

Project Suvidha 2.0 launched at 1st IRBN to improve welfare and living conditions of personnel

Itanagar, Jan 16: In an important step towards improving the living and working conditions of police personnel, Project Suvidha 2.0 was inaugurated at the 1st India Reserve Battalion (IRBN) Headquarters in Namsangmukh on Wednesday. The project was formally inaugurated by Apurba Bitin, Inspector General of Police (Operations), Police Headquarters, Itanagar. The programme was held at the battalion headquarters in the presence of senior police officers, personnel of the battalion, and their family members. Project Suvidha 2.0 aims to develop the 1st IRBN campus into a clean, green, and self-reliant space that supports the overall well-being of personnel. The focus of the initiative is on improving daily life by providing better facilities for health, fitness, community interaction, and basic needs. Officials said the project has been planned keeping in mind the long working hours and challenging duties faced by police personnel. The initiative is built around four main areas. These include health and well-being, community living and social bonding, targeted welfare facilities, and the creation of a self-sustaining ecosystem within the battalion campus. The goal is to ensure a bet-



ter quality of life not only for serving personnel but also for their families. Several new facilities were inaugurated as part of the project. These include a multipurpose hall for meetings and social programmes, an indoor gym hall for physical fitness, a wet and

dry canteen-cum-clothing store, and a mess-cum-dining hall to improve dining arrangements. An obstacle training facility, designed and built by the battalion personnel themselves, was also opened. In addition, a nature walk and children's park developed

with support from corporate social responsibility initiatives were unveiled. During the event, commendation certificates were awarded to selected personnel in recognition of their dedication and service, which boosted morale among the ranks.

Senior officers present at the programme included Sachin Kumar Singhal, Commandant of 1st IRBN; Irak Bagra, Commandant of 4th IRBN, Julang; and S. Singpho, Superintendent of Police (Planning), Police Headquarters, Itanagar.

In Brief

Assam Rifles celebrates Army Day in Manipur

Imphal: Assam Rifles marked Army Day 2026 on Thursday with a series of meaningful civic action programmes across Manipur, reinforcing its role as a trusted friend of the people. Army Day, observed annually, commemorates the historic occasion in 1949 when the first Indian Commander-in-Chief assumed command of the Indian Army, symbolising service, discipline and national pride. At Bongjang Village in Tengnoupal District, a friendly volleyball match was organised between Assam Rifles personnel and local youth.

Joint security operation launched in Kangpokpi

Imphal: Security forces initiated a joint operation in Kangpokpi district on January 16 to ensure peace and combat anti-national activities. Conducted by Special Forces and the Assam Rifles, the operation targeted armed elements in Wainem village based on specific intelligence. Security personnel cordoned off key locations to prevent escape and began searches to locate armed groups, recover illegal weapons, and dismantle hideouts. Maximum restraint is being exercised to protect civilians and minimize disruption to village life, with residents advised to stay indoors and cooperate as necessary.

Mizoram Suffers ₹114.64 Crore Loss in 2025

Aizawl: Mizoram suffered a financial loss of ₹114.64 crore in 2025 due to the outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF), which led to the death of more than 9,700 pigs across the state, an official from the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department said. Deputy Director (Disease Investigation and Epidemiology) Esther Lalzoli Ralte told PTI that 9,711 pigs died due to ASF, while another 3,620 pigs were culled as a preventive measure between March and December last year. The outbreak affected 3,867 families during this period.

Drugs worth Rs 29.4 crore seized in Mizoram

Aizawl: Officials reported on Thursday that Assam Rifles soldiers had apprehended a narcotics dealer in Mizoram and confiscated drugs valued at Rs 29.4 crore. According to a defense spokesperson, Assam Rifles carried out an operation in the Zemabawk neighborhood of Aizawl district on Wednesday afternoon in response to reliable intelligence reports about drug trafficking. The paramilitary men stopped a suspicious car during the operation. 9.8 kilogram of very addictive methamphetamine pills worth more than Rs 29.4 crore were found after a quick and exhaustive search.

Mizoram aims to become major rubber-producing state

Aizawl: Chief Minister Lalduhoma has said that Mizoram is making concerted efforts to emerge as a major rubber-producing state in the country. Addressing a training programme on scientific rubber cultivation, harvesting techniques, post-harvest handling and pest management at Vanapa Hall, Aizawl, he said that rubber is one of the most promising crops through which Mizoram can establish a strong identity, and with the objective of transforming Mizoram into a major rubber-producing region, the state government launched the Chief Minister's Rubber Mission in 2024. The Mission was formulated after detailed consultations with the Rubber Board of India and by studying the Tripura Rubber Mission, ensuring a well-planned and systematic approach.

Joint security operation launched in Kangpokpi against anti-national elements

Imphal, Jan 16: Security forces launched a joint operation in Kangpokpi district early Friday morning as part of ongoing efforts to maintain peace and prevent anti-national activities in the hill areas of Manipur. The operation is being carried out by elite Special Forces along with the Assam Rifles at Wainem village under Kangpokpi District. According to official sources, the operation began at around 6 am on January 16 following specific intelligence inputs about the movement and presence of armed anti-national elements in and around the village. Acting on this information, security personnel moved into the area in a coordinated manner

and sealed off key locations to prevent any escape. Officials said that trained teams cordoned the village and nearby forested areas and started careful search and area domination operations. The main aim of the operation is to locate and neutralise armed elements, recover illegal weapons and ammunition, and dismantle temporary shelters or hideouts allegedly being used for unlawful activities. Security forces have been instructed to exercise maximum restraint during the operation. Special care is being taken to ensure that civilians are not harmed and that normal village life is disturbed as little as possible. Residents have been advised to stay indoors and cooperate with the forces if required.

Assam Rifles celebrates Army Day in Manipur

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RRAG Alleges Killing of 15 Minority Hindus in Bangladesh in 45 Days, Flags Concerns Over Inclusive Elections

New Delhi, Jan 16: The Rights & Risks Analysis Group (RRAG) on Thursday alleged that at least 15 members of the Hindu minority community were murdered in Bangladesh over a span of 45 days, raising serious concerns about the feasibility of inclusive and participatory elections in the country. In a report released on Thursday, the RRAG said that between December 1, 2025, and January 15, 2026, one Hindu was killed every third day on average. The organisation alleged that the victims were killed by individuals belonging to the majority Muslim community. The report listed the victims as Samir Das and Prolay Chaki (January 11), Joy Mohapatra (January 10), Mithun Sarkar and Sarat Mani Chakraborty (January 6), Rana Pratap Bairagi (January 5), Khokon Chandra Das (December 31), Bajendra Biswas (December 29), Amrit Mondal (December 24), Dipu Chandra Das (December 18), Shanto Chandra Das (December 12), Jogesh Chandra Roy and Suborna Roy (December 7), and Prantosh Kormokar and Ut-pol Sarkar (December 2).

RRAG Director Suhas Chakma said the victims included elderly persons such as Suborna Roy and young people like 18-year-old Shan-to Chandra Das. He alleged that the killings were premeditated and, in several cases, linked to robbery or seizure of assets, including auto-rickshaws owned by some of the victims. Chakma further claimed that a number of the murders were carried out in a "Taliban-style" manner by slitting the victims' throats. "These murders are just the tip of the iceberg, as daily acts of violence against Hindu and other minorities across Bangladesh often go unreported in the media," Chakma said.

The RRAG also criticised the interim government of Bangladesh, led by Chief Adviser Dr Muhammad Yunus, alleging that it has consistently downplayed the religious dimension of attacks on Hindu minorities. According to the group, the interim government has described such incidents as disinformation or political violence, even before investigations are completed.

Chakma further alleged that Dr Yunus has sought to frame attacks on Hindu minorities as part of a disinformation campaign by India.



He referred to Dr Yunus's meeting with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk on January 13, 2026, seeking technical assistance to address disinformation during elections. The RRAG warned that once election campaigning begins on January 22, 2026, minority communities—particularly Hindus—could face "unprecedented violence" due to their religious identity. It alleged that such attacks may again be dismissed as political violence, as was done following large-scale attacks on Hindu minorities in August 2024. The statement came days after the Chief Observer of the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) in Bangladesh, Ivars Jbabs, called on January 11 for "inclusive" and "participatory" elections involving ethnic communities, religious minorities and regional groups. RRAG said that under the prevailing atmosphere of violence, Hindu minorities are unlikely to be able to participate meaningfully in the electoral process unless the interim government acknowledges the religious nature of the attacks and takes concrete steps to ensure their safety. The organisation urged international stakeholders, including the European Union and other election observer groups, to engage with the interim government of Bangladesh to ensure inclusive participation of Hindu and other minority communities, and to closely monitor incidents of violence against indigenous peoples, ethnic groups and religious minorities during the election period.

Meghalaya to allow registration of private candidates for SSLC exam

Shillong, Jan 16: In a landmark move for education reform, the Meghalaya Cabinet, led by Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, has approved a new provision allowing private candidates to register for the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC/Class 10) examination under MBOSE. This initiative specifically targets school drop-outs and students who previously failed to clear their matric exams, providing a flexible pathway to resume their education and secure a better future. Furthermore, the Cabinet introduced Community-Integrated Skill Learning (CISL) for Classes VI to X. This innovative curriculum transforms the existing Health and Physical Education subject from a theoretical textbook study into an experiential learning pro-

gram. Under CISL, students will identify and master practical skills aligned with their family or community backgrounds—such as agriculture, weaving, or local crafts. Chief Minister Sangma emphasized that CISL aims to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application. By encouraging students to learn directly from parents or community elders, the program promotes occupational continuity and strengthens social bonds. "This is an innovative step to enhance family participation in education while creating a meaningful social impact," the CM stated. This dual approach of academic flexibility and vocational integration marks a significant shift toward holistic development in Meghalaya's education system.

India Marks 10 Years of Startup India; Assam Startups Reflect Inclusive Entrepreneurial Growth

Guwahati, Jan 16: India is observing National Startup Day on Thursday while marking a decade of the Startup India initiative, launched in 2016 by the Prime Minister to strengthen the country's entrepreneurial ecosystem. When the programme was introduced, India had around 400 startups, limited access to capital, and entrepreneurship was widely seen as risky and uncertain. Startup India sought to address these challenges by creating an enabling environment through regulatory simplification, improved access to funding, mentorship support, and national and international recognition for startups. Over the past ten years, India's startup ecosystem has expanded rapidly. The country now has over two lakh DPIIT-recognised startups, recording a 95 per cent compounded annual growth rate since 2016. On average, nearly 80 startups are recognised every day. Collectively, these startups have generated more than 21 lakh jobs, with an average of 11 jobs per startup. Growth has been geographically and socially inclusive, with 52.6

per cent of recognised startups based in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. Nearly half of the startups have at least one woman director, and ventures span over 56 sectors, including IT services, healthcare and life sciences, education, agriculture and construction. India is now among the world's largest startup ecosystems and ranks as the third-largest unicorn nation. Assam's startup ecosystem has also witnessed steady growth, supported by Startup India policies and schemes. Guwahati-based RC Hobbytech Solutions Pvt. Ltd., operating in the drone technology sector, has contributed to the development of the emerging drone ecosystem in eastern India. Recognised under Startup India, the company availed benefits such as Section 80-IAC income tax exemptions, which helped ease early-stage financial pressures. The company said the exemptions enabled reinvestment in research and development, expansion of manufacturing capacity and talent development. Startup India's digital recognition framework and policy support have been particularly

beneficial for startups operating in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. Another Assam-based startup, Desso Natural LLP from Jorhat, operates as a premium tea and wellness brand specialising in natural and sustainably sourced tea blends. The startup received debt support under the Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS) through the Association of Lady Entrepreneurs of India incubation centre. Following this support, Desso Natural expanded its market presence across India and forged collaborations with brands such as Audi, Mercedes and Porsche. The company was also featured in WOW Hyderabad Magazine as one of India's leading homegrown tea brands. As the Startup India initiative completes a decade, these examples from Assam highlight how policy support, access to funding and strong institutional frameworks have enabled startup growth beyond metropolitan centres. The initiative continues to focus on promoting innovation, generating employment and fostering inclusive entrepreneurship across the country.

Assam Students’ Union demands eviction of tribal belt lands in Morigaon

Guwahati, Jan 16: The All Tiwa Students’ Union (ATSU) on January 16, submitted a memorandum to the Morigaon District Commissioner, demanding immediate eviction of illegal encroachers from tribal belt and block lands in the district. A delegation of the union met the district administration and raised concerns over large-scale encroachment in seven tribal belts and blocks of Morigaon. According to the organisation, nearly 28,000 bighas of land meant to safeguard the rights of indigenous and tribal communities are currently under illegal occupation. ATSU leaders alleged that despite repeated representations to the government, the encroached lands have not been fully cleared. However, they welcomed the eviction drives recently carried out in different parts of Assam under the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

ATSU president Prashanta Mosorang said the District Commis-



sioner has assured the delegation that eviction drives against illegal encroachers would begin in the district from February 1. He added that the organisation has also demanded eviction from Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR) and Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) lands.

The students’ body further opposed the proposed Satellite Township project at Jagiroad, expressing apprehension that it could adversely affect the rights, land and livelihoods of indigenous and Tiwa communities. The union urged the state government to cancel the project, stating that it has already

submitted a memorandum to the concerned authorities in New Delhi. The ATSU reiterated its demand for the protection of tribal belt and block lands, stating that safeguarding such areas is crucial for preserving the constitutional rights and identity of indigenous communities in Assam

Tipra Motha delegation meets timely tribal council polls

Agartala, Jan 16: A delegation of the Tipra Motha Party (TMP), an ally of the BJP-led coalition government in Tripura, met Chief Minister Manik Saha and demanded timely election to the autonomous district council, a party leader said on Thursday.

The present five-year tenure of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) expires on April 18. “A five-member delegation of our party, headed by TTAADC executive member Rabintra Debbarma, met Saha at his residence on Wednesday and discussed several important issues,” TMP spokesperson C K Jamatia said at a press conference. He said the delegation urged the CM to ensure that the TTAADC elections are held before its tenure expires. Debbarma said the delegation also submitted a memorandum to the CM to press for the adoption of the Roman script for Kokborok language, which he said was crucial for the overall development of the mother tongue of most tribal communities in the state. “The CM appears to have softened his stand on the Roman script demand and we hope that Saha will take a realistic step on the issue”, he said. Debbarma said the CM has exhorted the delegation to meet the chairpersons of



the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) in Delhi to introduce Roman script for Kokborok language.

“After consultation with party founder Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, a party delegation will shortly visit Delhi to meet the heads of CBSE and ICSE for adoption of Roman script for Kokborok language”, he said.

The TTAADC has already introduced Roman script for Kokborok in schools under its jurisdiction, while students in state-run educational institutions are allowed to write the subject in both Bengali and Roman scripts, he added.

Earthquake mock drill held across Mizoram

Aizawl, Jan 16: A statewide mock drill simulating an earthquake was conducted across all districts of Mizoram on Thursday to assess emergency response, rescue and relief preparedness, officials said. The exercise was organised by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in coordination with the state Disaster Management and Rehabilitation (DM&R) department to ensure a prompt and coordinated response in the event of a major earthquake. Mock scenarios, including building collapses, fire outbreaks and mass casualties, were staged at 36 locations across the state. The drill began at 10 am with the sounding of sirens at deputy commissioner offices, officials said. Personnel from District Quick Response Forces, Fire and Emergency Services, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Assam Rifles, Border Security Force (BSF), medical teams, NGOs and local volunteers took part in the exercise. State disaster response teams from neighbouring Assam and Tripura also participated in the drill at Kolasib and Mamit districts, officials said. Line departments, including Public Health Engineering, Public Works, Power and Electricity, Transport, and Information and Public Relations, were involved in simulated rescue



and relief operations amid collapsed structures, fires, road blockages and communication failures. Operations at incident sites, staging areas and relief camps were monitored through video conferencing at In Aizawl, Lok Bhavan was designated as a relief camp, while Lammual, formerly the Assam Rifles ground, was used as a staging area. NDMA and state DM&R officials visited relief camps during the exercise. Mizoram lies in the Seismic Zone V, which is the highest risk zone to earthquakes.

Mizoram to become major rubber producing state: Lalduhoma

Aizawl, Jan 16: Mizoram is making concerted efforts to emerge as a major rubber-producing state, Chief Minister Lalduhoma said on Thursday. Addressing a training programme on scientific rubber cultivation, harvesting techniques, post-harvest handling and pest management here, he said the state government launched the Chief Minister’s Rubber Mission in 2024. The CM said the mission was formulated after consultations with the Rubber Board of India and a study of the Tripura Rubber Mission to ensure a systematic and well-planned approach. Lalduhoma claimed that progress under the mission had surpassed initial expectations due to the enthusiastic response from farmers willing to take up rubber cultivation. He said that despite attaining Union Territory status over five decades ago, Mizoram lacked a crop that could distinctly establish its identity. However, after the Zoram People’s Movement government assumed office and implemented focused policies, the state was declared the ‘Ginger Capital of India’



by NITI Aayog, he added. Lalduhoma said that passion fruit, locally known as ‘Sapthei’, was another promising crop with strong potential. Rubber, he said, was among the crops through which Mizoram could build a strong agricultural identity. According to officials, Mizoram has around 50,000 hectares of land suitable for rubber

cultivation. The state government has prioritised rubber farming due to its environmental and economic benefits, including afforestation, water conservation, timber value and favourable market prospects.

