making the same gestures. Both the Indian men’s and women’s teams have declined to shake hands with their Pakistani counterparts during international matches since the Asia Cup in September. According to reports, this gesture is an expression of support for the victims of the terror incident in Pahalgam. India most recently upheld their position earlier this month at the U19 Asia Cup. In an interview with reporters in Lahore, Naqvi—who is also Pakistan’s interior minister—explained that the PCB does not intend to compel handshakes or other formal gestures with India. “Believe me, the Prime Minister himself has told me twice that we shouldn’t let politics get involved in any of this, and our beliefs are still the same today. Our position has always been that politics and cricket should stay apart. Naqvi remarked, “Sarfaraz must have told you what kind of attitude was shown and what it was like that day.” According to Naqvi, Pakistan will compete on an equal footing with their neighbors while respecting India’s decision. “We don’t particularly want to shake hands if they don’t want to. Whatever occurs, India will be treated equally. You’ll see that this strategy will persist in the future. They can’t do one thing and we’ll back down; it just isn’t going to happen,” he continued. After 26 Indian tourists were massacred by terrorists supported by Pakistan in the Pahalgam terror assault, tensions between the two countries peaked. India responded by initiating a military operation known as “Opera-



tion Sindoor” with the goal of destroying terrorist infrastructure on the other side of the border.



Career Story of Dipa Karmakar

Gymnastics may not be a very famous sport in India, but it sure is in the state of Tripura. Most of the schools there have their own gymnastics centre, and children are trained for free at many community centres. One such child grew up to be Dipa Karmakar, India’s first female gymnast ever to compete in the Olympics. One wrong move and Karmakar could die on the spot, but that’s what being an artistic gymnast is about. Karmakar is one of the only five women who have successfully landed the Produnova, the most difficult vault currently performed in women’s gymnastics. Every success story has a humble beginning, and this one started in one of the poorest states of India.

With a lot of people in Tripura living below poverty line, sports is a way to keep children employed and even keep them out of poverty and mischief. Though there are a lot of aspiring gymnasts in the state, the conditions make it a struggle to start learning and continue with the training. The gym in which Karmakar was trained used to get flooded during rains, and there would be rats and cockroaches all around. The first vault she was trained on was made with the parts of an old two-wheeler. The next gym she joined did not have proper equipment initially. It didn’t even have a vaulting table, so she would put mats on top of each other and make do with that. As she had the intent to succeed, the external conditions didn’t really matter. Karmakar’s father used to work for the Sports Authority of India and wanted her to get into sports. He believed that Karmakar’s build, personality and restless energy would help her excel at gymnastics, a sport that he himself had previously given a shot. Being reluctant to learn gymnastics in the beginning, Karmakar was eventually convinced by her father. Karmakar began her training with Soma Nandi, a national-level gymnast. In her first gymnastics competition, Karmakar competed without shoes and borrowed an oversized costume. She went on to win the gold medal on

the balancing beam at the Northeastern Games in 2002. Soma Nandi then took the little champ to her husband, Bisweshwar Nandi, who was a five-time National gymnastics champion himself. Bisweshwar Nandi was impressed by Karmakar’s dedication, but her flat foot was an issue. Having flat feet isn’t good news for gymnasts, as it affects their landing as well as the spring in their jumps. Nandi consulted some gymnastics experts on ways to develop a curve in a flat foot, but was told that it wasn’t possible. Nandi’s hopes were shattered, but he didn’t stop there.

