

OM NAMO VENKATESAYA

22-12-2025

Total pilgrims: 60,764

Tonsures: 33,077

Hundi kanukutru: 4.01 CR

Waiting Compartments: -

Out side line at ATGH

Approx. Darsan Time for Sarvadarshanam (with out SSD Tokens). 12 H



## Railways to extend AI-based system on 981-km track in Northeast to protect wild animals

NEW DELHI: Days after eight elephants were killed in Assam after a herd crossing the tracks was hit by a Rajdhani Express, the Railway ministry has announced that an AI-based system in place to detect presence of wild animals around rail lines will be extended to a further 981-km track in the north-eastern region.

The ministry has announced the award of a tender to install the AI-enabled Intrusion Detection System (IDS).

The IDS, which gives early alerts to loco pilots in case elephants come on the railway track, has already been implemented at 141-route km section on pilot basis on the Northeast Frontier Railway. These are Madarihath-Nagrakata under Alipurduar division, Habaipur-Lamsakhanga-Patharkhola-Lumding under Lumding division, Rangiya division's Kamakhya-Azara-Mirza



section and Titabar-Mariani-Nakachari under Tinsukia.

The incident took place early morning on December 20 when the Sairang-New Delhi Rajdhani Express hit the herd in Changjurai village in Assam's Hojai district. Five coaches and the train's engine also derailed.

"Indian Railways has already deployed Artificial Intelligence (AI) enabled Intrusion Detection System (IDS) using Distributed Acoustic System (DAS) for detecting presence of elephants on railway tracks. With the new ten-

der, the total coverage will extend to 1,122 route km," the ministry said. Elaborating on the functioning of the IDS, the ministry said the system generates real-time alerts for loco pilots, station masters and control rooms about the movement of elephants in proximity of railway tracks, enabling timely preventive action.

Besides ISD, the ministry said that AI-based cameras will be installed to alert loco pilots 0.5 km in advance to save lions, tigers and other wild animals along with elephants. "Indian Railways has been taking continu-

ous efforts to prevent wildlife casualties, particularly elephants, on railway tracks through technology-based solutions," it said.

"The deployment and expansion of the AI-enabled Intrusion Detection System using Distributed Acoustic System (DAS) reflects Indian Railways' commitment to wildlife conservation and safe train operations," it added.

On October 20, the Northeast Frontier Railway zone said that IDS would be rolled out in its network by April, 2026 to prevent the death of elephants by speeding trains. The NFR had first installed IDS at two locations of the Lumding and Alipurduar divisions in 2022. "The target date for completion of this expanded project has been set for April 2026, by which the system is expected to be fully functional across all identified elephant corridors," the NFR had said.

## Thackeray cousins want power, not development of Mumbai: Shinde



MUMBAI: Maharashtra deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Wednesday alleged that the Thackeray cousins have come together only for power, and lack any kind of program for Mumbai's development.

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) president Raj Thackeray earlier in the day announced the alliance of their parties ahead of the January 15 Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections. Talking to reporters here, Shinde,

who heads the rival Shiv Sena faction, said there was no mention of development at the cousins' press conference. "Those who deviated from (late Shiv Sena founder) Balasaheb Thackeray's ideology have been taught a lesson in the assembly elections last year and the recent municipal council and nagar panchayat polls," he said.

"They have no development agenda, their goal is only to get power. These people drove Marathi-speakers out of Mumbai. The assembly polls and recent local elections have shown which is the fake and which is the real Shiv Sena," said Shinde who rebelled against Uddhav Thackeray's leadership and split the party in June 2022. He also accused the Thackerays of blocking development projects, and said the Mahayuti government introduced cluster development and expedited redevelopment projects.

## Delhi's AQI moves from 'severe' to 'very poor' category



NEW DELHI: Delhi's air quality saw some improvement on Wednesday morning, with the AQI moving to 'very poor' from 'severe' the day before, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

The national capital's Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 336 in the morning, as against 415 on Tuesday, the CPCB data showed.

Of Delhi's 40 air quality monitoring stations, 36 recorded AQI in the 'very poor' category. Nehru Nagar recorded the highest reading of 392, the CPCB's Sameer app showed.

An AQI between 0

and 50 is considered 'good', 51 to 100 'satisfactory', 101 to 200 'moderate', 201 to 300 'poor', 301 to 400 'very poor', and 401 to 500 'severe'.

Fog and smog reduced visibility in some parts of Delhi early in the morning.

Delhi recorded a minimum temperature of 10.2 degrees Celsius, 2.7 notches above normal. The maximum temperature is expected to hover around 19 degrees Celsius, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The humidity level stood at 100 per cent. The IMD has forecast moderate fog during the day.

## SCR to run Christmas-New Year special trains between Hyderabad and Mumbai

Hyderabad: In view of the additional rush of passengers during the Christmas and New Year season, South Central Railway (SCR) has announced the operation of special trains between Hyderabad and Lokmanya Tilak Terminus (LTT), Mumbai.

Train No. 07458 Hyderabad-LTT Mumbai Special will depart from Hyderabad at 5.30 pm on December 28, 2025, and arrive at LTT Mumbai at 10.40 am the next day. In the return direction, Train No. 07459 LTT Mumbai-Hyderabad Special will leave LTT Mumbai at 3.20 pm on December 29, 2025, and reach Hyderabad at 9.00 am the following day. These special trains will have stoppages at Begumpet, Lingampalli, Vikarabad, Tandur, Wadi, Kalaburagi, Solapur, Pune, and Kalyan stations in both directions. The trains will consist of First AC, Second AC, Third AC, Sleeper Class, and General Second Class coaches, providing convenience to passengers travelling during the festive season.



## 3 minors caught for stone-pelting on Vande Bharat Express in Bihar



Muzaffarpur, Dec 24: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) on Tuesday evening apprehended three minors for allegedly damaging three windows of the Vande Bharat Express by pelting stones at the train while it was passing through Muzaffarpur district in Bihar, officials said on Wednesday.

Superintendent of Police (Rail) Beena Kumari said the minors were caught in the Kaparpura area near Kanti, a few hours after the incident. "During the investigation, it came to light that the minors threw stones at the running train while playing near the railway track," she added. The incident damaged windows of coaches C7, C4 and E1.

Legal formalities are being completed in the matter, the SP said. The Vande Bharat Express (Train No. 26502), running between Gorakhpur and Patna (Patliputra Junction), was attacked near Chakia station while travelling towards Muzaffarpur from Narkatiaganj.

This marks the fourth stone-pelting incident targeting the Vande Bharat Express in the region. In August, a similar attack near Chakia in East Champaran damaged a window, leading to the apprehension of three minors. In July, another stone-pelting incident near Mohammad Balami village in Muzaffarpur caused damage to a coach window.

## Will move SC to challenge Kuldeep Singh Sengar's bail: Unnao rape survivor

NEW DELHI: As former MLA and Unnao rape case convict Kuldeep Singh Sengar secured conditional bail by the Delhi High Court, the rape survivor expressed deep anguish over the decision, saying she was unhappy with the judgment, and alleged that BJP leader Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh has influenced the outcome. The survivor said she would approach the Supreme Court to challenge the High Court's order. Former BJP MLA Sengar was convicted of kidnapping and raping the minor girl in 2017.

On Tuesday, the Delhi High Court suspended the jail sentence of Sengar. A bench comprising Justices Subramonium Prasad and Harish Vaidyanathan Shankar granted him bail, directing him to furnish a personal bond of Rs 15 lakh along with three sureties of the same amount.