Officials said the Chief Minister’s Rubber Mission was launched on October 18, 2024, with implementation

by the Land Resources, Soil and Water Conservation Department beginning in early 2025.

About 4.5 lakh rubber saplings have already been planted across more than 1,000 hectares in Mamit district, which borders Tripura and Bangladesh, and Kolasib district, which shares a boundary with Assam, they said.

The department plans to plant over 11.58 lakh saplings across 2,575 hectares in various districts during the current year. Infrastructure support under the mission will include construction of approach roads to plantations, provision of rubber roller machines and tapping tools, and facilitation of marketing arrangements, officials said.

Approach and link roads measuring 46.50 km are proposed at 11 rubber plantation locations across the state during the year, they added.

The training programme, being conducted by experts, is likely to train around 550 rubber growers in scientific cultivation, tapping techniques, processing of rubber sheets, post-harvest handling and pest management.

Large-scale anti-insurgency operation launched in Manipur’s Churachandpur district

Agartala, Jan 16: Security forces on January 16 carried out a large-scale anti-insurgency operation at suspected militant hideouts in the interior areas of Manipur’s Churachandpur district, officials said. The coordinated operation was launched in the Henglep area, a remote and forested region of the hill district, based on specific intelligence inputs about militant activity. Numerous communities in Assam Personnel from elite Para Special Forces and the Assam Rifles were deployed as part of a coordinated

counter-insurgency operation, targeting suspected hideouts of armed groups operating in the area.

Officials said the region has long been considered a stronghold of militant elements, including the United Kuki National Army (UKNA), a group that is not a signatory to the Suspension of Operations agreement, though it was not immediately clear which group was being specifically targeted in the ongoing operation. According to officials, troops were inserted deep into the jun-

gle terrain with the assistance of helicopters to effectively comb the difficult and inaccessible areas. The operation focused on forested zones believed to be used as transit camps or hideouts by militants and was part of sustained efforts by security agencies to curb insurgent activities in the hill districts. Further details regarding recoveries, arrests or encounters were awaited at the time of filing this report.

Manipur has remained volatile following ethnic violence between Imphal Val-

ley-based Meitei groups and hill-based Kuki-Zo communities that erupted in May 2023. Since then, at least 260 people have been killed and thousands displaced from their homes. The state is currently under President’s Rule, imposed on February 13, 2025, following the resignation of then chief minister N Biren Singh on February 9. Security forces have since intensified operations across sensitive districts to restore law and order and prevent further escalation of violence.

NSF welcomes Nagaland Police recruitment drive



Dimapur, Jan 16: The Naga Students’ Federation (NSF) has welcomed the ongoing police recruitment drive across Nagaland, commending the Department of Home and the Government of Nagaland for addressing long-pending vacancies and creating employment opportunities for Naga youth. While appreciating the initiative, the NSF underlined that transparency, fairness and accountability must remain non-negotiable throughout the recruitment process.

The Federation stressed that meritocracy should be strictly upheld at every stage of selection, warning against any scope for favoritism, nepotism or undue influence that could undermine the credibility of the exercise. The NSF further urged the Department of Home and all concerned agencies to ensure that the recruitment process is completed in a time-bound manner, noting

that prolonged delays could erode public confidence and adversely affect aspiring candidates. Reiterating its role as a watchdog in matters of public interest, the Federation stated that it would closely monitor the recruitment process to ensure adherence to principles of justice, fairness and transparency.

The NSF expressed hope that the ongoing police recruitment drive would set a benchmark for integrity and efficiency in public appointments, inspiring confidence.

Nagaland and strengthening the State’s policing framework in the long term. In an official statement, the apex student body acknowledged that the recruitment exercise marks an important step towards building a stronger, more professional and people-oriented police force, which it said is essential for reinforcing public trust in governance and institutions.

PM Modi to visit Assam on January 17, set to launch key projects

Guwahati, Jan 16: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to arrive in Assam on Saturday for a two-day visit, marking his second trip to the state in less than a month, an official said.

Soon after his arrival in Guwahati on the evening of January 17, the Prime Minister will witness a grand performance of the traditional Bodo folk dance ‘Bagurumba’ by around 10,000 artists at the Arjun Bhogeswar Barua Sports Stadium. On January 18, Modi will travel to Kaliabor to lay the foundation stone for the proposed Kaziranga elevated corridor project, estimated to cost Rs 6,957 crore. The corridor is aimed at ensuring safer movement for wildlife while improving connectivity in the region.

During the visit, the Prime Minister is also expected to virtually flag off two Amrit Bharat Express trains — the Dibrugarh-Gomti Nagar (Lucknow) Express and the Kamakhya-Rohtak Express. He will later address a public meeting at Kaliabor, the official added. Modi’s upcoming tour follows his previous two-day visit.

Assam from December 20, during which he inaugurated the new terminal of Guwahati International Airport and unveiled a statue of Assam’s first Chief Minister, Gopinath Bordoloi, after whom the airport is named. He had also



laid the foundation stone for a Rs 10,601-crore brownfield ammonia-urea plant in Dibrugarh and addressed public

meetings in Guwahati and Namrup, setting the tone for the 2026 Assam Assembly elections.

GI products key to heritage, livelihoods: Assam Governor

Guwahati, Jan 16: Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on January 15 said that Geographical Indication (GI)-tagged products play a key role in protecting India's traditional heritage while also helping artisans and farmers earn a better and more dignified living. Speaking at the inauguration of the four-day GI Mahotsav: Promoting India's Heritage through GI Products, the Governor said GI products are not just goods for sale, but living symbols of folk art, traditional skills and age-old knowledge passed down through generations.

He said such products also follow environmentally sustainable practices and therefore deserve greater attention and protection. The Governor stressed that linking GI-tagged products with global markets is necessary to ensure long-term benefits for local communities.

He said when these products reach international buyers, artisans and farmers gain better income, wider recognition and stronger confidence in their work. According to him, this process also strengthens the foundation of Aatmanirbhar Bharat by making local producers self-reliant.

Acharya underlined the important role of women and youth in the GI-based economy, describing them as its main driving force. He said young people, through innovation, technology and entrepreneurship, can connect GI products with branding, start-ups and e-commerce platforms.

He called for coordinated efforts from the central and state governments, industry bodies and the private sector to unlock the full potential of the sector. Explaining the meaning of GI, the Governor said a GI tag confirms that a product comes from a specific region and gains its unique quality and reputation from that place. He noted that India is among the leading countries in registered GI products, reflecting its rich cultural diversity. Referring to Assam, he said the state holds a special place in India's GI landscape, with products rooted in local geography and community knowledge. He cited Muga and Eri silk, Sarthebari bell metal craft, Asharikandi terracotta, Assam tea and Kaji Nemu as proud examples of Assam's GI heritage.

Mizoram Suffers ₹114.64 Crore Loss in 2025 Due to African Swine Fever Outbreak

Aizawl, Jan 16: Mizoram suffered a financial loss of ₹114.64 crore in 2025 due to the outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF), which led to the death of more than 9,700 pigs across the state, an official from the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department said.

Deputy Director (Disease Investigation and Epidemiology) Esther Lalzoli Ralte told PTI that 9,711 pigs died due to ASF, while another 3,620 pigs were culled as a preventive measure between March and December last year. The outbreak affected 3,867 families during this period.

ASF was first detected in Mizoram on March 21, 2021, at Lungsen village in Lunglei district near the Bangladesh border. Since then, the disease has severely

impacted the state's pig population. A total of 72,012 pigs have either died or been culled since 2021, affecting over 12,500 families and causing cumulative financial losses of ₹1,011.27 crore.

Of these, 52,979 pigs were culled to prevent the spread of the disease, Ralte said, adding that the last ASF-related pig deaths in the state were reported on December 8 last year.

She further stated that compensation exceeding ₹14.51 crore, jointly provided by the Centre and the state government, has been disbursed to pig farmers for animals culled up to 2023. A proposal seeking ₹24.94 crore as compensation for pigs culled in 2024 has been submitted to the Centre, with the amount to be shared equally between the Centre and the state.

However, no compensation is provided for pigs that die due to ASF.

According to official data, Mizoram recorded the highest pig fatalities in 2021, with 33,417 deaths, followed by 14,950 deaths in 2024 and 12,795 in 2022. The state also suffered its highest financial loss in 2024 at ₹336.4 crore, followed by ₹334.14 crore in 2021 and ₹210.32 crore in 2022.

Ralte noted that ASF outbreaks usually decline during winter but tend to resurface during warmer months. She also recalled that Mizoram had previously faced outbreaks of Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) in 2013, 2016, 2018 and 2020, which killed thousands of pigs and piglets and resulted in losses estimated at ₹10.62 crore.

Arunachal Ranked Top National Startup Hub

Itanagar, Jan 16: Arunachal Pradesh has been ranked as the Best Performer along with Gujarat and Goa in the States' Startup Ranking Framework (SRF 5.0), results of which was declared today by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) coinciding with National Startup Day. Manipur, Meghalaya, and Nagaland featured as 'Leaders' while Assam, Mizoram and Tripura have been adjudged as 'Aspiring Leaders' in the ranking. The States' Startup Ranking

Framework serves as a practical policy and governance tool to assess how effectively States and Union Territories are enabling startup growth on the ground.

By encouraging both healthy competition and collaboration among state governments, the framework supports the development of strong, well-functioning startup ecosystems across the country. The fifth edition of the States' Startup Ranking Framework builds on lessons from previous editions and places greater emphasis on measurable

outcomes, long-term sustainability, and the resilience of startup ecosystems.

States and Union Territories are evaluated across six reform areas and nineteen clearly defined action points, covering policy and institutional support, physical and digital infrastructure, access to funding, market access and linkages, capacity building for entrepreneurs and ecosystem stakeholders, and innovation-led growth. Participation from 34 States and Union Territories in the current edition reflects

a shared national commitment to improving implementation, strengthening ecosystem maturity, and enabling startups to grow and scale across regions. Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, while addressing an event to mark National Startup Day in New Delhi, said that startups are now present in every corner of the country, with nearly 50 per cent originating from Tier-II and Tier-III cities, demonstrating that the startup revolution has truly become an Indian movement.

Drugs worth Rs 29.4 crore seized in Mizoram

Aizawl, Jan 16: Officials reported on Thursday that Assam Rifles soldiers had apprehended a narcotics dealer in Mizoram and confiscated drugs valued at Rs 29.4 crore.

According to a defense spokesperson, Assam Rifles carried out an operation in the Zemabawk neighborhood of Aizawl district on Wednesday afternoon in response to reliable intelligence reports about drug trafficking.

The paramilitary men stopped a suspicious car during the operation. 9.8 kilogram of very addictive methamphetamine pills worth more than Rs 29.4 crore were found after a quick and exhaustive search. A sniffer dog was used to find the drugs, which were neatly hidden inside the car's tires. In India, methamphetamine tablets are prohibited as psychotropic drugs. In accordance with the applicable provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985, the car and the seized contraband were turned over to the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), Aizawl Field Office, for a thorough investigation and potential legal action.

TYCM submits memo to Governor over ministerial portfolio

Imphal, Jan 16: The Tribal Youth Council Manipur (TYCM), Council Headquarters, submitted a memorandum to Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at Lok Bhavan, Imphal, urging him not to award/assign the portfolio of Minister-in-Charge of the Minor Irrigation Department to the Chief Minister and instead award/assign it to a member of the Council of Ministers when a popular government is formed in the State. According to a press release of TYCM, it is a well known that in previous governments, both during the Congress and the BJP regimes, the portfolio of Minister-in-Charge of the Minor Irrigation Department was held by the Chief Minister.

Left, TMC have ruined Bengal's prospects, says Tripura MP Biplab Deb

Agartala, Jan 16: Former Tripura Chief Minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Biplab Kumar Deb on Wednesday launched a sharp political attack on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, accusing the ruling Trinamool Congress of continuing a long period of misrule that, he claimed, began during the tenure of the Left Front and has severely damaged the state's future. Addressing a press conference in Agartala, Deb alleged that successive governments in West Bengal have weakened the state's economy, driven industries away, and failed to create sufficient employment oppor-

tunities for young people. He said the BJP was now emerging as the main alternative political force, committed to restoring development, dignity, and effective governance in the state. The BJP MP claimed that nearly 1.5 crore youths from West Bengal have migrated to other parts of the country in search of jobs. He attributed this migration to what he described as anti-industry policies and governance failures under the TMC. According to Deb, around 7,000 small and large industries have either shut down operations or moved out of the state over the years due to an unfavourable business climate.

Assam keen on exporting surplus power to Bangladesh through Tripura: Saha

Agartala, Jan 16: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha has said that Assam is willing to export its surplus electricity to Bangladesh by using Tripura as a transit state. Tripura, he said, is already supplying power to the neighbouring country. Addressing mediapersons during a programme for distribution of blankets and woollen clothes in Agartala on Friday, Saha said the proposal was discussed during his meeting with Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at his official residence on Thursday. Saha said that Sarma informed him that Assam is producing excess power and is interested in selling the surplus electricity to Bangladesh. "Since Tripura already has an operational arrangement for power export to Bangladesh, Assam has shown interest in sending its power through Tripura," he said. The Tripura Chief Minister said he apprised Sarma about the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Tripura and Bangladesh for power supply, which is set to expire in March this year. He further said the state is keen on renewing the agreement and continuing power export to Bangladesh. "Following the renewal of the MoU, Assam will be able to export its excess electricity to Bangladesh through Tripura," Saha said. The two Chief Ministers also discussed infrastructure-related issues, including the widening of roads at the Churaibari Inter-State Land Port on the Assam-Tripura border to ensure smooth vehicular movement. "The meeting also allowed both leaders to share updates on various development initiatives and challenges faced by their respective states, highlighting mutual cooperation between Tripura and Assam," Saha said.

Mizoram CM meets DoNER Secretary, seeks early clearance of pending projects

Aizawl, Jan 16: The Chief Minister of Mizoram, Lalduhoma, on Thursday held a meeting with Chanchal Kumar, Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, during the latter's official visit to the state. The meeting took place at the Chief Minister's office in Aizawl and focused on a range of development initiatives being implemented in Mizoram with support from the Ministry of DoNER. The Chief Minister reviewed the progress of ongoing projects and raised concerns over several proposals that are still awaiting approval. During the discussion, Lalduhoma requested early resolution of pending projects of the Mizoram government under the Ministry of DoNER. He also stressed the need to speed up and simplify procedures, stating that delays in approvals and fund sanctions often slow down work on the ground and affect timely completion of development projects meant for public benefit. Secretary Chanchal Kumar, while responding to the issues raised, appreciated the recently established Ginger Processing Unit in Mizoram. He observed that ginger is a major source of livelihood for a large number of farmers in the state and that production has been steadily increasing over the years. He added that the Ministry of DoNER attaches significant importance to the processing unit, as it supports farmers and adds value to local produce. The Chief Minister was accompanied during the meeting by Vanlaldina Fanai, Commissioner and Secretary to the Chief Minister.



Mizoram aims to become major rubber-producing state

Aizawl, Jan 16: Chief Minister Lalduhoma has said that Mizoram is making concerted efforts to emerge as a major rubber-producing state in the country.

Addressing a training programme on scientific rubber cultivation, harvesting techniques, post-harvest handling and pest management at Vanapa Hall, Aizawl, he said that rubber is one of the most promising crops through which Mizoram can establish a strong identity, and with the objective of transforming Mizoram into a major rubber-producing region, the state government launched the Chief Minister's Rubber Mission in 2024. The Mission was formulated after detailed consultations with the Rubber Board of India and by studying the Tripura Rubber Mission, ensuring a well-planned and systematic approach. He noted that progress under the



Mission has surpassed initial expectations, largely due to the enthusiastic response from farmers willing to take up rubber cultivation, which he described as highly encouraging. Assuring continued government support, the Chief Minister urged farmers to put in their best efforts, emphasising that rubber cultivation requires proper technical knowledge and discipline. He encouraged participants to atten-

tively follow the training, assuring them that the government would stand by them and provide continuous support. The training programme is being conducted with experts from the Rubber Board of India and Servo Lubricants (IOCL), who will train around 550 rubber growers on scientific cultivation practices, tapping techniques, processing of rubber sheets, post-harvest handling, and pest management. Mizoram has approximately 50,000 hectares of land suitable for rubber cultivation. Rubber is a resilient crop that supports afforestation, aids in water conservation, offers good market value, and after its economic life, the timber can be used for furniture and other purposes. Considering these advantages, the Government of Mizoram has prioritised rubber cultivation. The Chief Minister's Rubber Mis-

sion was launched on October 18, 2024. Under this Mission, the Land Resources, Soil & Water Conservation Department began implementation in early 2025, and has already planted 4,50,000 rubber saplings over 1,000 hectares in Mamit and Kolasib districts. In 2026, the Department plans to plant 11,58,750 rubber saplings across 2,575 hectares in various districts. The Mission is planned for a five-year period, with a target of covering 11,500 hectares under rubber cultivation.

Infrastructure support under the Mission will include construction of approach roads to plantations, provision of rubber roller machines and tapping tools, and facilitation of marketing arrangements. During the current year, approach roads measuring 46.50 kilometres are planned for rubber plantations in eleven locations.