Nandi researched on the ways to overcome Karmakar’s flat foot. He gave Karmakar 9-10 exercises but didn’t let her know that she had flat feet. Karmakar worked really hard on those exercises and after a year of extensive training, her flat foot disappeared, or rather, an arch developed in her feet. A year after her training started, Karmakar realized that the only way she could devote all her time to gymnastics was by sticking to the Bengali-medium school in Agartala, the capital city of Tripura. The attendance wasn’t a major issue and enabled her to devote maximum time to the sport. According to her father, this was Karmakar’s “biggest sacrifice she made in pursuit of Artistic Gymnastics.” Today, Karmakar has compensated for the time she didn’t attend school regularly. She’s a graduate and is pursuing her Masters in Political Science. In fact, she gave her MA exams just after heading back to India from the 2016 Rio Olympics! This is just another example of Karmakar’s high risk-appetite and her level of maturity in prioritising everything in life. Five years after winning that gold medal for the balancing beam in the 2002 Northeastern Games, Karmakar was an evolved gymnast. She excelled at various state-level, national and international championships and has won 67 gold medals (67 in total) since 2007. Karmakar also won the Junior Nationals held at West Bengal in 2008. All of this comes from a girl who was afraid of even stepping

up on the beam bar. Karmakar started keeping a track of her attempts on the balance beam and it totaled to 127 at the end of the first week. On her ninth birthday, she declared that she won’t cut the cake till she had finished her evening gymnastics practice. Until the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi, she had been practising with irregular-sized landing mats. This goes on to show the level of intent Karmakar had to overcome all odds. Representing Tripura at the 2011 National Games, Karmakar won gold medals in all the events — balance beam, floor, vault, uneven bars and all-around. Her inspiration at that time was Ashish Kumar’s bronze medal at the 2010 Commonwealth Games held in New Delhi. Dipa had also been a part of India’s contingent at the Games, but had been unable to win a medal. She made sure that didn’t happen in the next Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Karmakar had found it extremely difficult to reach the international stage, but her “life changed after the 2014 Commonwealth Games” where she won the bronze medal. She was the first Indian woman to do so, and the second Indian after Ashish Kumar. Karmakar had trained without equipment for eight months prior to the 2014 Games, before a training camp was arranged. On the day of the finals, Karmakar’s leg was badly swollen. Everyone advised her against doing the vault but she was adamant on taking that risk. It was her only hope to be eligible for a medal. At the 2014 Asian



Games, she finished fourth in vault behind two Olympics medalists and a World Championships medalist. What has been more commendable is Karmakar’s quality of not complaining about the lack of facilities or help from the Sports Ministry in India. Endless belief in herself and her coach has always been enough for her. The major reason behind Karmakar winning the bronze medal at the 2014 Commonwealth Games was the Produnova vault. The Produnova is an artistic gymnastics vault consisting of a front handspring and two front somersaults. It is the hardest vault performed in women’s artistic gymnastics, with many prominent gymnasts hesitating to attempt it, including star gymnast Simone Biles from USA. Karmakar became the third woman in history to land the Produnova, a vault that has been successfully completed by only five women till date. Every attempt at the Produnova doesn’t only risk the gymnast being paralysed, but also puts her life at risk. If it goes wrong, it can break the spine and the neck, to begin with. Karmakar had practiced the Produnova at least a 1000 times before the 2014 Games.

Karmakar finished 8th on the balance beam at the Asian Games in Hiroshima. She bagged the bronze medal in the women’s vault, with the help of a training camp being provided at home. Karmakar was conferred with the Arjuna Award by the Republic of India, and she also became the first Indian gymnast to qualify for a final stage at the 2015 World Artistic Gymnastics Championships. Owing to the lack of a gymnastics federation in India, Karmakar had gone eight months without practice before the Championships. Thereafter, she learned the Tsukahara vault in three months, something her peers had been doing for at least three years. Nonetheless, Karmakar finished fifth at the World Championships. In 2015, Karmakar has failed to secure a ticket to the Rio Olympics owing to a fifth place finish at the World Championships. But she got a second chance when the Gymnastics Federation of India sent her for the 2016 Olympic Test Event that was the final qualifier for the gymnastics events at Rio. Karmakar became India’s first female gymnast to qualify for the final vault event at the Olympics. Having qualified at the last moment, she had only three months to get things together. Despite the short time given to prepare (as opposed to her opponents who had been preparing for Rio Olympics for years), Karmakar successfully pulled off the death-defying Produnova vault once again. Karmakar missed the bronze medal by a whisker, attaining 4th position in the Women’s Vault Gymnastics event of the 2016 Summer Olympics. The gymnast who came third had a total score of 15.216 while Karmakar scored 15.066. Karmakar’s coach, Bisweshwar Nandi, felt that not having a manager at the Olympics was unfortunate, as they would have otherwise appealed to the panel for a better score (for a perfect landing) in Karmakar’s second vault. Karmakar’s earlier request for a physio also went in vain, as the physio was rushed to Rio only after she had qualified for the finals. Karmakar was conferred with the prestigious Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award, while Bisweshwar Nandi received the coveted Dronacharya Award for his excellence in coaching. According to Nandi, Karmakar has always been a dedicated student, but can lose her temper sometimes. Rebellion can take us places, isn’t it?