Reacting strongly to the development, the survivor told IANS, "I want to say only this, that I am not happy with this High Court judgment. I felt that I could have ended my life, but then I thought about my children and my family. But then I thought that God has given me life, so I should fight for justice." She also pointed to what she described as a glaring injustice in the legal process, referring to her uncle, whom she said was falsely implicated in a two-decade-old case filed by Sengar's brother, Atul Singh. According to her, despite filing multiple bail applications, her uncle has not been granted relief.

"On the other hand, the one who raped me, who got my father killed at the hands of his brother, is getting bail from the court. This means he is a powerful man with money," she said. Making serious allegations, the survivor claimed political backing was behind the decision. Reacting strongly to the development, the survivor told IANS, "I want to say only this, that



am not happy with this High Court judgment. I felt that I could have ended my life, but then I thought about my children and my family. But then I thought that God has given me life, so I should fight for justice." She also pointed to what she described as a glaring injustice in the legal process, referring to her uncle, whom she said was falsely implicated in a two-decade-old case filed by Sengar's brother, Atul Singh. According to her, despite filing multiple bail applications, her uncle has not been granted relief.

"On the other hand, the one who raped me, who got my father killed at the hands of his brother, is getting bail from the court. This means he is a powerful man with money," she said. Making serious allegations, the survivor claimed political backing was behind the decision. "He has all the backing from Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. I think they have bribed the judge. That is why this decision was taken. This is an injustice. I will go to the Supreme Court," she told IANS. The survivor also spoke about alleged police high-handedness during a recent protest. She said she and her family members were forcibly stopped from holding a dharna near India Gate. "When we went to India Gate, the

police did not let us hold a dharna. The police belong to the BJP. They picked me up in an improper manner. I have 250 stitches all over my body, despite that I was improperly picked up and thrown into the bus," she alleged. She further claimed that she was taken to a police station and later released, adding that social activist Yogita Bhayana, who was accompanying her during the protest, was also treated in a similar manner.

Meanwhile, the survivor's mother voiced grave fears about the safety of her family following Sengar's release on bail. "They have tried to kill us several times. We are not happy with the decision. They will find us, torture us and kill us. My husband was brutally killed, my brother-in-law is in jail, my sister-in-law and her sister were also killed; they will kill us all," she said, adding that the authorities had withdrawn the family's security cover.

Expressing loss of faith in the judicial process, the mother told IANS, "Now, I do not have any trust in the Delhi High Court. How can they grant bail to such a powerful man who has committed such a heinous crime?" The Unnao rape case has been marked by a series of tragic incidents involving the survivor's family.

## Lamborghini Esperienza Giro India 2025 celebrates passion and performance across iconic landscapes

India: Lamborghini India successfully concluded the 5th edition of Lamborghini Esperienza Giro India 2025, its flagship luxury experiential driving programme, bringing together over 80 Lamborghini customers and more than 40 supercars across breathtaking routes in North and South India. Covering over 1,500 kilometres in three days, the event marked a significant milestone as Lamborghini accelerates towards 800 cars on Indian roads. For the first time, Esperienza Giro India adopted a dual-route format, with independently curated journeys led by dealer teams from Delhi-Mumbai and Bengaluru. This unique approach allowed customers to participate closer to home while exploring exclusive, lesser-travelled routes and diverse landscapes. The northern route took participants through the scenic Aravalli ranges, spanning Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. The convoy passed through Rajasthan's desert-scrub terrain and winding regional roads, culminating at the majestic 14th-century Fort Barwara, before continuing



through Uttar Pradesh's heritage corridors towards the iconic Taj Mahal. The drive blended scenic beauty, cultural richness, and historic grandeur. Meanwhile, the southern route unfolded across Karnataka, beginning in Bengaluru and sweeping through curving highways into the lush hills of Coorg, followed by a culturally immersive drive to Mysore. Guests experienced royal hospitality hosted by the Maharaja of Mysore and visited landmarks such as the Mysore Palace, seamlessly combining performance driving with Southern India's heritage and culture.

Speaking on the occasion, Ms. Nidhi Kaistha, Head, Lamborghini India, said India remains one of Lamborghini's most dynamic and fast-evolving markets, driven by a younger and highly engaged customer base. She noted that the brand's fully hybridated product range and immersive experiences like Giro strengthen customer relationships and reflect India's unique energy, ambition, and diversity. Esperienza Giro India 2025 once again reinforced Lamborghini's commitment to delivering world-class ownership experiences while celebrating performance, lifestyle, and community across India.

## P.V. Prabhakar Rao pays tributes to P.V. Narasimha Rao on death anniversary

Hyderabad: Paying rich tributes to former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao on his 21st death anniversary at PV Ghat, his son P.V. Prabhakar Rao said that Rao's legacy went far beyond the historic economic reforms for which he is widely remembered. Describing him as a Karma Yogi and a Sthitaprajna, he said Narasimha Rao combined deep intellectual strength with inner composure while steering the nation through a crucial phase of transition.

Recalling his multifaceted contributions, Prabhakar Rao said the former Prime Minister played a key role in advancing land and education reforms, firmly believing that social equity and empowerment through knowledge were essential for India's long-term progress. He highlighted Rao's efforts in expanding Navodaya Vidyalayas, which brought quali-



ty education to rural and underprivileged students across the country.

He also underlined Rao's visionary foreign policy initiatives, especially the Look East Policy, which reshaped India's engagement with Southeast Asia and strengthened its strategic and economic presence in the region. India's progress in nuclear capability and missile technology, he said, was guided by Rao's strate-

gic foresight and quiet determination, laying a strong foundation for national security and technological self-reliance.

"His leadership blended scholarship with humility, courage with consensus, and reform with stability. The imprint of his ideas is clearly visible in the New India of today," Prabhakar Rao said.

The commemorative programme was attended by several prominent personalities, including H. Venugopal Rao, advisor to the Telangana government; S. Rajaiah; N.V. Subhash, BJP Chief Media Spokesperson; Dr. Jithender Rao Thanugula, senior journalist and Telangana Youth Journalists Federation president; P.V. Sharath; P. Susheel Kumar; P.V. Madhan Mohan; P.V. Kiran; M. Hari Babu; and Uday Nagaraju, along with admirers, well-wishers, and members of the P.V. Narasimha Rao family.



# Karnataka Cong crisis: Love to be party worker than holding any post, says Shivakumar

New Delhi, Dec 24 : Amid the leadership row, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and State Congress President D. K. Shivakumar has said that he would prefer being a party worker rather than holding any post.

Addressing a press conference at Karnataka Bhavan in Delhi, he said, "I love being a party worker more than holding any position in the party. That



is a permanent position for me. Since 1980, I have been a party worker, and I will continue to be a party worker in the future as

well."When asked whether he would be happy continuing as Deputy Chief Minister for five years, Shivakumar replied, "I

will remain a party worker. The position of party worker is the only permanent position for me."

Responding to another question, Shivakumar said, "On this trip, I am not meeting anyone because I don't think anyone is here. I will not meet any national leaders in Delhi, as no one is currently in the city. AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge is in Bengaluru.

# Deve Gowda Made Party in Supreme Court Writ on NICE Project

Bengaluru: Former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda revealed that a writ petition concerning the Bengaluru-Mysuru Infrastructure Project (NICE) has been filed in the Supreme Court, and he has been named as a party in the case. Speaking at a press conference at JP Bhavan, he said the State Government, some farmers, and himself are included as parties.