2 Guwahati youths bag fide social award for Chess-based social outreach

Guwahati, Jan 16: Two young chess players from Guwahati, Vihaan Upadhyay (15) and Viraj Upadhyay (13), have been honoured with the Outstanding FIDE Social Award for their remarkable contribution to using chess as a tool for social inclusion, education and emotional well-being among underprivileged children.

The award was presented to the brothers during the FIDE Global Conference on Chess in Society and Education, held at KIIT University in Bhubaneswar, Odisha on Thursday.

The recognition acknowledges the brothers' grassroots initiative "Pawns to Kings", through which they have been working to make chess accessible to children from underserved and marginalised communities. Despite their young age, both are accomplished players, holding FIDE ratings of 2101 (Vihaan) and 1983 (Viraj).

Through their initiative, the brothers have conducted multiple chess workshops across Assam, including Guwahati, Silchar, Pamohi, and Borkhola, reaching hundreds of children in remote villages, orphanages, child-care institutions, and disadvantaged communities.

Their programmes focus on introducing chess irrespective of socio-economic background and promoting values such as discipline, focus, confidence, and emotional resilience.

A significant part of their outreach work includes Project CHILD, implemented in flood-affected ar-



ea of Cachar district. The project used chess as a medium to help children cope with stress, rebuild confidence, and regain a sense of normalcy in the aftermath of natural disasters.

The three-day international conference, which began on January 14, brought together chess administrators, educators, researchers, and social impact practitioners from across the world.

The event also marked the launch of the FIDE Year of Chess in Education 2026, an initiative aimed at integrating chess into education systems globally to enhance cognitive development, critical thinking, and life skills.

Ex-AAMSU President Rejaul Karim Sarkar Calls for Greater Minority Representation in District Administration

Guwahati, Jan 16: Former All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU) president Rejaul Karim Sarkar on January 15 called for increased representation of minority communities in senior administrative posts, asserting that districts such as Bongaigaon and Dhubri should have Deputy Commissioners drawn from minority backgrounds.

Sarkar was speaking at a cultural programme organised by the Tapattary Regional Youth Club at the Tapattary High School playground in Bongaigaon district. The event, held

in the minority-dominated Tapattary area, drew a large turnout of local residents and youth.

While the programme featured cultural performances, it also served as a platform for strong political and social messaging focused on education, representation and minority rights.

Emphasising education as the key to empowerment, Sarkar urged parents to prioritise their children's education above all else, stating that financial hardship should not be a reason to deprive children of learning opportunities.

"If necessary, sell your kidney but ensure your children are educated—whether boys or girls—so that they can one day hold government positions," he said, drawing applause as well as sharp reactions from the audience.

He further argued that administrative leadership in districts with a sizeable minority population should reflect the region's demographic composition, stating that local representation at the Deputy Commissioner level would help address long-standing grievances and pro-

mote inclusive governance.

Touching upon issues of dignity and rights, the former AAMSU president warned against intimidation or attempts to marginalise the minority community, asserting that any such efforts would be firmly resisted.

Although the programme concluded with cultural performances, Sarkar's remarks remained the focal point of the gathering, underscoring ongoing debates surrounding education, administrative representation and socio-political challenges faced by minority communities.

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E-Commerce in India: Explosive Growth Amid Challenges

India’s e-commerce sector stands at a pivotal juncture, fueled by rapid digital adoption and evolving consumer behaviors, yet tempered by infrastructural and regulatory hurdles. Projections indicate robust expansion, positioning the country as a global leader in online retail by the early 2030s.

Market Growth Drivers

Internet penetration has surged past 900 million users, with affordable smartphones and data plans enabling mobile commerce dominance. Digital payments via UPI have exploded, handling billions of transactions monthly and reducing cash dependency. Rising disposable incomes, especially in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, propel categories like groceries, fashion, and electronics, with gross merchandise value (GMV) eyeing \$170 billion by 2030.

Key Opportunities

- Quick commerce models, leveraging dark stores, promise 10-30 minute deliveries and capture impulse buys in urban markets.
- Emerging tech like AI personalization and AR try-ons enhance user experiences, boosting conversion rates
- B2B e-commerce could unlock \$200 billion, aiding SMEs with supply chain efficiencies.

Government initiatives such as ONDC foster open networks, democratizing access for small players.

Persistent Challenges

Logistics remain fragmented, with last-mile delivery costs eroding margins in rural areas. Regulatory flux—FDI restrictions, data localization, and GST compliance—adds uncertainty, while cybersecurity threats loom amid rising transactions. High return rates (20-30% in apparel) and cash-on-delivery preferences strain operations.

Future Prospects

By 2030, e-commerce could contribute 10-12% to India’s retail mix, driven by vernacular interfaces and regional logistics investments. Policymakers must prioritize digital literacy, unified regulations, and infrastructure to sustain 18-20% CAGR. This boom promises inclusive growth, empowering millions of entrepreneurs nationwide. (DB)

Say what you will about Trump, but unlike Starmer he knows his own power – and how to use it

Last weekend, as the world wondered whether Donald Trump would swipe Greenland, Keir Starmer made his own big geographic intervention: he published a map of which councils were fixing potholes. Yes, potholes. Yes, a map. Barely 18 months into office, with crucial elections just ahead and his party lagging behind the ragtag troops of Nigel Farage and even Kemi Badenoch, this was how Team Starmer kicked off 2026. To be fair, as the young people say, the map is colour-coded. Then the prime minister got tough. Spurred on by fury at Grok, the AI service that doubles as a factory for child porn, he threatened Elon Musk’s X with losing the “right to self-regulate”. No 10 doubtless considers this fighting talk, but no one would call it action. For that, look to other countries, which simply went ahead and suspended X.

This week, tens of thousands of families and schools and pubs and restaurants across Kent and Sussex have had no water. For the second time this winter South East Water has deprived customers of one of life’s essentials. So glaring is the company’s failure that Tory MPs – true-blue, laissez-faire, privateer-loving sprogs of Thatcher – are demanding its boss quit, while Ed Davey’s Liberal Democrats want its licence confiscated. So how has Starmer responded? By declaring the fiasco – wait for it – “totally unacceptable”. That’s telling them! This is not another newspaper column on the redundancy of our prime minister, because such pieces are themselves redundant. From day one, the public has



been way ahead of most of the press and besides, when the cheap shops are flogging anti-Starmer Christmas cards, you know that next December Downing Street will have a new occupant. Nor am I going to hymn the praises of Donald Trump, who is, as I may have mentioned here previously, a know-nothing vainglorious bully out to grab what he can for himself, his family and funders. Yet this extremist rightwinger offers the left a profound lesson. He shows us that political power really can matter, provided it is wielded with clarity and purpose. Day after day, the most anti-government president since Ronald Reagan demonstrates the uses of government. And guess what? It turns out that the point of running a country is not to palm off tricky decisions to Ofcom or Ofwat. Not to announce yet another apparently essential policy, duly followed by yet another U-turn. Not to collect material for a crybaby op-

ed about how some toughs in Whitehall (sorry, I mean a “political perma-class”) laughed at the size of your majority before legging it with your shiny new mandate.

Over the past decade or so, as politics in the UK, the US and elsewhere has become ever more reactionary, people on the left have looked across at their counterparts on the right for ideas. Then they write threads or columns or entire papers about how progressives need to learn TikTok or cut welfare or be a bit racist. The conclusion I draw is rather more basic: the centre-left could do with reminding itself what politics is for. Because for Trump, change isn’t merely a word you slap on the front of a manifesto. He bends both the US and the world to his will – while the centre-left, whether in Washington or further afield, peevishly taps a big sign marked “RULES”. After Trump’s troops illegally kidnapped a foreign

leader, how did the highest-ranking Democrat in the House of Representatives, Hakeem Jeffries, protest? “The Trump administration has not sought congressional authorisation for the use of military force and has failed to properly notify Congress in advance of the operation in Venezuela.” The more basic among us might worry about the morality or the fallout; sophisticates such as Jeffries know that what counts is the process. You can see the same dynamic in Trump’s hounding of Jerome Powell, the head of the US central bank. The president has long attacked his central banker as a “numbskull” for not cutting interest rates more quickly; now his government is investigating him over the spiralling costs of refurbishing the Federal Reserve’s HQ. The pettiness here is rather tired and very squalid – Powell is in any case due to step down this May, while another Fed member, Lisa Cook, has already been

hauled up on charges that look equally baseless. Still, ahead of tough midterms and with his donors on Wall Street and in Silicon Valley swimming in debt, it makes sense for Trump to ram-raid monetary policy. Yet commentators on the centre-left do not point out how such authoritarianism is deployed to empower and enrich an unpopular president and his court. Instead, they tut about the injury done to independent central banking. Exactly when progressives fell into such neoliberal priggishness is a good question – we might start with Bill Clinton and Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder urging their weakened industrial towns to euthanise themselves for the good of globalisation. But it has destroyed their voter base, leaving their chief source of legitimacy as an expertise in the rulebook. So while Trump bashes the Fed and faces down any storm in the bond market, Starmer and his lieutenant, Rachel Reeves, cite the bond market

as the chief reason for keeping their jobs. When Andy Burnham decried his party’s subservience to financial markets a few months ago, he was ridiculed by Labour’s leadership. Yet while his remarks could have done with nuance, they were based on good economic and political sense. Labour cannot govern against its own people and expect to hold on to power. A chancellor cannot devise inflexible rules for herself, then claim those rules as a reason for inertia. And it should not be left solely to a chancer such as Farage to question the unelected power of the Bank of England and the Office for Budget Responsibility.

Government by wrecking ball – a la Trump – is not the answer, but nor is presiding over a failing status quo. However hard he thumps the table about “delivery”, radicalism is not on Starmer’s agenda. It never was. He and his little men play politics as a game where the instructions are handed down from others and the stakes are miserably low: a purge of some annoying lefties, a few well-paid and unadmirable careers. Government in the hands of these pretenders is about grids, anonymous briefings and “getting both sides around the table”. Oh, and potholes, of course: lovely, tricoloured maps festooned with potholes. All the while, voters in Britain for whom the system isn’t working look across at other leaders and other ideologies where politics is a means of doing things and getting results. However much you deplore Trump and Farage, the counter to their action isn’t to shrug your shoulders. It’s to act.

Uncontrolled Meji burning poses a fire risk

Through the columns of a prominent newspaper, the author raises an urgent issue concerning the fire hazards associated with uncontrolled meji burning during Magh Bihu celebrations. This traditional practice, integral to the festival, symbolizes gratitude and new beginnings. However, a growing lack of regulation has increasingly transformed this cultural custom into a safety risk. In numerous regions, mejis are frequently built in proximity to residential homes, electric lines, and public thoroughfares. Factors such as strong winds, dry weather, and the use of flammable materials exacerbate the risk of accidental fires, posing significant dangers to lives, property, and the environment. There have been rising reports of minor fire incidents over recent festive periods. While the preservation of such traditions is valuable, maintaining public safety is imperative. The author calls on authorities to establish clear guidelines pertaining to the placement, dimensions, and materials used in constructing mejis. Additionally, implementing fire safety measures, conducting awareness campaigns, and promoting community monitoring are suggested as proactive strategies to avert potential disasters. The piece concludes with a call for responsible celebration of Magh Bihu, emphasizing the importance of honoring tradition while ensuring safety. Today’s children and teens spend less time connecting with friends and family in person compared with past generations. Many use social media to connect, which can leave them feeling just as isolated. UNICEF- and WHO-aligned studies show teenagers now spend over seven hours a day on smartphones and social media. This exposure leads up to a sixty per cent



higher risk of anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, obesity, cyberbullying and diminished self-esteem, apart from the impact on learning. Parents can work with their children to create healthy digital habits and encourage moderation in its use. Discussion on negative effects with them to raise awareness can help manage the effects to a great extent.

It is true that children and teens are more likely to emulate what they see rather than what they are told. So, parents can help them by modelling behaviours like taking regular breaks from digital devices, turning off notifications, establishing phone-free hours and spaces, and discussing appropriate boundaries and behaviours when interacting online. Delaying the purchase of smartphones until the child is ready is a good first step. It is also important to instil healthy habits in children’s use of screens, given that technology and social media in particular. Every individual must know that learning to have a healthy relationship with social media is as important as learning to have a healthy relationship with food, exercise and coffee consumption. Several nations, especially Australia, have begun acting with clarity and courage to ban social media use for children under sixteen. Unfortunately, in India smart-

phone use in schools is rampant, even as nearly seventy per cent of parents support stricter control of it. It is high time we stopped the silent theft of the young generation before they become phoney to turn them into ‘zombies’ finally. As a rail enthusiast, I would like to share a common passenger’s perspective on the introduction of new Amrit Bharat Express services for Assam and the proposed Vande Bharat Sleeper train and how these developments can meaningfully improve long-distance rail travel for the people of the state. Railways continue to be the backbone of long-distance travel for Assam. Students pursuing education outside the state, working professionals, businesspersons, and families travelling for employment, education, and personal needs depend heavily on long-distance express trains. Due to consistently high demand, ticket availability on existing services is often very limited, particularly during peak seasons, creating inconvenience and uncertainty for passengers who rely on rail travel for essential journeys. The introduction of two Amrit Bharat Express services for Assam—Dibrugarh to Gomitnagar and Kamakhya to Rohtak—is a welcome step towards addressing this issue, especially for passengers travelling towards Delhi and the

NCR region as well as Lucknow. With these trains originating in Dibrugarh and Guwahati, passengers from both major urban centres and interior regions will benefit. These services can help distribute passenger loads, improve seat availability, and offer more reliable travel options for students, working professionals, regular travellers, and people wishing to visit Ayodhya.

A key strength of the Amrit Bharat Express lies in its emphasis on affordability. For middle-class families and frequent travellers, economical fares combined with upgraded coaches and improved basic facilities provide a practical balance between comfort and cost, ensuring that modern rail services remain accessible to the general public. The proposed Vande Bharat Sleeper train for Assam can further transform overnight long-distance travel. With improved ride quality, better sleeping comfort, and modern onboard amenities, overnight journeys can become more efficient and less tiring. Such a service would be particularly beneficial for passengers travelling overnight to reach state capitals early in the morning, saving precious daytime hours. Operationally, the expected average speed of around 69 kmph would be a notable improvement over the current fastest Howrah–Guwahati Saraighat Express, which averages about 57 kmph and takes nearly 17.5 hours. The Vande Bharat Sleeper will complete the journey in approximately 14 hours, which would significantly benefit business travellers and professionals. Further reductions in travel time are possible with future track upgrades from 110 kmph to 130 kmph, bringing the major eastern capitals closer together in time and strengthening economic connectivity.

Debunking the viral misinformation regarding second marriage

Somewhere between the headline and the comment section, Bangladeshi women were recently told a right had been snatched away. Apparently, overnight, the courts decided wives no longer mattered, consent had been cancelled, and patriarchy had received a fresh High Court seal of approval. Islam, of course, was dragged into the mess because no moral panic in this country is complete without a selective religious cameo. Except none of that actually happened. The law has been settled for decades. The problem lies in the careless spread of misinformation through selective reporting, truncated quotations, and headlines that prioritise virality over accuracy. What followed was not a debate about women’s rights or Islamic principles but a textbook example of how legal judgments are distorted when only the most provocative line is circulated. The recent judgment of the High Court did not introduce a new rule, dilute existing safeguards, or re-engineer family law. It dismissed a writ petition and reaffirmed the operation of Section 6 of the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961. That is the entirety of what happened, but the public was not told this in full. Instead, one fragment of the judgment was isolated, stripped of context, and circulated. “Wife’s consent not required” became the headline, while what is required, how decisions are made, and what consequences follow were quietly omitted. This is not a misunderstanding. It is a misrepresentation. At the centre of the controversy is Section 6 of the law, a provision that regulates polygamy for Muslim men.

Section 6 does not permit a man to remarry freely. It imposes a procedural barrier. A man who wishes to contract another marriage during the subsistence of an existing one must apply in writing to an Arbitration Council led by the concerned union parishad chairman, stating his reasons. The council, also comprising one representative nominated by the husband and one by the wife, must hear both parties and decide whether the proposed marriage is “necessary” and “just.” If a man bypasses this process and marries anyway, the consequences are immediate and tangible. The entire dower (denmohor) to the first wife becomes payable at once. Penal liability follows. This is not symbolic regulation. It is enforceable law. The law has always required prior written permission from the Arbitration Council before a second marriage can be contracted. It has always imposed penalties if that process is bypassed, required notice to the existing wife and an opportunity for her to be heard. It has never framed her consent as a statutory prerequisite. The court did not newly discover this. It did not announce it as a reform. It simply restated the law as written. The writ petition asked the court to either strike down Section 6 or read into it a mandatory consent requirement. The court refused to do either. That refusal was reported as a rollback. What the headlines did was focus obsessively on what the law does not require, while remaining conspicuously silent on what it does. There was little mention of the Arbitration Council, its composition, its decision-making role, or the consequences of marrying

without permission. The judgment was not read as a whole; it was cherry-picked, sensationalised, and released into the wild. This style of reporting reshapes public perception. When readers are told only that consent is not required, they are led to believe that nothing stands in the way of a second marriage. The procedural safeguards disappear from view. The state’s regulatory role vanishes. The law is reduced. And it is not accidental.