Indian girls at the age of Dipa Karmakar are usually married off by their parents, especially in states like Tripura. Ironically, the family’s support is one of the most crucial factors in deciding the career of a sportsperson, and Karmakar was fortunate to have that. But it’s anything but luck that made her the first Indian gymnast to compete at the Olympics and receive the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna award, the highest sporting honour given by the Republic of India. Being born in a poor state with flat feet is something that was not in Karmakar’s control. But she did everything else to make sure she succeeds because of her strengths and despite her weaknesses. She preferred not going to an English-medium school so that she could concentrate on gymnastics and compete at the Olympics one day. When she returned from the 2016 Rio Olympics, she gave her exams for her MA in Political Science. Everything falls into place when we are focused and have the intent to succeed, just like it was with Sania Mirza’s career story. And lastly, we learn that blaming our country’s infrastructure might not be as helpful as excelling at the sport and giving the country a reason to improve it.

Madhavi Latha

Madhavi Latha Prathigudupu is a former para-athletics sportswoman who advocates for inclusion of persons with disabilities in sports and society. In 2011, she founded the Paralympic Swimming Association of Tamil Nadu, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that aims to “create awareness about the importance and rehabilitation impact of swimming”. She is also the founder of the Wheelchair Basketball Federation of India (WBI), India’s national wheelchair basketball body, and the founder of Yes, We Can Too, a charitable trust focused on persons with disabilities. in sports. Madhavi Latha Prathigudupu won three gold medals at the National 15th National Paralympic Swimming Championship in 2015, among other swimming awards. Madhavi was born as the youngest of four siblings in a small village in Telangana, to a father who was a school-teacher and a mother who was a homemaker. She was diagnosed with polio at 7 months old, a condition that caused her legs and her spinal cord to weaken, due to which she began to use a wheelchair from an early age. She was left with a paralyzed lower body, and minimal movement in her hands and even caused her to not be able to speak. Madhavi completed her schooling and pursued a college degree privately, graduating with a B.A. in mathematics. She also completed a typist to improve her job prospects, as she was instilled with the desire to be financially independent from her parents. She got a job for a state bank in Hyderabad before moving to Standard Chartered bank in Chennai in 2006. In Hyderabad, Madhavi learned to ride a scooter, and then later, a car, so that she could commute independently.

In her late 30s, the disease had progressed, causing life-threatening complications to