Deve Gowda noted that the project, covering Bengaluru, Mandya, and Mysuru, involved the construction of five townships and concrete roads and had received the concurrence of the Finance Department during his tenure



as Chief Minister, when Siddaramaiah was Finance Minister. He criticised the appointment of additional legal consultants for the matter, alleging that around Rs.55 lakh is being spent on lawyers despite the presence of State Government legal advisors.

"I still have the determination to fight. I have the strength to struggle," he

asserted, highlighting the prevalence of contract workers in government institutions and unfilled vacancies, citing Victoria Hospital as an example.

Deve Gowda also criticised the current State Government for blaming the Centre for every issue, saying such criticism is unproductive. He emphasised the importance of attending DISHA meetings with the Prime Minister and taking proactive steps for Karnataka.

He further announced that the party will organise conventions in Hassan and Bagalkote from January 23 to 25 to highlight the State

Government's failures, including its inability to continue pro-people programmes initiated during Kumaraswamy's tenure. On the renaming of the MGNREGA scheme, Deve Gowda commented on Congress' criticism, pointing out the party's historical lack of respect for Mahatma Gandhi during its rule and defended the Modi government's management of funds and workdays under the scheme.

Legislative Council Member T.N. Javarai Gowda, former members K.A. Tippeswamy, Choudareddy Thoopalli, and others attended the press meet.

# I Want to Remain a Party Worker, Not Chase Power: DCM DK Shivakumar



New Delhi: Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, addressing the media at Karnataka Bhawan, emphasised that his priority has always been the party over personal power. "I have worked incessantly for the party since 1980. I would like to remain a party worker," he said, responding to queries about whether he aims to serve a full term as Chief Minister.

On rumors of a change in leadership after Sankranti, Shivakumar clarified, "The discussion is happening in the media. There is no such discussion either in the party or the government." He further stated that the government functions as a team, highlighting the contributions of all MLAs and party workers in bringing the party to power. Regarding dinner meetings with ministers and industrialists, he downplayed their significance,

saying, "We keep meeting regularly; there is nothing special about it." When asked about meeting the party High Command, he added that he would not disturb Rahul Gandhi, who had just returned from travel. On questions about the Ahinda convention in Mysuru, Priyanka Gandhi's role, and Cabinet expansion, Shivakumar maintained a disciplined stance, deferring to party leadership and the Chief Minister.

He also responded to concerns raised in letters by K N Rajanna about election lapses under his presidency, saying, "I don't have enough experience; I will come back with a degree training." Shivakumar's statements underscore his focus on party loyalty and collective leadership rather than personal ambition.

# New Psychological Thriller 'Vikalpa' Set to Captivate Kannada Audiences



Bengaluru: The Kannada film industry is all set to welcome a fresh cinematic experience with 'Vikalpa', a psychological thriller produced and led by newcomer Prithviraj Patil. Currently in the final stages of post-production, the film explores the hidden emotions and inner turmoil of the human mind, combining suspense with gentle humor and entertainment. 'Vikalpa'—meaning a state between reality and imagination—has been crafted with guidance from skilled psychiatrists to ensure authentic depictions of mental health. The majority of the film was shot across Bangalore, Thirthahalli, Sagar, Sirsi, Kundapur, and Yellapur, with select sequences filmed internationally in Singapore and the Netherlands. The film brings together a unique blend of young talent and seasoned artists, including Nagashree Hebbar, Sandhya Vinayak, Ganapathi Vaddinagadde, Swaroop Bach, Harini Srikanth, and Yakshagana award-ee Gode Narayan Hegde. Veteran technicians such as Mithun Thirthahalli (direction), Abhiram Gowda (cinematography), Suresh Arumugam (editing), and Samvatara (music) ensure high-quality storytelling and production. Prithviraj Patil, also the film's lead actor, said, "'Vikalpa' is a gift to mature Kannada audiences who value strong storylines and well-crafted cinema.

**Protium**  
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Notice is hereby given to the Borrowers as mentioned below that since they have defaulted in repayment of the Credit facility availed by them from **Protium Finance Limited** (Formerly known as Growth Source Financial Technologies Ltd.) and before that known as Growth Source Financial Technologies Pvt. Ltd.), their loan credit facility has been classified as Non-Performing Assets in the books of NPAFC as per RBI guidelines thereto. Thereafter NPAFC has issued demand notices to below mentioned respective borrower under section 13(2) of the **Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (SARFAESI Act, 2002)** on the last known addresses of the said borrowers thereby calling upon and demanding from them to pay the amounts mentioned in the respective Demand Notice's within 60 days from the date of the respective Notice's, as per details given below, together with further interest at the contractual rate on the below mentioned amount and incidental expenses, cost, charges etc. as stated in the said demand notices. However, the service is also being done by us by way of this publication as per Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 (SARFAESI Rules).

S. N.	Loan Account No./ Name and address of Borrower and Co-Borrower/s	Date of NPA	Demand Notice Date
1.	Loan Account No. GS041EEL2164078, Borrower - Hotel Sri Annapoorleshwari (Through its proprietor Byrappa Bandepada, S/o Byrappa), Number - Chikhatrupathi Main Road, Devanagiri Near Indian Gas Plant, Hoskote Bangalore, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560067, Co-Borrower, 1. Narayanappa Pramila, 2. Byrappa Bandepada, Thindlu Devanagiri Bangalore, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560067	01.12.2025	09.12.2025

**DESCRIPTION OF THE SECURED ASSETS/MORTGAGED PROPERTIES:** All that piece and parcel of the property bearing No. as per Panchayat records property No. 191/86/4, E-Katha No. 15030040560100252, situated at Thindlu Village, Jadedeghalli Hobli, Hoskote Taluk, Bangalore Rural District, presently within the Khajihosahalli Village Panchayath, measuring east to west 18.288 meters and north to south 4.408 meters, in all measuring 117.06 square feet, along with building constructed thereon and bounded on East by: Own property and road, West by: Property belongs to Chandrappa, North by: Property belongs to Chandrappa and Narayanappa, South by: Property belongs to Marappa, together with all other rights, buildings, improvements, and easements appurtenant thereto.

We hereby call upon the borrower stated herein to pay us within 60 days from the date of this notice, the outstanding amount of more particularly stated in respective Demand Notices issued, together with further interest thereon plus cost, charges, expenses, etc. thereto failing which we shall be at liberty to Sale, proceed against the above Secured Asset(s)/Immovable Property (ies) under Section 13(4) of the said Act and the applicable Rules not limited to taking possession and selling the secured asset entirely at the risk of the said borrower(s)/co borrower (s)/Legal Heir(s)/Legal Representative(s)at your own and consequent.

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Please note that as per sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, if the dues of **Protium Finance Limited** (Formerly known as Growth Source Financial Technologies Ltd) together with all costs, charges and expenses incurred by **Protium Finance Limited** (Formerly known as Growth Source Financial Technologies Ltd) are tendered to **Protium Finance Limited** (Formerly known as Growth Source Financial Technologies Ltd) any time before the date fixed for sale or transfer, the secured asset shall not be sold or transferred by **Protium Finance Limited** (Formerly known as Growth Source Financial Technologies Ltd) and no further step shall be taken by **Protium Finance Limited** (Formerly known as Growth Source Financial Technologies Ltd) for transfer or sale of that secured asset.