Outrage travels faster when complexity is removed. However, what is particularly troubling is how the selective reporting erased women’s actual legal tools from the conversation. Bangladeshi family law recognises the enforceability of conditions in the Nikah Nama (Muslim marriage contract). A woman may stipulate restrictions on polygamy or reserve the right to divorce if her husband remarries. Courts enforce these clauses. They offer concrete protection. Yet, these protections rarely make it into viral posts. In my conversation with Barrister Mariha Khan, advocate at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, she explained that the judgment was never about sidelining women. It was about reaffirming where statutory authority lies. The Arbitration Council is the decision-making body. By circulating only the particular line, the actual regulatory structure was obscured, which left women feeling exposed rather than informed. This pattern of selective amplification has consequences. It undermines trust in institutions, creates panic without offering remedies, and positions courts as adversaries rather than interpreters of law.

Reliance Q3 results key things to watch for digital business

Jio Platforms IPO:

New Delhi: RIL Q3 results: Mukesh Ambani led oil, telecom and retail behemoth Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) will announce its results for the quarter and nine-months ended on December 31, 2025. Besides this, investors will be looking at developments around the much awaited initial public offering (IPO) of Jio Platforms and its standalone earnings. Reliance Jio Infocomm is shifting focus from network expansion to monetization and cash flow generation ahead of the much awaited IPO of Jio Platforms, its parent company, which is eyeing a listing in 2026. Analysts expect a strong revenue growth, while Ebitda is projected faster than revenue led by operating leverage, higher ARPU and subscriber additions.

BNP Paribas expects 2026 to be an eventful year for the Indian Telecom industry and would watch out for Jio Platforms IPO, which could raise the weightage of the sector in indices; we see high likelihood of a mobile tariff hike in 1H2026; the DoT recently provided relief to VIL on its AGR dues.The brokerage does not expect this to have a meaningful impact on the Indian mobile market share trends in 2026; non-mobile opportunities, such as home and data center, could see an increase in the share of capex. Increasing adoption of digital services, such as cloud and AI services, creates differentiation opportunities in the near-term and a possible monetisation opportunity. On a standalone basis, BNP Paribas is penciling a strong



revenue growth boosted by India mobile's YoY performance and rising home broadband adoption and Ebitda to grow slightly ahead of revenue growth in December 2025 quarter. "We expect Jio to add 6.5 million QoQ subscribers. 5 million in mobile and 2 million in broadband. Data volumes continue to see strong growth," it said.

RIL's backed Jio Platforms has the potential to be the largest IPO in India in 2026. Post the IPO, said BNP Paribas. "We could have two large-listed telecom operators in India, which could result in an increase in telecom sector weightage in the indices," it noted. The brokerage has a target price of Rs 1,855 on the stock.

Reliance Q3 FY26 Results Jio, retail arm IPO, lower Russian oil imports in focus

New Delhi: Mumbai: (RIL) is set to announce its Q3FY26 results today.Kotak Institutional Equities expects Reliance Industries' consolidated EBITDA to grow about 9% year-on-year(YoY), led mainly by the oil-to-chemicals (O2C) and telecom businesses.Any announcement on the dates for the market debut of Reliance Jio is keenly awaited. According to Mukesh Ambani's address to shareholders last August, the IPO is expected in H1FY26. According to a report by Kotak Institutional Equities, Reliance Industries' O2C EBITDA is seen rising 15% supported by better refining margins and a weaker rupee, though weak petrochemicals may limit gains.Important to note, during the third quarter, Reliance Industries reduced its oil imports from Russia due to sanctions imposed by the US and West. Any commentary on that will be keenly awaited.#3 Reliance Retail to see slower revenue growth- Kotak Institutional Equities expects Reliance Retail's revenue growth to slow to about 9.6%YoY, mainly due to the festive season being split across quarters and the demerger of RCPL effective from December 1. JM financial expects Reliance Industries' EBITDA



to rise 2.8% quarter-on-quarter(QoQ) in Q3FY26 to Rs 47,200 crore, supported by strong performance in the oil-to-chemicals (O2C) business and steady growth in the digital segment. However, growth in the retail business is likely to remain muted, while E&P earnings may decline during the quarter.In a regulatory filing, Reliance Industries said, "A meeting of the Board of Directors of the Company is scheduled to be held on Friday, January 16,

2026, inter alia, to consider and approve the standalone and consolidated unaudited financial results of the Company for the quarter and nine months ended December 31, 2025."Greetings! Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries is set to announce its third-quarter results for FY26 today, for the period ended December 30, 2025. Stay tuned here for live updates on the company's financial performance and management commentary!

Bajaj General Insurance unveils 'Fetal Flourish' rider, expands prenatal coverage at ₹1,025 premium

Pune: Bajaj General Insurance Limited on Tuesday announced the launch of Fetal Flourish, a pioneering fetal health insurance rider aimed at supporting advanced in-utero medical procedures and high-risk pregnancies—an area largely outside the scope of traditional maternity insurance.Launched in Pune on January 14, the rider is priced at an affordable premium of ₹1,025 and is offered along with the insurer's flagship products, My Health Care Plan and Health Guard. The solution is applicable for women aged 18 to 45 years and carries a nine-month waiting period from policy inception.Fetal Flourish offers coverage of up to ₹2 lakh per maternity event for the first two maternity events under the base health indemnity policy. It covers 16 specialised in-utero interventions, including amniocentesis, chorionic villus sampling, fetoscopic laser surgery for twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome, fetal reduction, intrauterine transfusion, surgeries for neural tube defects, and procedures for congenital diaphragmatic hernia, among others

The launch comes at a time when pregnancy-related complications are rising, with reports indicating that around 17% of women in India give birth after the age of 35, increasing the need for advanced fetal procedures that are often costly and uninsured. Commenting on the launch, Dr. Tapan Singhel, MD and CEO of Bajaj General Insurance, said the rider aims to ease financial pressure during medically complex pregnancies, allowing families to prioritise timely treatment and outcomes.With Fetal Flourish, the insurer strengthens its focus on innovation in health insurance, extending protection to one of the earliest and most sensitive stages of life.

Sensex, Nifty Infosys Q3, trade deal & more



New Delhi: Benchmarks Sensex and Nifty rose on Friday, ending a two-day losing streak. The gain, following a public holiday, was led by Infosys, which alone contributed to half of the increase. Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank and Tata Consultancy Services Ltd (TCS) also supported the indices.Adding to the sentiment was reports suggesting the European Union will formalise its largest-ever trade deal with India on January 27. The market shrugged off reports of the delays in US Supreme Court ruling on legality of Trump tariffs. As there is no timeline for a ruling, such an event is unlikely to influence the market in the near-term, said VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited."Better-than-expected results will trigger stock-specific action but these are unlikely to take the market as a whole to significantly higher levels," Vijayakumar said.At 10.25 am, Sensex was trading at 84,022.67, up 639.96 points or 0.77 per cent. Nifty rose 188.55 points, or 0.73 per cent, to 25,854.15. Infosys climbed 5.21 per cent to Rs 1,682.40. Tech Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra and HCL Tech rose 3.76 per cent, 2.07 per cent and 1.94 per cent, respectively. Bajaj Finserv and Bajaj Finance rose 1.4 per cent each."While the evolving crisis in the Middle East will be closely monitored, particularly for any potential disruption to oil supplies and the resulting impact on prices, today's market action is expected to remain largely

stock-specific, driven by December-quarter earnings announcements and management commentary," said Ponmudi R, CEO at Enrich Money.Vijayakumar said even minor rallies from here on are likely to be neutralised by FII selling. "The increasing short positions being built by FIIs indicate that sustained FII selling is likely to be the near-term trend, till such time we have a trend reversal triggered by positive news or events. For long-term investors, the directionless weak drift in the market provides opportunities to slowly accumulate high quality growth stocks available at fair valuations."Shrikant Chouhan, Head for Equity Research at Kotak Securities said Nifty could move up to 25,880-25,900 levels and Sensex 84,000-84,200 levels.On the flip side, below 25,600/83,200, selling pressure is likely to accelerate. If it falls below this level, it could retest the levels of 25,500-25,450/83,000-82,800," it said."This is imperative in fostering inclusive and sustainable development, through a confluence of social and economic measures, that brings about improved access, availability and affordability," it said.The report was authored by Morgan Stanley equity strategists Ridham Desai and Nayant Parekh, along with Chief India Economist Upasana Chachra, among others. Morgan Stanley said measures to deepen financial markets could be undertaken, via improved access to both bank.

Zen Technologies bags Rs 404 crore anti-drone systems order from Ministry of Defence

Mumbai: Another defence sector order boost for Zen Technologies. The company has announced that it has received an order worth Rs 404 crore from the Ministry of Defence, Government of India, for the supply of anti-drone systems.According to the company's regulatory filing, the total order value of Rs 404 crore (inclusive of GST) comprises Rs 332 crore for the supply of anti-drone systems / Counter Unmanned Aerial Systems (C-UAS), while the remaining Rs 72 crore has been allocated towards training simulators and related equipment.The contract is domestic in nature and is scheduled to be executed within one year, the company said.

The order has been awarded in compliance with Regulation 30 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. Zen Technologies clar-

ified that neither its promoters nor promoter group entities have any interest in the awarding authority, and that no related party transactions are involved.Last month, the company had also secured an order worth Rs 120 crore from the Ministry of Defence for the supply of a Comprehensive Training Node (CTN), which included a range of training simulators and equipment. Earlier this month, Zen Technologies transferred 3,800 equity shares, each with a face value of Rs 1, to eligible employees under its Employee Stock Option Plan (ESOP) 2021. The shares were transferred from the Zen Technologies Employees Welfare Trust, which was established for the implementation of the ESOP scheme.For Q2FY26, the company reported a net profit of Rs 61.9 crore, marking a decline of over 2% year-on-year. Total income



for the quarter fell 20% YoY to Rs 198.8 crore. Following the announcement, Zen Technologies' share price surged over 8% in early morning trade.

However, the stock has declined over 2% in the past one month and is down 40.5% over the past one year. The Nifty Defence Index is up over 25% in the last one year.

Budget 2026: Morgan Stanley says stock market sceptical, shares strategy

New Delhi: Morgan Stanley on Friday said the stock market appears to be approaching the Union Budget 2026 with scepticism and could be dealing with both volatility and upside risk post-budget, if history is a guide. It noted that the impact of the Budget on the market has been on a secular decline, albeit actual performance is a function of pre-budget expectations, as measured by market performance ahead of the Budget."For the market, the key things to watch are the extent of fiscal consolidation, capex, and sector-level actions. Of particular interest will be capital market reforms to encourage a revival in foreign portfolio flows. We are overweight on financials, consumer discretionary, and industrials," it said.Morgan Stanley said the expenditure growth is likely to be tilted in favour of capex and social infrastructure related spending. It expects defence sector capex to show higher growth of 12-15 per cent, while core infrastructure capex could grow 8-10 per cent. Overall, the foreign brokerage said the capex may grow around nominal GDP growth of 11 per cent YoY."This will keep the productivity dynamics intact, as capex to GDP will likely remain steady at 3.1 per cent in FY27," it said.Morgan Stanley expects the focus to also remain on social infrastructure such as drinking water, urban infrastructure, etc, along with affordable housing

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along with Chief India Economist Upasana Chachra, among others. Morgan Stanley said measures to deepen financial markets could be undertaken, via improved access to both bank and non-bank sources of funds, so as to improve accessibility and affordability. "Moreover, other banking sector reforms – such as privatising select public sector banks – remain fundamental. Simplification of IPO, FPO, and SME listing procedures and aligning taxation across debt and equity instruments are pivotal to ensure ease of raising capital," it said.The foreign brokerage said the central government fiscal defi-

cit likely to be set at 4.2 per cent of GDP in F27, corresponding to moderation in debt to 55.1 per cent of GDP.A focus on capex to help create jobs, targeted social sector spending, and a step up in structural reform momentum are likely to be key themes, it said."We expect the government to target the fiscal deficit at 4.2 per cent of GDP in F2027 vs. the target of 4.4 per cent of GDP in F2026. This will likely be the shallowest pace of consolidation since F2023. The pace of consolidation will be consistent with central government debt reduction to 55.1 per cent of GDP from 56.1 per cent in F2026," it

said.Morgan Stanley said a pick-up in nominal growth will help to lift tax buoyancy and improve tax collections in F2027, helping the government to prioritise capex and social infrastructure-related spending alongside gradual consolidation."As of now, the market appears to be approaching the Budget with scepticism and could be dealing with both volatility and upside risk post-budget, if history is a guide," it said.On macro strategy, Morgan Stanley said consistent with the path of continued fiscal consolidation, net issuance of G-Secs may to remain broadly stable at Rs 11.6 lakh crore.

Director Jafar Panahi on Deadly Iran Protests & Filmmaking Censorship

This Regime Will Fall

Paris: With Iran gripped by nationwide protests that activists say have left at least 2,600 people dead, we recently spoke with renowned Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi, whose latest film, *It Was Just an Accident*, was shot entirely in secret inside Iran and won the Palme d’Or at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival. The film has since been shortlisted for an Oscar in the international feature category. Panahi dedicated a recent New York Film Critics Circle Award to Iranian protesters. JAFAR PANAH: [translated] Nothing just happens overnight. It has been about 47 years that people have had demands, and the state has only met them in one way. They’ve had civil demands. They’ve had economic demands. They’ve tried to make the regime hear, but no one is hearing within the state. People have had experiences, and every time, they’ve come one step forward. In the *Woman, Life, Freedom* movement, people crossed the red lines that were unimaginable, and eventually they pushed the regime back. And now all those civil demands and economic demands have been combined and intertwined, and they have brought people together from all echelons of the society. And this is why the protests are so widespread. And this is why the regime feels that it has reached an end and that people have reached the point that they can no longer tolerate. NERMEEN SHAIKH: So, you mentioned 47 years of demands and frustration in Iran. Forty-seven years ago was, of course, the Islamic Revolution, which began with protests against the shah. At the time, you were a high school student in your final year of high school, and you joined those protests. What were you thinking the protests against the shah would enable? And your response when Ayatollah Khomeini came, and it became an Islamic Revolution? It Was Just an Accident centers on a group of former prisoners who kidnap a man they believe was their interrogator and grapple with whether to exact revenge, and Panahi says the film drew directly from his own experience with state violence and repression. Panahi has been repeatedly arrested in Iran, served prison sentences, and was recently sentenced in absentia to an additional year in prison and a two-year travel ban. JAFAR PANAH: [interpreted by Sheida Dayani] This film is about my experience and the experience of other prisoners with whom I lived in prison for seven months. When they arrest a prisoner of conscience, the first thing they do is they take them to interrogation sessions. The interrogation sessions are such that the prisoner is placed in front of the wall. They are blindfolded, and they’re given a piece of paper and a pen. And a person behind the prisoner keeps walking and asking questions. And the auditory sense of the prisoner is the sense that works most, and the prisoner keeps wondering if they’re going to recognize this person if they meet them outside. This has become the center of my film, and it has been mixed with the stories that I have heard from

friends inside the prison. The film was made. It premiered at Cannes. It became successful, and now it is in the Oscar campaign.

And now I’m involved in the Oscar campaign, and I just keep hearing the very difficult news from my country. What I am hearing is just a catastrophe. When they shut down the internet, followed by the protests of the people, we issued a statement saying that the complete shutdown of the internet and telecommunications will end in a massacre. But we never imagined the massacre to be in such dimensions and for there to be a bloodbath. From this, you can understand that the regime knows it has reached the end, but in order to cling to power, it can kill as much as possible. And there is no rationality into its murder and killing machine. Usually such dictatorships, when they get to this point, still have certain individuals who think rationally or think about the future of the country, for whom the country is the most important thing. They intervene at that point, and they resort to people’s demands. But I am sorry to say that it seems there is no rationality within this violent dictatorship. You cannot even find one or two people who would think rationally. I am very sorry that it has gotten to this point. I do not have any trustworthy news from inside Iran. I don’t know what is happening. I don’t know where my colleagues are, where my family is. It is only the bits and pieces that you hear. But I can only hope that people can get what they want, my fellow Iranians can get their hands to what they want.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: So, when the protests began, they were focused on economic issues, the dire economic conditions in Iran, but then the protests became about a lot of other things. Could you explain what you think has made these protests so enormous? What are the issues that are at stake? In an extended interview, Panahi discussed the protests in Iran, fighting against censorship, and the risk of prolonged cycles of violence. “I have always said this regime will fall. It is impossible for it to not fall, because it’s a failed state in every sense,” he said. “What I care about is the future of my country. I want the country to stand. I want there to be peace, and I want our children and the children of our children to not be facing bullets.” He was interpreted by Sheida Dayani. NERMEEN SHAIKH: We turn now to Iran, where activists say at least 2,600 people have been killed since December 28th in nationwide protests that have been described as the biggest challenge to Iran’s rulers since the 1979 revolution. The number of protesters killed is likely much higher than the reported figures, given the nationwide communications blackout. Amnesty International has accused Iranian security forces of committing mass killings on an unprecedented scale amid an ongoing internet shutdown. AMY GOODMAN: President Trump’s comment came a day after he urged Iranian protesters to continue, while saying, quote,

“Help is on the way.” The New York Times reports Trump has still not ruled out launching a military attack. The U.S. has already withdrawn military personnel from some bases in the Middle East. The U.K. has also temporarily closed its embassy in Tehran. Iran has threatened to hit U.S. bases, as well as Israel, in the event of U.S. airstrikes. NERMEEN SHAIKH: On Wednesday, we sat down with world-renowned Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi here in our studio. His most recent film, *It Was Just an Accident*, received the Palme d’Or at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival and has been shortlisted for an Oscar in the international feature film category. The film was shot entirely in secret inside Iran. Earlier this year, he was awarded the best director prize by the New York Film Critics Circle. Jafar Panahi is the only living director to have won the top prizes at Europe’s three major film festivals: the Palme d’Or at Cannes, the Golden Bear in Berlin and the Golden Lion in Venice. His other award-winning films include his debut feature, *The White Balloon*, as well as *Taxi* and *The Circle*. Panahi was recently sentenced to one year in prison and a two-year travel ban in absentia by the Tehran Islamic Revolutionary Court. He’s been arrested multiple times in Iran and served two prison sentences for defying censorship laws and for spreading, quote, “anti-government propaganda.” AMY GOODMAN: On Tuesday night, Jafar Panahi spoke at the National Board of Review gala here in New York, and he won an award and denounced what he called a “bloodbath” in Iran. JAFAR PANAH: [interpreted by Sheida Dayani] It is an absolute honor to receive this award from the National Board of Review. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the board. But I cannot speak easily, because as we stand here, the state of Iran is gunning down protesters, and a savage massacre continues blatantly on the streets of Iran. Perhaps cinema is supposed to make the viewers laugh and cry. It is supposed to make us feel terrified and safe. Perhaps cinema must make us fall in love, then kill us with love and teach us and make us think. But today, the real scene is not on screens, but on the streets of Iran. The Islamic Republic has caused a bloodbath to delay its collapse. Bodies are piling up on bodies. And those who have survived are searching for signs of their loved ones through mountains of corpses. This is no longer a metaphor. This is not a story. This is not a film. This is a reality ridden with bullets day after day. Today, cinema has the power to stand by defenseless people. Let’s stand by them. Thank you, everyone. Thank you not just for presenting this award, but for introducing this film so that it can be seen. What we wanted for this film to do was to say that the cycle of violence needs to stop. But, unfortunately, what is happening today seems to be saying that the cycle of violence is continuing.