her spine and her lungs. Her spine had compressed further owing to the disease and was putting pressure on one of her lungs, depriving her body of oxygen. Doctors gave her between six months to a year to live. It was at this time that her physiotherapist, Dr Anand Jothi, suggested that she take up hydrotherapy. The buoyancy of the water made her body weight lighter, and her legs and back were able to support the weight of her body underwater. Following her doctor’s advice, Madhavi started to teach herself to swim using inflatable tubes, as she could not find a coach. It was only after she had learned how to swim freestyle that she found herself a coach, who then taught her about the other styles of swimming – butterfly stroke, breast stroke, etc. In an interview, she said, “Under water my weight is lesser. Inside the water, I can use muscle movements with little effort. I feel like a fish inside the water.” Madhavi entered the realm of competitive sports in 2010 by joining a corporate Olympiad, during her time at a global banking corporation. In that swimming competition, she was the sole participant with a disability. The event organizers made sure she was accompanied by four individuals for safety purposes. Despite this, she successfully finished the 100m freestyle race, earning significant acclaim and the honor of being named the Most Encouraging Sportsperson. After her first experience in the 2010 corporate Olympiad, Madhavi went on to swim in competitive events regularly, with the highlight being when she won three gold medals in the 2011 National Paralympic Swimming Championships, in 50m freestyle, breast stroke and backstroke competitions. In 2012, she won two silver and two bronze Medals in the 12th National Paralympics Swimming Championship. Madhavi’s success with sports in her forties



led her to start a movement called “Yes We Too Can”, to promote sports for people with disabilities. In an interview, she said, “Team sports, as opposed to individual sports, helps the differently-abled people to fit in, besides assisting the physical rehabilitation process. Often, the differently-abled are socially isolated and not part of the mainstream, which severely affects their social skills and breeds an inferiority complex. It reduces their anxiety and enhances their social skills, boosts their self-esteem and helps them interact better.” Her advocacy activities led her to begin a state-level association – the Paralympic Swimming Association of Tamil Nadu, in 2011. This association started with 4 para-swimmers and has expanded to have over 300 swimmers, several of whom represent the state of Tamil Nadu in national championships, as of 2016. She was the General Secretary for the Paralympic Swimming Association of Tamil Nadu. After this, Madhavi was approached by UK-based NGO Choice International to partner with them to promote wheelchair basketball in India. Madhavi got on board, and this led to her, along with a few other individuals, instituting the Wheelchair Basketball Federation of India (WBFI) in 2014. Madhavi is the founder President of WBFI, which is a registered national body. One of these individuals was Kalyani Rajaraman, an activist working for people with disabilities, who served as the Secretary-General of WBFI. They aimed for wheelchair basketball to be seen as a competitive sport in India, as opposed to a rehabilitative activity, as it was generally perceived as. Currently, WBFI aims to put a team from India at the Wheelchair Basketball Championship, in the 2020 Paralympics at Tokyo.

Through WBFI, Madhavi campaigns for greater inclusion of people with disabilities in the sporting world. Finding individuals to participate in wheelchair basketball was an initial challenge as there were no state or national level sports associations or clubs for wheelchair basketball in India. Howev-

er, in 2014, WBFI initiated the first National Wheelchair Basketball Championship at Chennai with 5 teams from different states – Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Madhavi and Kalyani also engineered an association between the representatives from the International Wheelchair Basketball federation and the second National Wheelchair Basketball Championship held at New Delhi in December 2015. This happened after Madhavi and Kalyani were invited by the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF), to attend the Asia Pacific conference in Japan in 2015, and the IWBF recognised WBFI as an authorised body to promote wheelchair basketball in India. IWBF supported the efforts of WBFI by sending four instructors who extended technical help, besides training coaches, classifiers and referees in a camp conducted at Hyderabad.

As a vocal advocate for para-sports, Madhavi is outspoken about the challenges faced by people with disabilities in the sporting world. The biggest challenge, she has stated in an interview, is the access to sports facilities. She narrated an incident wherein, despite being a three-time Gold medallist in the National Para-Swimming Championships, she was denied entry at a new swimming pool that she had gone to when her regular pool was undergoing renovation. “Even after being a national champion, they told me that I cannot swim on my own, that I need to bring my medical certificate and show it to them,” she said. The lack of trained instructors, coaches and sports equipment exacerbates this lack, contributing to the low uptake of para-sports in India. “We do not even have sports equipment for wheelchair-bound [sic] sportspersons. It has to be imported from abroad,” she said On 18 January 2016, Madhavi Latha was honoured with the “Built Tough Award” at the Adding Smiles Ambassador Awards ceremony for her efforts towards promoting sports among disabled people.