Date: 25.12.2025, Place: Karnataka Sd/-, For Protium Finance Limited, Authorised Officer

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EDITORIAL

Instagram love

Riya had been passionate about taking photographs since childhood. While children her age were busy with toys, games, and petty quarrels, Riya would take a different look at any ordinary object. She even viewed the morning rays as if they were the first chapter of a tender story. She believed that every object, every person, every moment in the world held a secret that only she could capture. During her school days, she had acquired a simple camera—a cheap one from a small shop, but for Riya, it was the most precious companion in the world. That camera had given birth to the artist hidden within her.

Times changed, she went to college, and her inner feelings deepened. She lived in a small room in a corner of town. The walls were simple, but her photographs hung on them gave them a distinct identity. The photographs contained light, darkness, color, blur, and—most of all—emotion. Each photograph was like an unspoken sentence. Each image seemed to say that what sound cannot say in the world, shadows can. One day, her friends suggested she share her paintings on a platform. It was a place where people shared their thoughts, pictures, videos, and daily routines. Riya created her own page. She named it “Momentary Collection.” The name was gentle and simple, but people would stop by. Riya hadn't expected her art to be so well-received, but gradually her followers grew. One of those followers was Aarav. He silently liked each of Riya's paintings. He wouldn't leave a comment, he wouldn't send a long message, just silent praise. Sometimes, he would send a shining star, as if it were beaming its tiny light from the sky of a distant village into Riya's world. Riya found this both strange and fascinating. In a world where people were lost in appearances and details, this silent man both intrigued and captivated her.

One day, Riya suddenly asked him, “You like my paintings, but why don't you speak?” The reply came after a long time, “Words get lost somewhere... not images.” This sentence struck Riya's heart. For the first time, she felt that someone understood the silence hidden behind her photographs. After reading that reply, she stared at the ceiling until late at night. She wondered if there was someone who could understand her through the eyes of his camera. Slowly, a conversation began. First, a sentence or two. Then longer conversations. Then endless discussions that stretched into the night. Both of them began to reveal to each other corners of their hearts that they had probably never shown to anyone else. Riya often asked, “Why do you always send a shining star?” Aarav would reply, “Because stars are far away, but they give light. I'm like that too... perhaps I look good from a distance.”

Riya found this answer profound. She wondered who this boy was? What was it about him that made his words so tender? After a long time, they decided to meet. A quiet café was chosen—located on the edge of the old city, dimly lit with yellow lights and soft, melodious music playing.

When Riya arrived, her heart raced. She saw Aarav for the first time—an ordinary young man with no pretense or pretense. But his eyes... they seemed to have read the stories in Riya's photographs. As soon as he sat down, Aarav said, “You look as real as you do in your photographs. Maybe even more so.” This resonated deeply with Riya. That evening at the café, they didn't speak much, but their hearts spoke volumes. They remained silent and yet spoke.

Time passed, and their relationship deepened. They shared each other's dreams, pains, fears, memories, and unfinished pages. Riya now posted each photo as if she were speaking to Aarav. And Aarav read each photo as if he were listening to Riya's heartbeat. But life has its twists and turns. One day, Riya noticed that Aarav was repeatedly sending heart icons to another girl's story. Suspicions arose in her mind. She thought that perhaps he was talking like this not just to her but to others as well. Angered and hurt, she blocked Aarav. Now his messages were no longer visible, and she couldn't tell if he had even seen them. This small adjustment suddenly made Riya's world heavy and cold. A while later, Aarav sent a message— “Riya, I don't know why you did that. Maybe you thought I'd changed, but the truth is, I just sent a compliment on an old friend's story. If you thought I took you for granted, that's my fault. But I'm still the same star—trying to shine in your sky.” Riya was devastated upon reading this. Guilt surged within her. She lifted the bar and wrote, “Can we come out of the world of pretense and embrace each other in real life?” Aarav replied, “Yes. Because love isn't something that needs a cover to shine.”

'Rahul Unapproachable', Struggling Congress Bets On Priyanka Gandhi

Before Priyanka Gandhi Vadra finally joined active politics, adoring Congress folk used to call her the party's "Brahmastra", that is, the 'ultimate weapon'. Considering the buildup, many may say that the ultimate weapon proved to be rather a dud. Even so, the Congress party considered politics to be 'PGV's' manifest destiny. In the Winter Session of Parliament, PGV did not disappoint her admirers in the party with her impassioned speech on the Vande Mataram controversy. Unlike her sibling, the Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, who often ends up courting controversy on the floor of the House with his fiery comments, she managed to score points against the Modi government all with a smiling face and a gentle but unyielding speech. The cordiality didn't end there. PGV went ahead making friends and influencing people with a chat over tea and snacks with Nitin Gadkari, the Union Minister of Transport. Reportedly, six projects in Kerala featured in the discussion. Gandhi also attended the Speaker's tea - the first person from the Gandhi family to do so after the 2024 election results - and wasn't hesitant to share details about it outside Parliament. Rahul's Striking Absence "Sources" says that even senior government ministers were impressed by her 'Vande Mataram' intervention - at a time when Rahul Gandhi, ironically, seemed to have decided that a trip to Germany to meet the Indian diaspora was more important than missing a week of the Winter Session of Parliament. Many also credit PGV for ensuring that Shashi Tharoor and Manish Tewari, two Congress leaders who have long been left out in the cold in the 'Rahul' scheme of things, were allowed to speak in the House. A senior Congress leader considered close to PGV rightly points out: "when the cat is away, the mice will play". PGV's improved public persona - even if orchestrated and intentional - has aroused frenzied debate in the Congress party, which has long been devoid of anything positive to talk about and dampened after a



string of election defeats from Maharashtra and Haryana to Delhi and Bihar.<So, what gives, and what is the big takeaway from the 'public display of affection' for PGV? I spoke to six senior Congress leaders before writing this column, and there is across-the-board unanimity that the Congress needs to give PGV a bigger public role, perhaps on par with Rahul Gandhi. They say she is far more accessible than her brother and much more pleasant to deal with, with an ability to say 'no' with grace. On the other hand, say senior leaders, Rahul Gandhi is seen as unapproachable and comfortable only with his own coterie of leaders, who keep giving him "unworkable advice"; "without hearing you out", says a leader, "he [Rahul] will deliver his decision", cutting you off mid-sentence and leaving the room. Priyanka, in contrast to all that, is perceived and even respected for being a "listener". Let Her Take The Lead The thing, however, is that PGV has always chosen to downplay her role and, at least publicly, defers to her older brother. Another Congress leader insists that though the two siblings share a very warm personal equation, it is high time the party utilised her qualities to complement Rahul's leadership. Can't be more diplo-

matic than that, said another leader when I asked him. However, irrespective of whether this sharp spotlight on PGV is organic or manufactured, public opinion about giving PGV a larger campaign role is undeniable and only growing, reflected in viral and much-liked social media reels of her Parliament speech. Sources also state that a bigger role for her is a clear possibility, though they scoff at rumours that Sachin Pilot, another young leader, may be roped in to re-energise the All India Congress Committee. Pilot has made it very clear that his focus was and remains Rajasthan. Another buzz in the Congress is about PGV replacing the general secretary in charge of organisation, KC Venugopal, who is close to Rahul Gandhi but, reportedly, not very popular among many Congress leaders. In any case, Venugopal is unlikely to leave Gandhi's side till he is declared the face for the Kerala elections due next year. Nonetheless, expect PGV to shed her self-imposed reticence and take the lead both within and without Parliament with other opposition parties. Her meeting with Prashant Kishor after his gigantic Bihar defeat was one of the first of many such planned meetings. As for her sibling, Rahul, he remains the chief