Senate Republicans Kill War Powers Resolution

London: The U.S. has withdrawn military personnel from bases in the Middle East as President Trump has repeatedly warned that the U.S. would intervene on behalf of the protesters in Iran. By Thursday morning, Iran shut down its commercial airspace for several hours. A senior Iranian official said that Iran had warned its neighbors in the region that it would hit American bases in the event of U.S. airstrikes. This comes as Iran postponed the execution of Erfan Soltani, the 26-year-old protester who was sentenced to death just days after his arrest. More than 2,500 people, including 147 security officials, have been killed since protests began on December 28, according to the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency. Iranian authorities have imposed an internet shutdown across the country, but videos of the deadly crackdown on protesters have been trickling out of Iran via smuggled Starlink terminals. In one video, at least 100 bodies held in bags await identification at a morgue in Tehran. We’ll hear from the world-renowned Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi after headlines. The State Department said Wednesday it will indefinitely halt processing visas for immigrants from 75 countries, after claiming without evidence that people from those nations often receive public benefits after arriving in the U.S. Immigrants from over a third of the world’s 193 countries will be affected by the sweeping restrictions, which are set to begin on January 21. Among the targets are Afghanistan, Brazil, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. This comes on top of total or partial travel bans on visitors from 39 countries.

In Minnesota, federal agents fired tear gas, pepper balls and stun grenades at protesters who gathered late Wednesday near the scene where a federal agent shot and injured a man in north Minneapolis. Mayor Jacob Frey said after the shooting that details remain unclear, even as he once again condemned ICE’s surge of agents into the Twin Cities. Witnesses told the Star Tribune that a series of gunshots followed a car chase and foot chase involving federal agents, who reportedly ordered residents to come out of their homes with their hands up. Several people, including children, then walked out into the freezing cold. According to the Trump administration, the gunshot victim was shot in the leg after he began to resist arrest and “violently assault” an officer. Minneapolis has recorded three shootings since New Year’s Day. Two of them were by federal agents. In a video statement released shortly before the latest shooting, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz condemned what he called a “campaign of organized brutality against the people of Minnesota by our own



federal government.” Gov. Tim Walz: “Armed, masked, under-trained ICE agents are going door to door, ordering people to point out where their neighbors of color live. They’re pulling over people indiscriminately, including U.S. citizens, and demanding to see their papers. And at grocery stores, at bus stops, even at our schools, they’re breaking windows, dragging pregnant women down the street, just plain grabbing Minnesotans and shoving them into unmarked vans, kidnapping innocent people with no warning and no due process.” Among nonimmigrants who’ve been swept up by ICE’s campaign of racial profiling are four members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, three of whom remain jailed at an ICE facility at Fort Snelling south of the Twin Cities. It’s the same site where, in 1862, U.S. forces imprisoned about 1,700 Indigenous men, women, children and elders following the U.S.-Dakota War, where many died of torture, starvation and disease; survivors were exiled to reservations in what’s now South Dakota. In California, 21-year-old Kaden Rummeler says he was left permanently blind in one eye and narrowly avoided death, after a federal agent fired a crowd control weapon into his face during an anti-ICE protest in Santa Ana last week. Rummeler had joined protests against the killing of Renee Good by an ICE agent in Minneapolis, when a federal agent fired a “less lethal” round at close range that struck his left eye. He was then dragged by an agent across a plaza, his face covered in blood, as he complained, “I can’t breathe.” He says he pleaded for agents to call an ambulance as they mocked him about his injured eye. He ultimately underwent six hours of surgery to remove plastic, glass and metal from his face and skull, with one piece narrowly missing his carotid artery. Rummeler says doctors told him it was a “miracle” he survived. An investigation by President Trump. Since then, GoFundMe campaigns have raised over \$700,000 for Sabula. On Wednesday, Laura Dickerson, the United Auto Workers’ vice president and director of the Ford department, said in a statement,

Mamdani Takes Oath at Abandoned NYC Subway

Dubai: New York City started 2026 with a new mayor, as democratic socialist Zohran Mamdani made history when he was sworn in as the city’s first Muslim, first South Asian and first African-born leader, as well as the youngest in over a century. Ahead of a public ceremony on New Year’s Day that drew tens of thousands of people in the freezing cold, Mamdani was privately sworn in at midnight by New York Attorney General Tish James in a small ceremony held at a decommissioned subway station below City Hall. He took his oath using two Qur’ans, including one that belonged to his grandfather. Andrew Epstein, one of Mamdani’s closest advisers, spoke with Democracy Now! about the significance of the private ceremony and how it connected the new mayor to the history of the city he now leads. AMY GOODMAN: Democratic socialist Zohran Mamdani has been sworn in as the mayor of New York City. He was officially sworn in just after midnight on New Year’s Eve. He’s made history as New York’s first Muslim, first South Asian and first African-born mayor, and, at the age of 34, the city’s youngest mayor in more than a century. Ahead of a public ceremony that drew thousands of people in below-freezing weather, Mamdani was sworn in privately at midnight New Year’s Eve by New York Attorney General Tish James in a small ceremony in an old, decommissioned subway station below City Hall. AMY GOODMAN: As the New York Attorney General Tish James swore in Zohran Mamdani, he placed his hand on top of two Qur’ans held by his wife, the Syrian American artist Rama Duwaji, including one that belonged to his grandfather, making him the first New York City mayor to use Islam’s holy text at his inauguration. This is Mayor Mamdani.

MAYOR ZOHRAN MAMDANI: Thank you so much for everyone for being here. Happy New Year to New Yorkers, both inside this tunnel and above. And I cannot

wait to see everyone tomorrow as we begin our term. This is truly the honor and the privilege of a lifetime. And after just having taken my oath to become the mayor of the city of New York, I do so also here in the old City Hall subway station, a testament to the importance of public transit to the vitality, the health and the legacy of our city. And last night, we were just below where we are right now, in the old City Hall station, built in 1905, decommissioned in the 1940s when Fiorello La Guardia was mayor, because the trains got longer and the platform was too short. But it remains beautifully intact in its original form.

Last night, the small number of guests and reporters were brought downstairs, waited on the platform, and a 6 train — now, this is the station where the 6 train typically turns around. But a 6 train pulled in. First, Mira Nair and Mahmood Mamdani and the families stepped off the first car on the train. ANDREW EPSTEIN: Absolutely right, as well as the first lady Rama Duwaji’s parents, their guests, as well, stepped off of the first train. And then the next one pulled up, pulled up a little farther, and off stepped then the mayor-elect and his wife Rama. They walked up under the arch that says City Hall station. And at midnight, Attorney General Tish James administered the oath of office. And then, Zohran, the mayor, had to pay his \$9 in cash to the clerk of the city and sign his name into the book. And I had a great conversation with the clerk. He has physical bound books where every single mayor, going back to the early 19th century, has signed their name, because in the — before the days of photo ID, you know, you matched the signature. How are you going to prove someone is who they are? So, he actually is in possession of these bound volumes. We have the 21st-century one, so it had Michael Bloomberg and Bill de Blasio and Eric Adams. In his office, he has 20th century, 19th century and so on.

State Department to Halt Processing Visas for Immigrants from 75 Countries

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Gov. Tim Walz: “Armed, masked, undertrained ICE agents are going door to door, ordering people to point out where their neighbors of color live. They’re pulling over people indiscriminately, including U.S. citizens, and demanding to see their papers. And at grocery stores, at bus stops, even at our schools, they’re breaking windows, dragging pregnant women down the street, just plain grabbing Minnesotans and shoving them into unmarked vans,



kidnapping innocent people with no warning and no due process.” In Minnesota, federal agents fired tear gas, pepper balls and stun grenades at protesters who gathered late Wednesday near the scene where a federal agent shot and injured a man in north Minneapolis. Mayor Jacob Frey said after the shooting that details remain unclear, even as he once again condemned ICE’s surge of agents into the Twin Cities. Witnesses told the Star Tribune that a series of gunshots followed a car chase and foot chase involving federal agents, who reportedly ordered residents to come out of their homes with their hands up. Several people, including children, then walked out into the freezing cold. According to the Trump administration, the gunshot victim was shot in the leg after he began to resist arrest and “violently assault” an officer. Minneapolis has recorded three shootings since New Year’s Day. Two of them were by federal agents. In a video statement released shortly before the latest shooting, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz condemned what he called a “campaign of organized brutality

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Don't 'over-engage your core muscles' and other tips for looking after your pelvic floor

Pelvic floor health has long been relegated to whispered conversations about pregnancy or aging, often reduced to vague instructions to “do your kegels”. But according to experts, daily maintenance of the pelvic floor is important. The pelvic floor consists of the muscles at the base of the pelvis and “everything above it, including ligaments” says Lisa Birmingham, a senior physiotherapist and director of All Women’s Health in Brisbane. It extends from the pubic bone in the front to the coccyx in the back. These muscles are responsible for “pulling everything in from below” and supporting the bladder, bowel, and – in females – uterus. Pelvic health is vital for all genders and ages, says Shan Morrison, a specialist physiotherapist and director of Women’s and Men’s Health Physiotherapy in Melbourne. “Ten per cent of men experience persistent pelvic pain at some stage,” she says. Here are some key strategies for maintaining a healthy pelvic floor. Before strengthening the muscle, you must find it. Birmingham says



the goal is a strong, “bulky” muscle. The pelvic floor is made up of an “entrance group” of muscles and a “deeper group” of muscles, she says. For women, strengthening the muscles takes a two-part movement. “Squeeze at the front as if you’re holding onto a wee and an anal squeeze at the back which feels like a lift,” Birmingham says. She adds a good visualisation is to imagine you are in a crowded lift “trying to

hold in a fart”. For men, the cue is to “lift up the testicles,” Morrison says. She suggests everyone aim for 10 repetitions of 5–10 second holds. However, relaxation is equally important. Angela James, founder and principal physiotherapist at Sydney Pelvic Pain Clinic, warns excessive physical activity is not always conducive to a healthy pelvic floor, using the example of “overzealous gripping” of pelvic floor muscles

sometimes seen in pilates. James advises checking in with yourself to ensure you aren’t constantly clenching and learn to relax these muscles. She says many people “chronically over-engage their core muscles” in an effort to maintain “good posture” throughout the day. “This can create excessive tension in the abdominal wall and pelvic floor, contributing to pain.” Birmingham recommends a technique

called “the knack”: bracing your pelvic floor muscles immediately before a sudden increase in abdominal pressure, such as a cough, sneeze or laugh. To build the habit, she suggests “habit stacking” – popularised by James Clear’s Atomic Habits – to attach the exercise to an existing daily routine, such as performing a hold every time you stand up after using the toilet. How we approach our daily toilet routine can have a significant impact on the strength and function of the pelvic floor. Constipation is a major stressor for the pelvic floor, says Dr Millie Mardon, a pelvic pain researcher at Western Sydney University. Birmingham explains that the resulting straining creates unnecessary pressure that can weaken the pelvic muscles over time. “The rectum is not a storage facility,” she says, warning that workers often cause constipation by resisting the urge to poo. To help alleviate pressure, Mardon suggests anyone can use a footstool during bowel movements, to better mimic the natural squatting position and reduce straining. Morrison adds that it is equally important to avoid going “just in case”.

Are Online Fitness Challenges Helping Or Harming Your Body

The fitness craze is spreading fast, especially via apps like YouTube, Instagram Reels and TikTok. Not long ago, one challenge demanded six workouts daily and zero treats – it was called 75 Hard. Some promise running shape within weeks, starting from your sofa; as expected, millions watched and even joined in.

At work, chat groups light up with talk of cleanse streaks. Meanwhile, casual matches turn fierce in company sports circuits. They’re addictive: quick wins, community cheers, and transformation photos. However, it is not as easy as it looks. Sumit Dubey, Fitness & Wellness Coach, says, “As a coach who has been in the fitness industry for over 15 years and has coached athletes, I wonder, are these digital dares sculpting superhumans or setting you up for sidelined suffering?”

The Rise of Viral Fitness Culture vs the truth

Online challenges can spark real change. They shatter inertia, fostering accountability through progress pics and leaderboards. One year ago, a report showed people using certain fitness apps stuck with their workouts more often – almost half again as much. Some short challenges, such as holding a plank daily, quietly strengthen muscles without strain. Movement games set to music, like viral dance sequences, add energy training through play instead. For the consistent crowd, they’re rocket fuel. Yet, the dark side lurks in unchecked enthusiasm. Scroll past the glow-ups to the horror stories: ER vis-

its, shredded knees, and yo-yo crashes. Take marathons – the ultimate badge of grit. Picture it – every season, screens fill up with plans promising marathon glory in ten days. These flashes target folks stuck at desks, hearts set on crossing that line. Yet reality hits hard: long runs demand more than wishful thinking. Being out of shape, carrying extra weight, or barely moving makes the race a risk, not a goal. You can’t cram 42 kilometres after a week of jogs; hearts strain, muscles tear, and kidneys overload from rhabdomyolysis. Data from Runner’s World shows 70% of first-time marathoners who are underprepared suffer injuries.

Why Endurance Sports Demand Patience

Start smart instead: Build up to 4-6 km or 10 km runs with 3-4 months of progressive training – three sessions weekly, adding 10% distance max. Marathons reward the already fit, not the frantic. Similarly, badminton buffs eyeing tournaments? Sumit Dubey says, “Those lightning smashes demand joint prep. Sedentary players diving into matches risk rotator cuff tears or ankle sprains. I’ve seen clients hobble in after one game, ligaments screaming from unaccustomed pivots.” Then there’s the office cricket plague. Picture this: You’re a 40-something email warrior with zero exercise history. Company tournament hits; you sign up for glory. Suddenly, sprinting for catches, bowling overs – bam, heart attack risk skyrockets. Sudden high-intensity bursts on unfit bodies spike adrenaline,

clotting blood, according to a British Journal of Sports Medicine analysis. In India alone, cricket-related cardiac events jumped 25% post-pandemic, often from desk-to-pitch leaps.

Nutrition Challenges That Backfire

Sumit Dubey adds, “Don’t get me started on fasting fads and detox delusions. Intermittent 16:8 windows trend on influencers’ feeds, but for newbies, it’s metabolic mayhem – dizzy spells, muscle loss, hormonal havoc.” Detox weeks that involve consuming juice only? They dehydrate, starve mitochondria, and rebound with binges. A Nutrients review warns of nutrient deficiencies and gallstones in 15% of extreme dieters.

The Real Problem With Online Fitness Challenges

The verdict: these online challenges are more harm than hype for most. Challenges prey on FOMO, ignoring progressive overload – the golden rule: increase intensity by no more than 10% weekly. Bodies adapt gradually; shock them, and they rebel. My prescription: Vet challenges ruthlessly. Assess your baseline – sedentary? Start with walks, not warriors. Consult a doc or trainer; use apps to get instant help if unable to visit the expert. Prioritise sleep, nutrition and recovery, and try building your base with 30 days of consistent, moderate moves. Online fitness can ignite your fire, but without wisdom, it burns you out. Sustainable strength trumps viral stunts. Ditch the rush – your body will thank you with decades of vitality, not a highlight reel of hospital selfies.