ideologue and the man to whom much of the party and his own family defer - for now at least. One of the that catapulted Revanth Reddy to the Chief Minister's chair in Telangana is his aggression. He does not believe in keeping it subtle when he wants to drive a point home. When he spoke about "sacrifices" by Sonia Gandhi that have enabled Christians to celebrate Christmas in Telangana, it was not so much about sycophancy as a well-thought-out political strategy. As expected, it caught everyone's attention and sent the political mercury soaring. The BJP has called it "Olympic-level sycophancy and boot-licking" and said this was an insult to Jesus Christ and the Christian community, and mockingly suggested that the Congress may next claim the Sun rises because of the Gandhi family. The BRS called it political theatrics and recirculated videos from when Revanth Reddy was in the Telugu Desam Party and had reportedly referred to Sonia Gandhi as "Bali Devatha" (Deity of Sacrifice), blaming her for the death of young people during the movement for a separate state. Examine the statement: "If people are celebrating Christmas in Telangana today, it is because of Sonia Gandhi's sacrifice."

Ji Ram Ji: Faith and Hope in Rural India

The "Ji Ram Ji" scheme has set a new benchmark for trust and development in rural India. It reaches 1.25 billion beneficiaries, ensuring rural employment, local production, women's empowerment, and food security. Trust is built not by mere announcements but by results and consistent implementation. Criticism also suggests that a focus on long-term economic self-reliance and sustainability is essential. Through local industry, skill development and transparency, this scheme can become not only a symbol of relief but also of social justice and faith in democracy. In Indian politics, trust isn't just a word, but a reflection of public perception and policy outcomes. The "Developed India - Ji Ram Ji" bill and its associated schemes stand as a testament to this trust. When the central government introduced this bill in Parliament, it was driven by the ideals of sustainable development, social justice, and rural welfare. This bill is not just a legal document, but a symbol of schemes that will reach 1.25 billion people. The current government's vision is clear: development should not be limited to mere announcements. This requires lasting impact and transparent implementation

of plans. Policies such as rural employment, food distribution, women's empowerment, and minimum income security have been implemented. These policies have increased confidence and hope among rural and marginalized communities. The rural economy has always been vulnerable. A largely agrarian lifestyle, limited industrial development, and seasonal employment instability have forced rural people into temporary employment and migration. In this context, the central government's rural employment schemes are a conscious effort. This scheme not only provides employment but also promotes local construction and production activities in rural areas. The participation of women, the engagement of youth, and the use of local resources make the scheme sustainable and effective. This ensures that rural people feel economically secure and migration is reduced. Improving the fortunes of women is not only a question of social justice, but also a sign of economic development and community stability. Under the "Ji Ram Ji" scheme, women have been provided with employment and training opportunities. The impact is palpable—women have increased their contribution to their family

income, participated in local productivity, and developed decision-making power within their communities. This dimension of women's empowerment is crucial to the long-term success of the scheme. When women gain economic independence, standards of education, health, and nutrition at the family level also improve. Thus, the scheme is not limited to economic reforms alone, but also lays the foundation for social change. Food security has always been central to social politics in India. Providing essential food grains and minimum income security to the poor and marginalized is not just a matter of charity or relief, but a matter of justice and constitutional responsibility. The Ramji Bill took steps in this direction. The direct result of the scheme, which has reached 1.25 billion beneficiaries, is the creation of confidence in food and income. The poor are no longer trapped in day-to-day struggles, but instead feel a sense of participation and hope in future plans. This confidence reflects the strength of the relationship between the government and the people. Criticism is natural for all policies. The opposition has raised questions: Is this plan sufficient for long-term economic self-reliance? Is it merely a temporary relief?

Does its implementation ensure transparency and accountability? These questions are important. Development cannot be measured solely by immediate results. It must be seen as a combination of sustainability, monitoring, and timely improvement. Criticism also reminds us that political trust is built only when the results of a plan are consistently visible and match public experience. Political trust isn't built solely through election rallies or speeches. It's strengthened when the public sees, experiences, and feels the results. The "Ji Ram Ji" scheme is unique in this respect—it shows that public trust can be increased if the government maintains a balance between system, policy, and implementation. It is also crucial that the government continuously monitors and improves the scheme. The effectiveness of the scheme is maintained only when there is communication and accountability between the local administration, the Panchayat, and the beneficiaries. This is the greatest strength of democratic governance. The "Ji Ram Ji" bill has set a new precedent in terms of trust and policy. Certain steps are necessary to ensure its further success in the future. Sustainability and

expansion: The scheme should not be limited to existing beneficiaries only, but should be expanded with new technology and skill development. Transparency: Information, monitoring and reporting to beneficiaries in government schemes should be transparent. Local Industry and Production: Employment should not be limited to government work only, but local industry and self-employment should be encouraged. Women and youth empowerment: Participation of women and youth should be increased to ensure community-based development. Balance of economy and development: The schemes should not only provide employment or relief but also promote sustainable economic growth and self-reliance. The "Ji Ram Ji" bill and its associated schemes make it clear that trust and results are two crucial pillars of politics. Public trust is not built solely through announcements or speeches. It must be combined with implementation, transparency, and results. This initiative demonstrated that if the government implements schemes in a timely, effective and sustainable manner, trust not only lasts but also becomes a symbol of the strength of democracy and society.

FOLLOW THE FOOTSTEPS OF ALL

Follow the footsteps...  
Of the pen—where thought takes flight,  
Of the gun—where ends ignite.  
What is truth? What is right?  
Who casts the line 'tween dark and light?

The fence leaves prints on guarded ground—  
What do they shield? What truths confound?  
The school's soft steps on dusty floors  
Awaken dreams behind closed doors

What is toil? Who breaks the soil?  
A farmer's path is carved in toil.  
Worn his feet, yet firm they stand—  
He walks with hope across the land

The temple chants through silent stone,  
The school resounds with minds full-grown.  
What is kindness? What is grace?  
Do they still dwell in a stranger's face?

The tree stands tall, in quiet pride,  
Its roots below, its arms spread wide.  
A bird descends—unbound, unchained,



A dream with wings, by sky ordained

What is a bed but calm release?  
A cradle soft for mind's peace.  
What is the mind, that roams so far?  
A lantern chasing its own star

What is a mother, if not the limb  
That bends but holds when life grows dim?  
What is a branch but love extended—  
A bond that breaks not, though it's bended?

What is the link of branch and tree?  
A silent code of unity.

What is life but steps we make—  
Each one a ripple on fate's lake?

And in the sky, those glimmers burn—  
Footsteps of stars that don't return.  
The lark ascends on morning's breath—  
A song that dares the edge of death

I do not know what name is mine,  
Nor where begins my inner shine...  
But in each step—of all, of one—  
I walk until the path is done

- Dr Peruka Raju



## Ring in the New Year with a wholesome treat: Dark Chocolate Almond Orange Cake



As the festive season ushers in warmth and togetherness, this New Year brings a wholesome yet indulgent dessert option with the Dark Chocolate Almond Orange Cake, thoughtfully crafted by Chef Kabita Singh. Blending almond flour, rich dark chocolate, fresh orange zest, and maple

syrup, the recipe offers a modern twist to festive baking while keeping mindful eating at its core. Prepared with ghee and eggs, and made using nutrient-rich almond flour, the cake delivers a soft, moist crumb infused with deep chocolate and refreshing citrus notes. The result is a nourish-

ing yet celebratory dessert that is easy to prepare, perfect for sharing, and ideal for end-of-year gatherings. Sharing insights on festive eating, Ritika Samaddar, Regional Head – Dietetics, Max Healthcare, said that festive food need not be about excess or compromise. She highlighted that California Almonds are a natural source of protein, fibre, healthy fats, vitamin E, and essential minerals, supporting heart health, sustained energy, and satiety—especially important during the indulgent holiday season. Incorporating almonds into baking, she noted, allows people to enjoy festive treats while maintaining overall nutrition and well-being.

## FIFA World Cup Trophy Tour by Coca-Cola to visit New Delhi and Guwahati in January 2026



New Delhi: The Coca-Cola Company has announced that the FIFA World Cup™ Trophy Tour by Coca-Cola will arrive in India from January 10 to 13, 2026, giving football fans a rare opportunity to witness the original FIFA World Cup Trophy, the most coveted prize in world football. The Trophy will be showcased in New Delhi and Guwahati as part of its global journey ahead of the FIFA World Cup 2026™. Speaking about the tour, Mickael Vinet, Vice President, Global Assets, Influencers and Partnerships, The

Coca-Cola Company, said the initiative aims to bring fans closer to the heart of football by allowing them to experience the thrill, excitement, and emotion of the game up close. He added that bringing the original Trophy to India is a way to build anticipation and celebrate the universal passion for football. Karthik Subramanian, Senior Director, Marketing – Coca-Cola Category, India and Southwest Asia, said Coca-Cola has always played a key role in shaping cultural moments, with football emerging as a strong social connector. He noted that the partnership with FIFA allows Coca-Cola to transform a global sporting spectacle into local, memorable fan experiences, where people can stand before football's greatest symbol while celebrating the moment with an ice-cold Coca-Cola.

## Coke Studio Bharat LIVE to debut in Delhi and Guwahati in January 2026

Coca-Cola is set to create a landmark cultural moment with the first-ever public debut of Coke Studio Bharat LIVE, scheduled to take place in Delhi and Guwahati in January 2026. The new live format marks a significant evolution of the popular music platform, bringing together music, food, and cultural expression in an immersive, large-scale public experience.

For the first time, audiences will experience Coke Studio Bharat beyond screens, stepping into a live setting designed especially for music lovers and



India's youth. The initiative aims to unite fans and artists under one roof, celebrating the sounds and stories that have defined Coke Studio Bharat over the years.

Speaking on the launch, Shantanu Gangane, Integrated Marketing Experience (IMX) Lead, Coca-Cola INSWA, said Coke Studio Bharat has

grown into a powerful cultural platform rooted in music and storytelling. He noted that taking the experience from digital to live spaces was a natural progression, with Coke Studio Bharat LIVE aiming to create culture-shaping moments that celebrate India's rich musical heritage in an iconic Coca-Cola style. Coke Studio Bharat is known for curating folk traditions, regional dialects, traditional instruments, and contemporary sounds, blending authenticity with innovation

## Central Bank of India marks 115th Foundation Day with grand celebrations in Mumbai



Mumbai: Central Bank of India celebrated its 115th Foundation Day in Mumbai with a series of commemorative events, marking a significant milestone in its illustrious journey as India's first Swadeshi bank. Shri M. Nagaraju, IAS, Secretary, Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance, Government of India, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest.

Addressing the gathering, Shri M. Nagaraju said it was a privilege to be part of the 115th Foundation Day celebrations of Central Bank of India. He highlighted the bank's vital role in strengthening the nation's banking ecosystem and supporting inclusive economic growth. Commending the bank's sustained efforts in expanding financial access and delivering customer-centric services, he recalled the vision of the bank's founder Sir Sorabji Pochkhanawala, noting that the impact of a good bank extends far beyond its premises into commerce, industry, and all spheres of economic activity. He observed that the bank has

truly been an integral part of India's growth story, with a RAM loan share of 72 percent reflecting its strong commitment to serving the common man, along with improved business performance and profitability. Earlier, welcoming the Chief Guest, Shri Kalyan Kumar, Managing Director & CEO, Central Bank of India, spoke about Shri M. Nagaraju's distinguished career spanning over three decades, marked by rich administrative experience at the state, national, and international levels. He noted that as Secretary (DFS), Shri Nagaraju has played a pivotal role in strengthening India's banking, insurance, and financial inclusion framework. Shri Kalyan Kumar also highlighted the bank's extensive pan-India presence with 21,492 touch points, including 4,556 branches, of which over 65 percent are located in rural and semi-urban areas. As on the 30th, the bank's total business stood at Rs.7,37,938 crore, with CASA deposits accounting for 46.83 percent of total deposits.

## Vizag shopper spends Rs.5.84 lakh on Instamart as city upgrades to premium quick commerce in 2025

Vizag, December 24, 2025: Visakhapatnam, popularly known as the Jewel of the East Coast, is rapidly emerging as one of India's most dynamic quick-commerce markets, according to Instamart's latest consumer trends report, How India Instamarted 2025. The report reveals that a Vizag user splurged a staggering Rs.5.84 lakh in 2025, spending heavily on gold coins and premium iPhones, signalling a major shift in how the city shops for convenience.

The city recorded remarkable growth in non-grocery categories during the year. Purchases of bags and wallets surged by 434 percent, sports and fitness by 374 percent, and jewelry and hair accessories by 249 percent, highlighting Vizag's growing preference for lifestyle and premium products delivered at lightning speed. Electronics and appliances grew by 161 percent, while toys saw a 166 percent rise, reflecting a diverse mix of fashion,



fitness, technology, and family-focused shopping. Snacking continued to dominate Vizag's carts, with snacks emerging as the most-ordered category, followed by sugar, drinking water, and home essentials. The data reflects the city's blend of

indulgence, everyday convenience, and lifestyle upgrades. High-value purchases stood out in 2025, with iPhone 16 and iPhone 16 Pro among the most popular premium buys. Notably, one shopper placed the region's highest-value order by purchasing a 24-carat gold coin worth Rs.1 lakh, underlining growing consumer trust in quick-commerce platforms for big-ticket purchases. Commenting on the evolving shopping behaviour, Hari Kumar Gopinathan, Chief Business Officer, Swiggy, said that quick commerce in India has moved beyond last-minute convenience to become an integral part of modern lifestyles, encompassing planned and premium purchases alongside daily essentials. The findings position Vizag as a fast-evolving quick-commerce hub, where speed, style, and scale are reshaping everyday shopping habits in 2025.

## Maruti Suzuki VICTORIS wins prestigious Indian Car of the Year (ICOTY) 2026 award



New Delhi: The all-new Maruti Suzuki VICTORIS 'Got it All' SUV has been adjudged the winner of the Indian Car of the Year (ICOTY) 2026, one of the most coveted honours in the Indian automobile industry. The award was decided by a jury comprising leading automobile journalists from across the country, who evaluated vehicles on innovation, performance, safety, design, technology, and value.