Beyond Period Problems: Subtle Symptoms That Could Signal Cervical Cancer



When people think of cervical cancer, they often imagine dramatic warning signs, severe pain, heavy bleeding, or obvious illness. In reality, cervical cancer is far more deceptive. “In its early stages, it is often more of a whisper than a shout,” says Dr Ninad Katdare, Consultant Surgical Oncologist, Jaslok Hospital & Research Centre. Symptoms can be so mild that they are frequently dismissed as “normal period problems” or minor gynaecological concerns. “As a cancer surgeon who has treated hundreds of women with gynaecological cancers, I can say with confidence that recognising these subtle cues can lead to earlier diagnosis and significantly better outcomes,” explains Dr Katdare.

When ‘Normal’ Bleeding Isn’t Normal

Irregular periods are common, influenced by stress, hormonal changes, weight fluctuations, or

contraception. “In today’s fast-paced lifestyle, cycle irregularities have almost become the norm,” notes Dr. Katdare. However, certain patterns of bleeding should never be ignored:

Bleeding between periods (intermenstrual bleeding): Light spotting between cycles is one of the most common early warning signs of cervical cancer.

Bleeding after sexual intercourse: “This is not normal at any age and should always be evaluated by a gynaecologist,” emphasises Dr. Katdare.

Bleeding after menopause: Once periods have stopped, any vaginal bleeding is considered abnormal until proven otherwise.

“These symptoms are often painless, which is why they are easily brushed aside,” explains Dr Katdare. “Pain is not a prerequisite for cancer. While infections or minor injuries can cause similar symp-

oms, they must always be assessed by trained medical personnel.”

Changes in Vaginal Discharge

Vaginal discharge naturally varies throughout the menstrual cycle. However, cervical cancer may cause changes that are frequently overlooked. Discharge may become persistent, watery, foul-smelling, or tinged with blood. Some women report discharge that appears pink, brown, or rust-coloured.

“Because discharge issues are commonly linked to infections, many women self-medicate or delay seeking care,” says Dr. Katdare. “While infections are far more common, chronic or unusual discharge especially in older women requires thorough evaluation.”

Pelvic Pain That Doesn’t Add Up

Mild pelvic discomfort is often attributed to menstruation, ovulation, or digestive issues. However, persistent pelvic pain particularly pain that occurs outside the menstrual cycle or during sexual intercourse should raise concern.

“Pain during intercourse, or dyspareunia, is especially important,” explains Dr Katdare. “It should not be dismissed as ‘just dryness’ or an age-related change. In cervical cancer, this pain may result from inflammation or tumour growth involving the cervix and surrounding tissues.”

Urinary and Bowel Symptoms

As cervical cancer progresses, it can begin to affect nearby organs. Symptoms such as frequent urination, difficulty emptying the bladder, constipation, or rectal discomfort may develop.

“These symptoms are often evaluated in isolation because they don’t seem related to the cervix,” says Dr Katdare, “which can delay the correct diagnosis.”

Unexplained Leg Swelling

Unexplained swelling of one leg, particularly if it occurs on one side, can be a sign of advanced disease. “This happens due to pressure on pelvic blood vessels,” explains Dr. Katdare, “and should not be ignored.”

Fatigue and Unintentional Weight Loss

Persistent fatigue that does not improve with rest, along with unexplained weight loss, can be subtle indicators that the body is fighting a serious illness. “While these symptoms are non-specific, when they appear alongside gynaecological changes, they deserve attention,” notes Dr. Katdare.

Listening to Your Body Could Save Your Life

“The most important message is simple: do not normalise symptoms that feel different from your usual pattern,” says Dr Katdare. Spotting that wasn’t present before, discharge that feels unusual, or pain that doesn’t align with your cycle are not inconveniences to ignore.

“Cervical cancer does not always announce itself loudly,” he concludes. “Sometimes, it leaves silent clues. The sooner you listen to them, the better the outcome. If something feels ‘off,’ trust that instinct and seek medical advice. Early action can make the difference between a curable disease and a life-altering diagnosis.”



Skin Concerns Like Pigmentation, Premature Ageing On The Rise; Evidence Based Skincare Can Help

Pigmentation, acne, and early signs of ageing are becoming more common across age groups. Daily exposure to pollution, irregular routines, extended periods of indoor activity, and fluctuating weather conditions can impact how the skin functions. These factors slowly weaken the skin barrier and reduce moisture retention. When the barrier is compromised, the skin becomes more reactive, uneven in tone, and slower to repair itself. Dehydration is a key factor behind many of these issues. Skin that lacks water tends to appear dull, shows fine lines more clearly, and is more prone to breakouts. In response to dryness, the skin may produce excess oil, which can clog pores

and trigger acne. At the same time, sun exposure continues year-round and contributes to pigmentation and premature ageing when protection is inconsistent. We speak to Pravin Bera, Co-Founder of Dr Rashel, to understand the 8 ways that you can support your skin health:

The Role of The Skin Barrier

The skin barrier plays a central role in maintaining balance. When it is healthy, it keeps moisture in and irritants out. When weakened, the skin loses water easily and becomes sensitive. This makes pigmentation more persistent and acne harder to control. Ingredients such as ceramides help restore barrier strength by reinforcing the outer layer of the skin.

A stable barrier improves resilience and supports natural repair, which is essential for reducing uneven tone and slowing visible ageing.

Gentle Cleansing

Cleansing is often where imbalance begins. Strong or overly foaming cleansers can remove natural oils and leave the skin tight. Gentle cleansers with aloe vera, glycerin, and hyaluronic acid clean the skin while maintaining hydration. This helps reduce irritation and supports better absorption of skincare products used later.

Targeted Pore Care

Targeted pore care is also important. Using a charcoal nose strip occasionally

helps clear blackheads and surface build-up around the nose. Charcoal absorbs excess oil and impurities from the pores, reducing congestion without the need for harsh scrubbing. When used in moderation, it supports cleaner pores without disturbing the skin’s balance.

Controlled Exfoliation for Even Texture

Exfoliation helps manage uneven tone and rough texture, but excess exfoliation can worsen pigmentation and sensitivity. Lactic acid and fruit enzymes such as papaya, provide mild exfoliation by loosening dead skin cells without damaging the barrier. This improves skin clarity and allows moisturising ingredients to work

more effectively.

Deep Hydration and Recovery

Hydration supports all skin types and concerns. Hyaluronic acid binds water within the skin, helping it appear smoother and more settled. Well-hydrated skin is less likely to overproduce oil, which helps reduce acne. It also shows fewer fine lines and responds better to treatment for pigmentation.

Weekly Support and Recovery

Weekly treatments can support the skin during periods of dryness or irritation. Masks containing rice water help improve softness and clarity, while ceramide-based products reinforce the skin barrier. Used regularly, these steps help

the skin cope better with everyday exposure and stay stable.

Sun Protection and Prevention

Sun exposure remains a major contributor to pigmentation and premature ageing. Using a sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher daily helps prevent further damage. Hydrating formulas are especially useful as they protect while maintaining comfort. Rising skin concerns are often linked to weakened skin function rather than isolated problems. Evidence-based skincare focuses on hydration, barrier repair, and consistent protection. With regular use of proven ingredients, the skin becomes more stable, clearer, and better able to manage long-term concerns.

Karan Johar refers to the “expensive” Homebound Oscar campaign as a “bottomless pit”



Mumbai: Homebound, directed by Neeraj Ghaywan, has been selected for the 98th Academy Awards' Best International Feature Film category. The movie, which was produced by Dharma Entertainment under Karan Johar, is currently competing for a nomination in the Best Foreign Film category. The filmmaker has now acknowledged that the joyous occasion was accompanied by the realities of a costly Oscar cam-

paign, acknowledging that it may occasionally feel like a “bottomless pit.” Karan emphasized that the film was never motivated by money, calling it a “passion project.” Karan recently discussed Homebound's inclusion on the 2026 Oscar shortlist. He disclosed that Adar Poonawalla, his business partner, went all out to start the Oscar campaign for their movie Homebound, starring Janhvi Kapoor, Vishal Jethwa, and

Ishaan Khatter. According to Karan, Adar didn't care about the money spent on the movie's Oscar campaign since they considered it as a chance rather than a hazardous business venture. “Homebound was what we were doing. I informed him that running an Oscar campaign is expensive and can occasionally be a never-ending pitfall. Because you have no idea what the outcome will be or if you will even make it to the shortlist of

15 and then 5. “It's a challenging task,” Karan remarked. “You have to hire publicists and travel and make noise and do media abroad and screenings abroad,” the director continued. However, Adar responded, “Karan, let's do everything in our power because this is a fantastic opportunity and a fantastic movie.” On this one, let's not consider profit and loss. Let's prioritize passion over financial gain. That's what we did. For us, it's not a way to make money. We will make other movies to survive, but Homebound has always been a passion project. It's all about credibility. In that movie, there is no financial game. Homebound, directed by Neeraj Ghaywan and starring Janhvi Kapoor, Vishal Jethwa, and Ishaan Khatter, has been nominated for the 98th Academy Awards in the Best International Feature Film category. Last month, it was made public. On January 22, 2026, the final nominees will be revealed. On March 15, comedian Conan O'Brien will host the 98th Academy Awards once again.

Dhanush Fights Karma in the Next Action Film



Mumbai: D54's curtain has finally come up. The first teaser for Dhanush's much anticipated movie, Kara, has debuted with a huge bang, according to the makers. The one-minute and twenty-three-second teaser promises a story driven by karma and is dark and intensely emotional. In the first scene of the teaser, men with glowing torches are seen searching for Dhanush in the darkness of a vast jungle that has been soaked by constant rain. A sense of danger and pursuit is immediately created by the simple but powerful imagery. Dhanush's somber voiceover, which considers sin, morality, and the certainty of reaping what one sows, elevates the scene. The phrases imply a protagonist burdened by past actions, seeming less like a threat and more like a confession. At last, he says, “My name is Karasaami.” They refer to me as Kara. It feels more like a confrontation than a simple introduction—a man coming forward to deal with the fallout from his own actions. The announcement of a Summer 2026 release brings the teaser to a close. Another ambitious project from Vels Film International is Kara, which is co-written by Alfred Prakash and directed by Vignesh Raja. Mamitha Baiju, Karunas, Prithvi Pandiarajan, Jayaram, Suraj Venjaramoodu, and Sreeja Ravi join Dhanush in crucial roles, making the cast roster equally impressive.

AR Rahman Discusses Writing Music for Ramadan

Mumbai: AR Rahman, who worked with Oscar winner Hans Zimmer on Nitesh Tiwari's Ramayan, discussed whether or not his religious identity was a factor in the project. Rahman stated during the same discussion that each of us must transcend above the “petty things.” “I studied in a Brahmin school, and we had Ramayana and Mahabharata every year, so I know the story,” Rahman remarked. The narrative focuses on a person's virtue, higher values, and other related topics. I appreciate all those positive things—any positive things you may learn from—even though people may disagree. According to the prophet, knowledge is priceless regardless of where it comes from—a king, a pauper, a good deed, or a terrible one. You can't avoid situations.” “I think we need to elevate from small-mindedness and selfishness,” Rahman continued. Because it's crucial that we become radiant as we rise and become dazzling. I am pleased of the entire initiative since it is being sent with such love from India to



everyone on the planet. The Ramayana is Hindu, I am Muslim, and Hanz Zimmer is Jewish. Rahman talked about his well-known partnership in an interview with The Hollywood Reporter India, saying, “It's terrifying for both of us.” We're scoring something that is so significant to the globe and so famous. I believe he had a soundscape in the promo, so I added the Sanskrit phrases at the end and everything else. The challenge is that we have to give them something new while taking something so epic that all Indians are familiar with. We must contribute to the global community, starting in India. “We have to unlearn certain things, like

how our instincts demand, ‘Oh, this is how Ramayana should be done,’ but also imbibe the timeless quality that exists in the culture,” he said on his approach to the movie's soundtrack. The process is still ongoing. When it comes to the Ramayana and the Hindi language, Dr. Kumar Vishwas, with whom I work, is almost a professor. Ramayana is spoken by every atom in his body. That's how he writes lyrics, and he's a really kind guy. We're enjoying ourselves, which is novel.” Ranbir Kapoor, Yash, Sai Pallavi, Ravi Dubey, Sunny Deol, Kajal Aggarwal, Arun Govil, and Indira Krishnan are among the cast members of Nitesh Tiwari's film Ramayan.

Samantha shares a silly selfie with her husband, Raj Nidimoru



Mumbai: This year's Makar Sankranti was particularly memorable for Samantha Ruth Prabhu because she celebrated her first Sankranti with her husband, Raj Nidimoru. On December 1, 2025, Samantha and Raj tied the knot. Samantha posted a cute photo of herself and Raj on January 15 along with the caption, “Sankranti vibes.” Samantha and Raj were seen seated in a car, dressed in red. They both chose to dress traditionally. Samantha posed for a selfie with Raj while pulling a silly

face. On December 1, Samantha and Raj tied the knot in a small ceremony in Coimbatore. On the same day, she posted a couple wedding photos to Instagram. Raj and Samantha had previously worked together on the well-liked online series The Family Man 2. When Samantha posted pictures from the World Pickleball League on Instagram, showing her cheering on the Chennai Super Champs with Raj by her side, rumors about their romance started. An old interview of Samantha with Galatta India started doing the rounds online shortly after their wedding. In the video, she responds to an unexpected message from Raj, whose kind remarks caused her to flush. Samantha's commitment and ease switching between Tamil and Telugu productions are praised by the director in the video, who calls it “commendable.” In addition, Raj called her a “geek” and a “proper nerd,” saying, “She's a bookworm; we caught her studying so hard for a scene or anything she had to do.” She acts as though she didn't prepare at all after preparing extensively. Actor Naga Chaitanya was Samantha's former spouse. They declared their split in 2021 after getting married in 2017.

Aryan Khan and Ranbir Kapoor spend time together



Mumbai: Bollywood's exclusive boys' club has just provided the internet with a moment it didn't realize it needed. Social media users are losing their cool after Ranbir Kapoor and Aryan Khan, who would rather keep quiet, were sighted together. Fans went crazy as soon as a photo of Ranbir and Aryan hanging out with Akash Ambani appeared online. IIFA's official Instagram account posted the picture along with the statement, “A rare frame, a tremendous crossover! Akash Ambani, Aryan Khan, and Ranbir Kapoor were sighted together. Ranbir and Aryan can be seen in the picture having a lighthearted conversation with a bunch of males, including Akash. They are standing in a laid-back outdoor scene with foliage and hanging string lights in the background, perhaps on a patio or garden. Ranbir is wearing a black shirt and spectacles, while Aryan is wearing trousers and a casual, slightly unbuttoned plaid shirt. With the majority of them grinning for the cam-

era, the group looks happy. Akash is spotted sporting black pants and a basic white shirt. Many social media users expressed their delight about the image by posting heart and thumbs up emojis in the comment area. One person said, “My Aryankhan looking so hot,” while another wrote, “Aryan looking so hot.” Ranbir recently appeared on screen in the action drama Animal (2023), directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga. Last year, he appeared briefly in The Ba***ds of Bollywood, Aryan Khan's first online series. For his first directing role, Aryan received praise. Although there is talk of his show's second season, nothing has been announced as of yet. Fans will witness Ranbir, Alia Bhatt, and Vicky Kaushal in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Love and War.

This Diwali, the actor's Ramayana Part One starring Nitesh Tiwari will be released. Yash, Sai Pallavi, Sunny Deol, and Ravie Dubey play major roles in what is billed as the most costly Indian movie ever produced.

In Happy Patel, Mithila Palkar slapped Vir Das many times

Mumbai: It's true that Mithila Palkar's smack to Vir Das in the Happy Patel teaser looked convincing. In fact, Mithila has lost count of the number of times she hit her co-star during filming the Vir Das and Kavi Shastri-directed movie. “In the trailer alone, I think it's at least five times,” Mithila chuckles. But to be honest, we've lost count. We stopped counting even throughout the song's filming. The slaps weren't staged or staged for impact. The movie's actor, Vir Das, requested that the action be authentic. “You have to slap,” he insisted. If you're just acting, the effect won't be the same. Mithila recalls. The fact that she doesn't naturally slap people made it more difficult. “I don't naturally want to slap people. I couldn't get it properly, so I had to hit him four times for one shot.” Vir Das was seen applying an ice pack to his face in between shots, demonstrating how genuine the effect was. “I actually saw him holding an ice pack a couple of times, especially during the song,” she continues. Vir never compromised his character in spite of the physical suffering. Mahesh Babu in the main parts. However, Mithila did lose it due to guilt. “I burst out laughing, and he remained true to himself. “He simply said, ‘Okay, now conviction,’” she continues. In addition to the anecdotes from the set, Happy Patel represents a significant turning point for Mithila because Aamir Khan plays a significant role in the movie. Mithila acknowledges that she froze when she first met him. “I was the first to meet Ira, and we grew close. Then I actu-

ally met her father. He's still Aamir Khan, despite being Ira's father,” she adds. “We come from a space where we've grown up looking up to him.” Years ago, she was formally introduced for the first time at Katti Batti. “Everyone was at Imran's house. Everyone was seated around a big table when Aamir entered. I was actually at a loss for words. Aamir reacted kindly when Imran introduced her and explained that they had collaborated. “I know you're a talented actor, of course,” he continued. I've seen you. She laughs, “That made me freeze even more.” Mithila met Ira, the daughter of Aamir Khan, in an unexpected way. I've known Nupur Shikhare, also known as Popeye, Ira's spouse. We've been working out together for years,” she says. Mithila realized that Aamir Khan's approval was important when Happy Patel approached her. As a producer, you can see that Aamir Sir is highly involved. Everybody goes to an audition. “His consent is essential,” she says. Aamir personally informed her that he had seen her audition and thought it was good once she was formally hired. “That validation meant a lot,” she continues. The movie, which also stars Mona Singh and Sharib Hashmi, combines heart, humor, and emotionally grounded performances—all of which Mithila has always found appealing. Happy Patel has undoubtedly been an unforgettable experience for Mithila Palkar, from losing count of actual slaps to receiving compliments from one of the most renowned performers in Indian cinema.

Nupur Sanon wrote “Love Of Her Life” Stebin Ben's bridal entrance song, Aisa Milan

New Delhi: Nupur Sanon posted a video of her bridal entrance on Instagram. She explained how she wrote and performed the song “Aisa Milan.” Stebin Ben initially encounters Nupur Sanon in the uploaded video, dressed as a bride. There are also glimpses of Nupur coming down the aisle and the happy couple taking their ceremonial pheras. Nupur revealed that when she began to take Stebin seriously, Kriti was the first person she confided in. “My sister (Kriti Sanon) was the first person I told about Stebin,” she stated in an interview with Etimes. Despite being five years apart, we are incredibly close—almost like best friends. Stebin was only starting his career at the



time, and Nupur acknowledged that there weren't many notable accomplishments. Rather, she decided to concentrate on him as a person and the one characteristic that, in her opinion, really made him unique. “I talked more about him as a person,” she remembered. She responded, “He has

a magical voice and immense talent,” as soon as I forced her to listen to his voice. After a few months, Nupur found the confidence to discuss Stebin with her mother. As was to be expected, her mother was wary, doubting the relationship's commitment and speculating about what

lay ahead. At that point, Kriti made the decision to intervene and offer her assistance. “At first, like most mothers, she was a little uncertain about seriousness and the future,” Nupur disclosed. My sister intervened at that point and said, “I've met Stebin.” He's been heard by me. He is incredibly gifted and diligent. Everything changed because of that confidence. After that, things just fell into place since, to be honest, Stebin makes a fantastic impact on everyone he encounters. Stebin Ben and Nupur Sanon are now legally wed. In front of their close friends and family, the couple conducted a romantic Christian wedding on January 10 and a Hindu ceremony on January 11.

Shaan Remembering KK's Startling Demise

Mumbai: The Indian music industry was rocked by KK's passing in 2022. During a recent appearance on the Maniesh Paul podcast, musician Shaan discussed his close relationship with KK and how the tragedy altered his perspective on life and health. Regarding KK's way of life, Shaan disclosed that the singer was the most unlikely person to have a heart attack. “KK abstained from alcohol and smoking. He used to have no cholesterol issues and never ate large meals. He would be the last guy you would anticipate to have a heart attack because he used to practice yoga and swimming. He didn't even perform in many performances in the past. Because they were in the same city, he was performing in consecutive college shows during that time, he claimed. Since



KK had no obvious risk factors that could account for such an unexpected medical emergency, Shaan acknowledged that the entire fraternity was frightened. Shaan continued by

talking about his intimacy with KK and how their careers were closely linked. “His voice was at its best, and he was performing at his best. We greatly missed his voice because he left

too soon. I was close to him, of course. Compared to Shreya Ghoshal, Sunidhi Chauhan, and Alka Yagnik, I believe I have sang the most duets with him. At least a dozen of the more than twenty songs we collaborated on have become huge hits. Not only have we performed a lot of songs together, but we have also traveled extensively,” he remarked. He went on to discuss his personal reactions to KK's passing. “All of us used to perform a lot, travel often, and go to after-show parties, but we never considered all of this. However, my family became really concerned after this occurred. Since KK might have anything similar, I underwent an MRI. We were all stunned, and when I learned about it, I refused to accept it. “I can still hear his voice in my head,” Shaan remarked.

13 e-commerce websites were fined Rs. 10 lakh each for selling walkie-talkies illegally



New Delhi, Jan 16: The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) issued final orders against eight entities and imposed fines totaling Rs 44 lakh after taking suo motu action against e-commerce platforms for listing and selling unapproved walkie-talkies in violation of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and telecom laws. After more than 16,970 non-compliant product listings were found across platforms, notices were sent to 13 e-commerce companies: Chimiya, JioMart, Talk Pro, Meesho, MaskMan Toys, TradeIndia, Antriksh Technologies, Vardaanmart, IndiaMart, Meta Platforms Inc. (Facebook Marketplace), Flipkart, Krishna Mart, and Amazon. The CCPA discovered that without Equipment Type Approval (ETA) certification or appropriate notification of licensing requirements, platforms were enabling the sale of Personal Mobile Radios (PMRs) operating outside of the license-exempt frequency band. Penalties of Rs 1 lakh and Rs 10 lakh were assessed. According to Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare, the authority fined Meesho, Meta Platforms Inc. (Facebook Marketplace), Flipkart, and Amazon Rs 10 lakh apiece and Chimiya, JioMart, Talk Pro, and MaskMan Toys Rs 1 lakh apiece for violating consumer

rights, deceptive advertising, and unfair trade practices. Penalties have been paid by Meesho, Meta, Chimiya, JioMart, and Talk Pro. She said, "Payment from the remaining platforms is awaited." Only PMRs operating exclusively in the 446.0-446.2 MHz band are eligible for license exemption under current regulations. Before importing, selling, or operating such devices, makers and sellers are required under Rule 5 of the Use of Low Power and Very Low Power Short Range Radio Frequency Devices Rules, 2018 to get ETA. Significant infractions found 65,931 units with frequency ranges that were either blank or outside of the exempted range were sold on Flipkart. 42,275 more units were sold with the accurate frequency reported. Between January 2023 and May 2025, 2,602 units were sold on Amazon, although 467 product descriptions lacked the necessary frequency or certification information. One seller alone sold 2,209 units on Meesho, and several listings omitted information about frequency requirements or ETA certification. While Facebook Marketplace had 710 listings delisted after CCPA involvement, JioMart sold 58 units over a two-year period without disclosing clear licensing requirements. The CCPA discovered that walkie-talkies were offered on Facebook Marketplace without disclosing frequency parameters, ETA/WPC certification, or licensing requirements. The platform enabled the repeated listing of regulated devices without sufficient preventive measures, even after post-notice removals. 710 listings were delisted as a result of the authority's ruling that platforms must perform due diligence commensurate with their size and technological competence. Devices operating throughout UHF 400-1200 MHz were listed by Talk Pro (Iconet Services Pvt Ltd) under false pretenses of being "100 per cent legal" and "license-free."

Justice Yashwant Varma's Significant Supreme Court Setback Regarding the Parliamentary Panel



New Delhi, Jan 16: Judge Yashwant Varma of the Allahabad High Court suffered a severe loss when the Supreme Court rejected his appeal contesting the legitimacy of the parliamentary panel looking into corruption claims against him and the Lok Sabha Speaker's decision to approve a motion seeking his removal. The verdict was rendered by a bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and SC Sharma, who had postponed making a decision on Varma's request until January 8. On December 16, the Supreme Court made the decision to review Justice Varma's petition challenging the Lok Sabha Speaker's decision to "unilaterally" form a committee to look into him under the Judges (Inquiry) Act. According to Justice

Varma, who was represented by renowned counsel Mukul Rohatgi, the committee's constitution under Section 3(2) of the 1968 Act infringed his entitlement to equal protection under the law. He contended that the Speaker unilaterally formed the committee despite the fact that notices of motion for removal were presented in both Houses of Parliament on the same day. When firefighters were called to Justice Varma's Delhi home on March 15 of last year, they found heaps of money that had been burned by a fire, sparking a massive uproar. This sparked concerns about corruption in the nation's top courts. Justice Varma declared the accusations against him "preposterous" and denied any connection to the money, but the highest court established an internal panel that suggested his impeachment. Sanjiv Khanna, the Chief Justice of India at the time, sent the panel's findings with the same suggestion to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Droupadi Murmu. After then, Justice Varma filed a petition against the highest court panel's suggestion that he be removed. However, he had concealed his identity in the petition and was subsequently referred to as "XXX" in court filings. In his writ suit, Justice Varma presented the two-judge panel of AG Masih and Justice Dipankar Datta with five arguments against his dismissal, including concerns about the internal committee's power and jurisdiction to look into a sitting judge. The Supreme Court, however, rejected his challenge, declaring the Judge's petition "not worth entertaining" and chastising him for his "not confidence-inspiring conduct."

The BJP has begun the process of choosing a new leader; an announcement is expected on January 20

New Delhi, Jan 16: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has formally begun the process to elect its next national president, issuing an official notification under the party's 'Sangathan Parv'. The internal election will take place over two days, starting on January 19 and ending on January 20, according to the notification issued by BJP National Returning Officer K Laxman. The announcement states that the BJP headquarters on Deendayal Upadhyay Marg in New Delhi will host the entire electoral process.

The electoral list of 5,708 Nirvachak Mandal members has also been released by the party. On January 19, the nomination procedure will take place from 2 to 4 p.m., and from 4 to 5 p.m., nomination papers will be reviewed.

The deadline for candidates to withdraw their



nominations is 6 p.m. At 6:30 p.m. on the same day, the Returning Officer is expected to make a news release. The official announcement of the new BJP national president will take place on January 20

between 11:30 am and 1:30 pm, if polling is necessary. Since no other senior official is anticipated to run, party insiders predict that BJP national working president Nitin Nabin would be chosen without opposi-

U19 World Cup was "Detrimental To His Growth" for Vaibhav Suryavanshi



New Delhi: In India's opening encounter against the USA on Thursday, 14-year-old prodigy Vaibhav Suryavanshi scored just 2 runs off 4 balls in his first U19 World Cup appearance. Despite his advanced age, Suryavanshi has demonstrated remarkable bat potential. The young opening batsman is already well-known in the Indian Premier League (IPL) and has quickly broken a number of age-group records. However, WV Raman, a former coach of the Indian women's team,

believes that Suryavanshi's inclusion in the Under-19 squad was premature. Suryavanshi will not be eligible to participate in another major event at this level since the BCCI restricts his players' U19 World Cup attendance to one. However, the board thought it was OK to include him in the mix in the hopes that the exposure might accelerate his battering development. But Raman doesn't think it's a good idea. "This viewpoint might not be widely held. Suryavanshi has excelled

in both the IPL and the A series. His development is probably going to suffer if he is forced to play at the U-19 level. In a post on X (previously Twitter), WV Raman stated, "He might win matches, no doubt, but it should always be about the big picture." Pace bowler Henil Patel won the U19 World Cup opener against the USA, while Suryavanshi was unable to make an impact. After India chose to bowl in cloudy conditions, he concluded with figures of 5/16 from seven overs with one maiden, tearing through the middle order of the USA. In 35.2 overs, the USA were dismissed for a pitiful 107. After rain halted play, India's target was changed to 96 in 37 overs, with a score of 21 for one in four overs. Using the DLS system, Abhigyan Kundu (42 not out off 41 balls) then led the team home with 118 balls remaining.

Rescheduled BPL 2026 by the Bangladesh Board



New Delhi: A high-profile player boycott that resulted in the dismissal of M Nazmul Islam, a senior board official, has thrown the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) 2026 schedule into disarray. Following the cancellation of matches due to players refusing to play, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced a revised schedule on Thursday and demanded that Nazmul resign and issue a public apology. The Bangladesh board published a notification outlining the updated schedule

for the top T20 competition in the nation under the new conditions. "The BPL 2026 games that were originally slated for January 15, 2026, will now take place on Friday, January 16, 2026. The games that were initially set for January 16 and 17 will now take place on January 17 and 18, respectively, after being rescheduled by one day. The Eliminator and Qualifier 1 have been rescheduled for January 20 instead of January 19. Nazmul Islam, a board director and chairman of the BCB's finance

committee, made startling comments that set off the crisis. After referring to Tamim Iqbal, the nation's former captain, as a "Indian agent" for his remarks stressing the need for communication with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) about the T20 World Cup 2026 venue dispute, Islam incited indignation within the cricket community. Senior internationals like Najmul Hossain Shanto and Mehidy Hasan Miraz initiated an instant boycott under the leadership of the Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB). Teams for Thursday's afternoon and evening games failed to show up for the toss, which had an immediate effect at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium. The BCB called an emergency meeting and said that Islam had been "released from his responsibilities" as Chairman of the Finance Committee due to the complete collapse of its premier T20 event. "The decision is aimed at ensuring the continued smooth and effective functioning of the board's affairs," said the BCB. "The board remains fully committed to upholding the honour and dignity of all players under its jurisdiction."

Barcelona makes it to the Copa Del Rey quarterfinals

New Delhi: Barcelona defeated Racing Santander 2-0 on Thursday thanks to goals from Ferran Torres and Lamine Yamal, advancing them to the Copa del Rey quarterfinals. After an unexpectedly close match in the round of 16, holders Barcelona defeated second division leaders Racing thanks to goals from the Spanish internationals, winning 11 straight games in all competitions. Barca, the record 32-time winners, scored just enough to win despite the hosts having two goals disallowed for offside. "We didn't think they would be so hard to break down," Torres told Movistar. "We knew that we had to stretch the game, be calm and in the end it went well." After witnessing Real Madrid's elimination against second-tier Albacete on Wednesday, Barcelona coach Hansi Flick assembled a reasonably formidable squad that included teenage sensation Yamal. The game began at Racing's Sardinero stadium after a 15-minute delay during which numerous spectators were stranded outside. Barca promptly gained possession of the ball. However, the Catalans



had trouble converting possession into a significant chance, and when they did, Dani Olmo's kick from Marcus Rashford's risky cross was missed. Racing attempted to get past Barcelona's tall defensive line, but the visitors were able to clean up after themselves. Joan Garcia easily fielded Giorgi Guliasvili's low effort from range, and that was the closest the hosts could get. In the second half, Barcelona kept pushing forward, and Rashford's attempt was both blasted just wide and touched away. After Torres was sent through on goal by Fermin Lopez, the Spanish champions eventually took the lead. The Spain international rolled home after rounding Racing's Jokin Ezkieta. Manex Lozano's two goals were disallowed for offside despite the hosts being forced to go on the attack and having the ball in Barcelona's net twice.

Can the Delhi Assembly suspend, fine, or expel Atishi



New Delhi, Jan 16: The Delhi Assembly's privilege proceedings against Atishi, the Leader of the Opposition, have reached a critical stage, and the House is now getting ready to proceed strictly according to the rules rather than using political hyperbole. The focus has moved to what the Delhi Assembly may legally do next and how far it is willing to go in establishing its authority after Atishi was ordered to provide a written explanation by January 19. The House has a wide range of choices, from a straightforward reprimand to the most severe sanctions a legislature may impose. The incident began with a

heated argument in the Assembly on January 6 when Atishi tried to bring up the topic of Delhi's pollution levels, even though Speaker Vijender Gupta told her that it was scheduled for the next day. The Assembly administration claims that comments made during that conversation were deemed offensive to Sikh Gurus, leading to numerous disruptions, adjournments, and complaints by BJP MLAs. The Speaker invited Atishi to stay in the room and explain her stance, citing natural justice principles. The subject was formally brought to the Committee of Privileges after she failed to appear at following sessions.

Gautam Gambhir is charged with "influencing" Ajit Agarkar's choice to fire Captain Rohit Sharma

New Delhi: Despite leading the national team to victory in the ICC Champions Trophy, Rohit Sharma, a legend in Indian cricket, abruptly lost the captain's armband. Many believed that Rohit's dismissal as captain was unduly severe, even if the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) selection committee wanted a new beginning in advance of the 2027 ODI World Cup. Former Indian cricketer Manoj Tiwary thinks head coach Gautam Gambhir was a major factor in the audacious choice, even though Ajit Agarkar, the chief of the selection committee, made the announcement. Tiwary said, "I don't know what the primary cause is," to Sports Today. However, I know that Ajit Agarkar has a powerful personality. He is a decisive leader who doesn't hesitate to make difficult decisions. But we have to ask if he was persuaded to "fire the gun from his shoulder" by someone

else. Behind the scenes, a lot of things go place where one plus one equals two. It's possible that the head selector made the decision and was honest about it, but the coach ought to have had a say. Both of you bear equal responsibility for this decision, thus you cannot make it alone." With a strong focus on the 2027 World Cup, the selection committee named Shubman Gill as the new captain. At first, a lot of people said that Rohit, who is 38 years old, would not be eligible for the upcoming competition, necessitating a leadership change. But Rohit has demonstrated that he still has the desire to compete on the global stage one final time with his steady performances, physical condition, and motivation. "There has been a lot of inconsistency in picking the playing XI," Tiwary said, expressing his dissatisfaction with the team's present administration. To tell the truth, I no lon-

ger enjoy watching ODI matches. It seems needless to remove and replace a captain who has won both the Champions Trophy and the T20 World Cup. I have a connection to Rohit since we played together, and I didn't like how this turned out. For a cricket player who has given so much to fans all across the world, it felt disrespectful. He further questioned the "cricketing logic" of the decision, pointing out Rohit's history as a successful leader who has won two ICC trophies. "I wonder why there were doubts regarding Rohit playing in the 2027 World Cup," Tiwary said, implying that the choice revealed a lack of confidence in Rohit's longevity. It was a mistake to doubt his abilities. You don't question a player who has three double-centuries and plays with such selflessness, like he did in 2023. Cricket logic alone cannot support his removal from captaincy.