Emerging victorious from a highly competitive list of finalists, the VICTORIS impressed the jury with its compelling combination of intelligent technology, premium comfort, comprehensive safety features, striking design,

and a versatile range of powertrain options catering to diverse customer needs. The ICOTY 2026 recognition further cements VICTORIS' positioning as an SUV that truly has "Got It All". Receiving the award, Mr. Hisashi Takeuchi, Managing Director & CEO, Maruti Suzuki India Limited, said the company was honoured by the recognition. He stated that the VICTORIS was designed to meet the expectations of new-age customers by seamlessly blending style, advanced technology, safety, and smart innovations. He added that the strong customer response, combined with the ICOTY award, reinforces the SUV's promise and thanked the ICOTY jury for the prestigious honour. The VICTORIS stands out with several segment-first features, including a "Theatre on Wheels" infotainment system with an 8-speaker premium sound experience featuring Dolby Atmos, and a 25.65 cm (10.1-inch) SmartPlay Pro X touchscreen.

## ARTSCAPE '25 celebrates dance, music and visual arts at GITAM Hyderabad



Hyderabad (TSIT): The Department of Fine and Performing Arts, GITAM School of Humanities and Social Sciences (GSHS), Hyderabad, successfully organized ARTSCAPE '25, a three-day cultural festival celebrating the spirit of performing and visual arts at the GITAM campus. The festival was inaugurated by the Honourable Pro Vice-Chancellor, Prof. D. S. Rao, in the presence of Dr. Shamuel Tharu, Director of GSHS, and Dr. Lalitha Sindhuri, Head of the Department of Fine and Performing Arts. ARTSCAPE '25 brought together eminent artists and art enthusiasts, showcasing the richness of Indian classical traditions. Day One commenced at

Kinnera Hall with "Divine Strings", a captivating veena recital by Vid. D. Srinivas. The concert opened with Muthuswami Dikshitar's "Mahaganapathim" in Ragam Natta, followed by Tyagaraja's popular kritis "Brovabharama" and "Nagumo". He was ably supported by Sri Dinakar on violin, Sri Ramakrishna on mridangam, and Sri Chandrakanth on ghatam. Day Two featured a Carnatic vocal concert by Vid. Anandhu Murali, who began with a Padavarnam composed by Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna in Ragam Gambheeranatta. The concert concluded with the evergreen "Harivarasanam". This was followed by a Bharatanatyam recital by Vid. Anju Aravind,

who impressed the audience with her expressive abhinaya in "Navarasamohana", a bhajan, and a concluding Tillana in Ragam Purvi. The final day opened with a thematic vocal performance by the Darbha Sisters, Vid. Harini and Vid. Mruduravalli, accompanied by Vid. Sai Kiran on tabla and Vid. Sai Raghava on flute and keyboard. The festival concluded with a vibrant Kuchipudi recital by Vid. P. B. Vaishnavi, featuring Tiruppavai and Tarangam. ARTSCAPE '25 stood as a vibrant celebration of artistic excellence, reinforcing GITAM's commitment to nurturing cultural heritage and creative expression among students and the wider community.

## Central Bank of India inaugurates NRI desks at Nampally and Rein Bazaar branches

HYDERABAD: Central Bank of India inaugurated dedicated NRI Desks at its Nampally and Rein Bazaar branches in the Hyderabad region on Monday, aiming to provide specialized and efficient banking services to Non-Resident Indian (NRI) customers. The NRI Desks were inaugurated by Shri Dharasingh Naik K., Zonal Head, Hyderabad Zone, in the presence of Shri D. K. Baranwal, Regional Head, Hyderabad Region, along with senior officials from the Zonal Office, branch



managers, bank staff, and customers. The newly launched NRI Desks will function as a

single point of contact for NRI customers, offering personalized assistance for services including NRE and

NRO accounts, remittances, deposits, loans, and other related banking requirements. The initiative is aimed at enhancing convenience and ensuring faster, more transparent service delivery. Addressing the gathering, Shri Dharasingh Naik K. highlighted the bank's commitment to strengthening customer service and expanding its NRI business. He urged staff to proactively engage with NRI customers and deliver quick, efficient, and customer-centric banking solutions.

## Tirupati resident spends Rs.3.89 lakh on Instamart, city emerges as quick-commerce hotspot in 2025

Tirupati: Tirupati is fast emerging as one of India's fastest-growing convenience-shopping hubs, according to How India Instamarted 2025, released by Instamart. The report reveals that the city is redefining quick commerce beyond groceries, with one Tirupati resident spending a staggering Rs.3.89 lakh on the platform in 2025. The top buyer's cart reflected a blend of fitness, technology, and everyday essentials, featuring Greek yogurt,



unflavoured whey protein, premium grooming tools, portable storage drives, high-capacity memory cards, and even a flagship smartphone.

Several other power users in the city followed closely, recording annual spends between Rs.1.8 lakh and Rs.2.3 lakh, highlighting Tirupati's

growing appetite for big-ticket, ultra-fast online shopping. Beyond daily essentials, Tirupati saw a sharp rise in non-grocery purchases. The sports and fitness category recorded an impressive 27-fold year-on-year growth, signalling the city's increasing focus on health and wellness. Demand for dry fruits, edible oils, cleaning products, and beauty accessories also rose significantly, pointing to more diverse and premium shopping baskets.



# Zelensky moves towards demilitarised zones in latest peace plan for Ukraine

Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky has given details of an updated peace plan offering Russia the potential withdrawal of Ukrainian troops from the east and the creation of a demilitarised zone in their place. Detailing the 20-point plan agreed by US and Ukrainian envoys in Florida at the weekend, Zelensky said the Russians would respond on Wednesday once the Americans had spoken to them. Describing the plan as "the main framework for ending the war", he said it proposed security guarantees from the US, Nato and Europeans for a co-ordinated military response if Russia invaded Ukraine again. On the key question of Ukraine's eastern Donbas, Zelensky said a "free economic zone" was a potential option. He told journalists that as Ukraine was against withdrawal, US negotiators were looking to establish a demilitarised zone or a free econom-

ic zone. Any area that Ukrainian troops pulled out of would have to be policed by Ukraine, he stressed. "There are two options," Zelensky said, "either the war continues, or something will have to be decided regarding all potential economic zones." The 20-point plan is seen as an update of an original 28-point document, agreed by US envoy Steve Witkoff with the Russians several weeks ago, which was widely seen as heavily geared towards the Kremlin's demands. The Russians have insisted that Ukraine pulls out of almost a quarter of its own territory in the eastern Donetsk region in return for a peace deal. The rest is already under Russian occupation. Sensitive issues including questions over territory would have to be resolved "at the leaders' level", but the new draft would provide Ukraine with strong security guarantees and a military strength of 800,000, Zelensky explained.