Tuchel emphasizes England World Cup squad must balance footballing talent with strong teamwork and social skills



New Delhi: England manager Thomas Tuchel has made it clear that talent alone will not be enough to secure a place in his squad for the FIFA World Cup 2026, insisting that players must also possess the right “social skills” and personality to help build a winning team environment. Speaking about his vision for the tournament, Tuchel stressed the importance of creating a strong bond within the squad, describing his aim to form a “brotherhood” among the players. While England are among the favourites for the title, the German coach believes past failures show that individual quality means little without the right group dynamic. “The connection between the players makes the difference,” Tuchel said. “When the communication is right and players feel that this is the right group, that they know their roles and what is expected of them, then you have the foun-

datation for success.” Tuchel has studied England’s previous World Cup campaigns, including the disappointing tournaments of 2006 and 2010, where dressing-room harmony was often questioned. He acknowledged the cultural shift achieved under Gareth Southgate, who led England to two European Championship finals and a World Cup semi-final in 2018, and said he wants to build on that legacy.

With the expanded 48-team World Cup set to last more than five weeks, Tuchel believes squad harmony will be more crucial than ever. When players feel they could stay together for another four weeks and still be happy, that’s when you know you have the right group,” he said. “But when players start thinking after the round of 16, ‘When can we finally go home?’ then the energy is not right and it shows on the pitch.” Tuchel has only two friendlies in March - against Uruguay and Japan at Wembley - before naming his final 26-man squad. England will open their group-stage campaign against Croatia on June 17 in Arlington, Texas, before facing Ghana and Panama. Since replacing Southgate, Tuchel has shown he is not afraid to make bold selection calls, leaving out high-profile players such as Jude Bellingham and Phil Foden in recent squads, while recalling experienced figures like Jordan Henderson. He insists he is looking for

balance, not just star quality. “We will not select just for talent,” Tuchel said. “We also need to look at what we need from a player. What are his social skills? Is he a good teammate? Can he support others if his role is a supporting one? This is where the focus is.” The former Chelsea manager also highlighted the physical and mental demands of a tournament being staged across Canada, Mexico and the United States, with long travel distances, varying climates and altitude changes. “It will be very hot, and many players will come straight from long club seasons,” he said. “We could be together for six to eight weeks if we go all the way. That will demand a lot from us socially, how we live together as a group.”

Tuchel added that making the right squad selections will be key to turning the World Cup into a positive experience rather than a draining one. We need to find the right balance in the team and see this as a dream coming true,” he said. “To be part of a World Cup and hopefully play a major role—that should be nothing but a dream.” England are expected to hold warm-up matches in Florida ahead of the tournament, with Tuchel still finalising travel plans to ensure his players cope with the logistical challenges of the competition Tuchel added that making the right squad selections one.

Swiatek dreams Grand Slam, Melbourne focus lies elsewhere

Melbourne: Iga Swiatek said Friday it would be a dream to complete a career Grand Slam at the Australian Open but “grinding” through the first round was the Polish star’s focus. The world number two has won four French Opens, the US Open and Wimbledon, but a title at Melbourne Park has proved elusive. The 24-year-old has made the semi-finals twice but never gone further. Honestly, since the beginning of the year, there are many people coming to me and talking to me about it,” she said of completing a sweep of all the majors. I’m really just focusing on day-by-day work. This is how it’s always been for me. This is how I actually was able to achieve the success that I already have, just focusing really on grinding match by match.”

She added that winning Grand Slams was “tough” and she had no expectations in Melbourne. Obviously it would be a dream come true (a career Grand Slam),” she said. But this is not my clear goal that I wake up with. I’m thinking more about how I want to play, what I want to improve.”Swiatek will open her campaign against Chinese qualifier Yuan Yue after a mixed start to her season.While she enjoyed success as part of the Poland



team that won the United Cup in Sydney, she suffered back-to-back singles losses. After crashing 6-4, 6-2 to American Coco Gauff, Swiatek then slumped 3-6, 6-0, 6-3 against Switzerland’s Belinda Bencic. “The Sydney matches weren’t the smoothest ones. It wasn’t an easy start,” she said. “I think I still need to work on some stuff.”Overall I think it’s also going to be about the mentality and if I’m going to be able to go on court and just enjoy playing and give this extra energy, bring the intensity and be there every point. “Not really care if I’m going to make some mistakes or something will not work. Just go forward and try to push. “So I’m working on all of this stuff. Hopefully it’s going to be fine.” She added that winning Grand Slams was “tough” and she had no expectations in Melbourne.

RCB proposes AI-enabled cameras for crowd management at the Chinnaswamy Stadium

RCB to install AI cameras boosting stadium crowd safety

Bengaluru: In a formal communication to the KSCA, RCB has proposed the installation of 300 to 350 AI-enabled cameras at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, according to a release. The advanced surveillance technology will empower the KSCA and law enforcement agencies to efficiently manage crowd movement, ensure disciplined queueing, monitor unauthorised access through real-time tracking of entries and exits, and significantly enhance overall fan safety.The solution leverages advanced analysis of video, audio and text data to accelerate investigations and enable faster, more accurate decision-making. Its real-time AI video analytics capability enables early detection of incidents such as violence, unauthorised access and intrusion, facilitating swift and effective law-enforcement response. RCB has further committed to bearing the entire one-time cost of this initiative, estimated at approximately ₹4.5 crore. RCB has partnered with Staqu, a technology company with a proven track record in enhancing public safety through automation and data-driven intelligence. Staqu’s state-of-the-art facial recognition technology and intelligent monitoring of objects, crowd, perimeters and vehicles have assisted many State Police forces in their regular monitoring and investigations. The solution leverages advanced analysis of video, audio and text data to accelerate investigations and enable faster, more accurate decision-making. Its real-time AI video analytics capability enables early detection of incidents such as violence, unauthorised access and intrusion, facilitating swift and effective law-enforcement response.



The integration of this advanced technology will elevate crowd management standards and reinforce a safe, secure and seamless matchday experience for all fans. (ANI) (This content is sourced from a syndicated feed and is published as received. The Tribune assumes no responsibility or liability for its accuracy, completeness, or content.)Former India spinner Harbhajan Singh has come out strongly in defence of Virat Kohli, pushing back against remarks by Sanjay Manjrekar that questioned Kohli’s decision to continue playing

One Day Internationals after stepping away from Test cricket. Manjrekar recently sparked debate by suggesting that Kohli chose to stick with what he described as the “easiest” format for a top-order batter. Speaking in a video posted on his Instagram handle, Manjrekar said, “It was OK if Virat Kohli had just walked away from cricket, retired from all formats. But that he’s chosen to play one-day cricket actually disappoints me more because this is a format which, for a top-order batter, I’ve said before as well, is the easiest format. The format that really tests you is first, obviously, Test cricket, and T20 cricket has its different challenges.” Harbhajan, however, dismissed that argument, stressing that success at the international level cannot be reduced to format-based assumptions. Speaking on the sidelines of an event, as reported by Sportstar, the former off-spinner said the focus should remain on performance and impact rather than format choices.

“If it was so easy to score runs in any format, then everyone would have made it,” Harbhajan said. “Let’s just enjoy what people are doing. They are playing well, winning games, scoring runs, and taking wickets. That’s all that matters. It doesn’t matter who plays which format. Virat, whether he plays in one format or all formats, has been a fantastic player and a big time match winner for India” Harbhajan also highlighted Kohli’s influence beyond statistics, arguing that players of his stature have played a crucial role in shaping modern Indian cricket. They inspire the next generation. Manjrekar has his own way of thinking. The way I see it is that Virat and these players have played a major role to take this game forward,” he added. Kohli retired from Test cricket last year, bringing the curtain down on a distinguished career in the longest format that included 29 centuries and several defining overseas performances. Since then, he has continued to thrive in ODIs and has expressed his desire to represent India until the 2027 ODI World Cup. “Virat is an unbelievable player. Even today, if he plays Test cricket, he will be our main player,” he said.

Barcelona secure 2-0 win over Racing, progress to Copa del Rey quarterfinals

Madrid: Defending champion Barcelona avoided an upset a day after Real Madrid faltered in the Copa del Rey, edging second-division leader Racing Santander 2-0 Thursday to reach the quarterfinals. Madrid, which lost last year’s Copa final to Barcelona, was eliminated by second-tier team Albacete 3-2 on Wednesday in the debut of coach Álvaro Arbeloa. Ferran Torres broke the deadlock in Santander on a breakaway in the 66th minute, receiving a pass by Fermin López and going past the goalkeeper before finding the open net. Lamine Yamal sealed the victory in the sixth and final minute of added time. Racing had two goals disallowed for offside, one in the 77th and another in the 86th. It squandered a golden chance to equalize in a one-on-one situation in second-half stoppage time, with Barcelona goalkeeper Joan García making a last-minute save on a shot by substitute Manex Lozano. “Gladly we have Joan in goal,” Torres said. “These teams are well prepared and have players with a lot of quality, that’s why it has been so tough (for the first-division teams).” The match was delayed in 15 minutes because of problems with access to the stadium in northern Spain. Barcelona

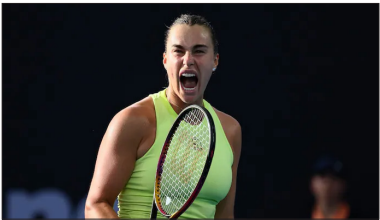


coach Hansi Flick did not start some of his top players, including Raphinha, Robert Lewandowski and Pedri. All three of them entered the match as second-half substitutes. Before kickoff, Racing players did a guard of honor for the Spanish Super Cup champions, lining up to salute the Barcelona players as they entered the field.In the other round-of-16 game on Thursday, Valencia scored a goal in each half to advance past second-tier club Burgos 2-0. On Tuesday, Atletico Madrid beat second-division tier Deportivo La Coruña 1-0. The other teams that advanced to the last eight were Real Sociedad, Athletic Bilbao, Real Betis and Alaves. The draw for the quarterfinals will be on Monday. The Copa final will be played in Sevilla on April 25. Barcelona manager Hansi Flick fielded a strong lineup to avoid an upset similar to Real Madrid, who had been eliminated by Albacete

the previous day. - Racing Santander, leaders of Spain’s second division, put up a spirited fight and had two goals disallowed for offside in the 77th and 86th minutes Ferran Torres showcased his pace and composure, going past the goalkeeper before slotting into an open net.Raphinha and Lamine Yamal celebrated each other’s goals with a raised arm and hands linked as Barcelona won 2-0 at 10-man Villarreal on Sunday to stay four points clear of Real Madrid at the top of La Liga. Raphinha won a penalty after being fouled when cutting inside. He took a slow run-up and sent goalkeeper Luiz Junior the wrong way in the 12th minute for his seventh league goal of the season and Barca’s 50th.Yamal also grabbed his seventh this season, striking from close range in the 63rd after being set up by midfielder Freddie de Jong following a goalmouth scramble. It was

a seventh straight win in all competitions for coach Hansi Flick’s side. Barcelona was without central defender Andreas Christensen, who tore the ACL in his left knee in training on Saturday. Villarreal defender Renato Veiga was shown a straight red card late in the first half for a heavy tackle from behind on Yamal, who briefly had treatment on the ground. Midfielder Koke put Atletico ahead in the 13th minute with a fine half-volley from just outside the penalty area and into the top right corner. Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak made a stunning save to keep out Axel Witsel’s close-range shot midway through the half, clawing it off the line one-handed near the left post. Atletico doubled its lead in the 38th when midfielder Conor Gallagher’s strike from 20 meters (yards) deflected off a defender and wrong-footed goalie Paulo Gazzaniga. Villarreal’s defeat allowed Atletico Madrid to move into third place with a 3-0 win at Girona. Atletico has played two more games than Atletico’s traveling fans gave midfielder Thomas Lemar a warm welcome when he came on for Girona seasons. “Because even if I had 15 attackers I still would have been happy if he would have come back, t he still to play.

Sabalenka seeks redemption, healing at Australian Open one year after heartbreak



New Delhi: Last year in Melbourne was nothing short of shocking for Aryna Sabalenka. The Australian Open final against Madison Keys left fans stunned and wondering what went wrong. Until that day, Sabalenka had been untouchable — she had won 17 consecutive sets at Melbourne Park and 28 of her last 29 hard-court Slam matches since the start of 2023. The numbers screamed dominance, a force seemingly unstoppable on the hard courts. Yet, on that fateful day, even the world’s best was brought crashing down. The heartbreak lingered, a reminder that in tennis, nothing is guaranteed, no matter how commanding the form. Now, it’s 2026, and the stage is set again at Melbourne Park. Sabalenka begins her campaign against France’s Tiantsoa Rakotomanga Rajaonah, but this time the narrative is different. The mission is no longer just to compete — it’s to reclaim her crown, to erase the ghosts of last year, and to remind the

world who truly rules the hard courts. Melbourne is ready for her comeback, and so is she. Sabalenka couldn’t have asked for a better start to 2026. After a disappointing end to 2025, where she fell to Elena Rybakina in the WTA Finals, the world No. 1 has roared back into form by claiming the Brisbane International in commanding fashion. The Belarusian top seed defended her WTA 500 crown with authority, defeating Ukraine’s Marta Kostyuk 6-4, 6-3 in the final at Pat Rafter Arena to complete a flawless week without dropping a single set. The triumph marked her second consecutive Brisbane title and the 22nd singles trophy of her career, moving her past Victoria Azarenka into third place among active players — a clear reflection of her growing dominance on the tour. More than just the silverware, Sabalenka’s run in Brisbane carried deeper significance. She produced a statement straight-sets win over Madison Keys, the 2025 Australian Open champion, in a rematch of last year’s Melbourne heartbreak, showing she has well and truly put those scars behind her. Reclaiming her throne at Melbourne Park will not come easy, but Sabalenka appears ready for the challenge. The world No.1 has been handed a promising yet intriguing draw at the

2026 Australian Open as she sets out to regain a title she has already lifted twice on the sport’s biggest hard-court stage. Sabalenka begins her campaign against French wildcard Rajaonah, a match she enters as the clear favourite but one that could set the tone for her title push. A likely third-round clash with 28th seed Emma Raducanu looms as an early examination, offering a stern test against another powerful hitter capable of unsettling rhythms. Beyond that, the Belarusian’s quarter looks manageable on paper. Seventh seed Jasmine Paolini and 14th seed Clara Tauson present potential hurdles in the middle rounds, yet neither boasts Sabalenka’s Slam pedigree or recent form. Forecast models back her to progress smoothly through the opening week, reflecting both her top-seed status and her dominant showing in Brisbane. However, the real battles may await later. With stars like Coco Gauff and Iga witek positioned deeper in the draw, a blockbuster semifinal could be on the horizon. Armed with confidence, power, and belief, Sabalenka arrives in Melbourne ready to chase redemption and legacy. seed Emma Raducanu looms as an early examination, offering a stern test against another powerful hitter capable of unsettling rhythms.

Harleen Deol fights back, makes bat speak after enduring batter’s nightmare setback

Harleen Deol rebounds with commanding 64 against Mumbai

Mumbai: Few moments in sport cut deeper than being publicly told you are not good enough in that instant. For a batter, it is the ultimate humiliation. Not being dismissed by the opposition, but by your own team’s decision. Harleen Deol experienced that nightmare earlier this week when she was asked to retire herself out for a poor strike rate during a Women’s Premier League 2026 clash between the UP Warriorz and the Delhi Capitals in Navi Mumbai. What made the decision sting even more was the context. Deol was just three runs short of a half-century. That milestone, however, mattered little to a management group led by Abhishek Nayar, who chose to pull the plug in search of quicker runs. The call backfired spectacularly. The Warriorz’s gamble collapsed, leaving the franchise red-faced and Deol carrying the emotional weight of a decision that would have unsettled even the strongest minds.

There is a clear difference between tactical substitution and public doubt. It is one thing when a lower-order batter is sacrificed for momentum. It is another when a specialist batter, whose role is to score runs and anchor chases, is asked to walk back. The feeling is comparable to a footballer being brought on as a substitute only to be withdrawn again. Rare, brutal, and unforgettable. What followed could have gone in two directions. Deol could have retreated into her shell, burdened by embarrassment and second-guessing ev-



ery movement at the crease. Or she could respond with clarity, composure, and conviction. She chose the latter. That response came swiftly and emphatically, against the Mumbai Indians. Harleen has long been known for her vibrant personality off the field, her energy and expressiveness often as visible as her stroke-play. This time, however, there was no outward show. No extra celebration. No statement beyond the scoreboard. She let the bat do the talking. Chasing a demanding target, Deol produced an innings that shifted the narrative entirely. She dismantled the bowling with a fluent and fearless knock of 64 off 39 balls, striking 12 boundaries and guiding the Warriorz home with authority. This time, there was no debate. No questioning of intent. Only clarity. Interestingly, the approach was not vastly different from the previous outing. The intent remained. The shots were familiar. The difference lay in execution and timing, and sometimes, the fine margins of fortune. “Nothing different actually. I just got a little boundary balls, so I could convert it into boundaries. Sometimes it’s just your day - that wherever you are thinking to hit, the ball comes there, so it was that for me,” Harleen said in the post-match interview. That gave the innings much needed momentum with Sciver-Brunt hammering a coupe of fours and a straight six. Interestingly, the approach was not vastly different from the previous outing. The intent remained. The shots were familiar.