Much of the updated plan resembles what came out of recent talks in Berlin involving US negotiators Witkoff and Jared Kushner with Ukrainian and European leaders. The setting then moved to Miami last weekend where US President Donald Trump's team spoke separately to Russian envoy Kirill Dmitriev and then Ukrainian and European officials. There now appears to be far more detail on the

territorial issue, although it is clear the Ukrainian side was unable to reach a consensus with the Americans. Zelensky explained that if Ukraine was prepared to pull its heavy forces back by five, 10 or 40km in the 25% of Donetsk it still held to create an economic zone, making it virtually demilitarised, then Russia would have to do the same "accordingly by five, 10, or 40km". Russian troops are currently about 40km (25

miles) east of Ukraine's "fortress belt" cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, having captured the town of Siversk. Russian President Vladimir Putin is unlikely to be impressed by the kind of compromise being proposed for Donetsk. He said this month that Russia would take control of the entire east of Ukraine by force if Ukrainian troops did not pull out. However, Trump is pushing for a deal to end almost four years of full-scale war and the Ukrainian president believes Russia cannot afford to reject the US plan. "They cannot tell President Trump, 'look we're against a peaceful settlement'," Zelensky told reporters. "If they try to obstruct everything, then President Trump would have to arm us heavily, while imposing all possible sanctions against them." Zelensky made clear that if a free economic zone were established in Donetsk it would have to

be under Ukrainian administration and police - "definitely not the so-called Russian police". The current front line would then become the boundary of the economic zone with international forces on the ground along the contact line to ensure no Russian infiltration. Russia has so far rejected a European proposal to police any peace deal through a Coalition of the Willing as a "brazen threat". A referendum would need to be held on the whole peace plan, Zelensky said, and only a referendum could decide on the idea of a potential free economic zone in Donbas. He emphasised that an economic zone would also have to be set up around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant currently occupied by Russia, and that Russian troops would have to pull out of four other Ukrainian regions - Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolaiv, Sumy, and Kharkiv.

## Two police officers killed in explosion in Moscow



Three people - including two police officers - have been killed in an explosion in Moscow, Russian authorities have said. Two traffic police officers saw a "suspicious individual" near a police car on the city's Yeletskaia Street, and when they approached the suspect to detain him, an explosive device was detonated, Russia's Investigative Committee has said. The two police officers died from their injuries, along with another individual who was standing nearby. The blast took place close to the location where a senior Russian general was killed in a car bombing in the capital on Monday. Lt Gen Fani Sarvarov died after an explosive device - which had

been planted under a car - was detonated. Investigative Committee spokesperson Svetlana Petrenko said in a statement on Telegram that a criminal case was being investigated in Moscow "regarding an attempt on the lives of traffic police officers". The officers have been named by Russian media as Ilya Klimanov, 24, and Maxim Gorbunov, 25. Speaking to the Reuters news agency, Alexander, a resident who lives close by, said: "There was an explosion. It was loud bang - like with the car a few days ago." Russia said it suspected Ukraine was behind Monday's explosion, however Ukraine has not said whether it was involved in Fani Sarvarov's death.

## UK social media campaigners among five denied US visas



Two British social media campaigners are among five people denied US visas after the State Department accused them of seeking to "coerce" American tech platforms into suppressing free speech. Imran Ahmed, an ex-Labour adviser who now heads the Centre for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), and Clare Melford, CEO of the Global Disinformation Index (GDI), were labelled "radical activists" by the Trump administration and banned from entering the US. A French ex-EU commissioner and two senior figures at a Germany-based anti-online hate group were also denied visas. French President Emmanuel Macron called it "intimidation", while the UK government said it is "fully committed" to upholding free speech. "While every country has the right to set its own visa rules, we support the laws and institutions which are working to keep the internet free from the most

harmful content," a UK government spokesperson said. The US billed the measures as a response to people and organisations that have campaigned for restrictions on American tech firms, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio saying they belonged to a "global censorship-industrial complex". He said: "President Trump has been clear that his America First foreign policy rejects violations of American sovereignty. Extraterritorial overreach by foreign censors targeting American speech is no exception." Ahmed has links to senior Labour figures. He was previously an aide to Labour minister Hilary Benn, and Sir Keir Starmer's chief of staff Morgan McSweeney has served as a director of the group he founded. The US government labelled Ahmed a "collaborator" for the CCDH's purported past work with the Biden administration. News has contacted the CCDH for comment.

## Brazil's Supreme Court allows Bolsonaro to leave prison for surgery



=Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro has been permitted to leave prison to undergo surgery on Christmas Day following approval from Brazil's Supreme Court, court documents show. Bolsonaro is currently serving a 27-year prison sentence for plotting a coup after he lost the last election in 2022. Justice Alexandre de Moraes on Tuesday granted permission for Bolsonaro to temporarily leave prison and be transferred to a hospital on

Wednesday for a hernia operation on 25 December. Bolsonaro, 70, has faced ongoing health complications since being stabbed in the abdomen during a 2018 presidential campaign. In April, the right-wing former president underwent intestinal surgery. By November, Justice Moraes, who also oversaw his trial, mandated that Bolsonaro be given full-time medical care. Flávio Bolsonaro, the former president's son, posted a video to X on Wednesday with the caption: "Keep praying for the president." Bolsonaro was found guilty in September for plotting a coup d'état after he lost the 2022 election to his left-wing rival, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. The former leader is serving his sentence in a federal police jail in Brasília, the capital.

## VENEZUELA ACCUSES US OF 'EXTORTION' OVER SEIZURE OF OIL TANKERS

Venezuela has accused the United States of the "greatest extortion" at an emergency session of the UN Security Council in New York. Washington's seizure of two Venezuelan oil tankers was "worse than piracy," the Venezuelan ambassador to the UN said. The emergency meeting of the Security Council was called to discuss the seizure of the tankers, which took place off the coast of Venezuela earlier this month. The US has also said it was pursuing a third Venezuelan oil tanker. President Trump has accused Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro of leading a drugs cartel and said gangs had operated with impunity for too long. On 16 December, Trump ordered a naval blockade of all sanctioned oil tankers entering



and leaving Venezuela. The US president has said the US will keep or sell the crude oil it has taken, as well as the vessels themselves. The US has been building up its military presence in the Pacific and Caribbean Seas in recent months, sending 15,000 troops and a range of aircraft carriers and warships to the area. It is the largest deployment to the region since the US invaded Panama in 1989,

and the stated aim is to stop the flow of fentanyl and cocaine to the US. The US has carried out strikes on what it says are Venezuelan drug-smuggling boats, targeting more than 20 vessels and killing at least 100 people. Some experts say the strikes could violate laws governing armed conflict. Venezuela's envoy to the UN said the US was subjecting his country to the "greatest

extortion" in its history. Speaking at the UN Security Council meeting on Tuesday, Samuel Moncada said "we are in the presence of a power that acts outside of international law, demanding that Venezuelans vacate our country and hand it over." Regarding the US seizure of Venezuelan oil, he added: "We are talking about pillaging, looting and recolonisation of Venezuela. "The government of the United States does not have jurisdiction in the Caribbean." Referring to the Venezuelan oil industry, he said: "What does that have to do with drugs?" In response, the US Ambassador to the UN, Michael Waltz, told the Security Council the US does not recognise Mr Maduro as the legitimate leader of Venezuela.

## Australia to deport British man charged with displaying Nazi symbols



A British national in Australia has had his visa cancelled and faces deportation for allegedly displaying Nazi symbols. The 43-year-old man living in Queensland was arrested and charged earlier this month, after allegedly using a social media account to post the Nazi swastika, promote pro-Nazi ideology and call for violence towards the Jewish community. The man was taken into immigration detention this week in Brisbane and is due to face court in January. Police have been cracking down on the use of prohibited symbols amid a recent rise in anti-semitism and right-wing extremism. Home Affairs

Minister Tony Burke said: "He came here to hate - he doesn't get to stay." "If you come to Australia on a visa, you are here as a guest," Burke told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) on Wednesday. Last month, Burke also revoked the visa of Matthew Gruter, a South African national who

had been living in Australia since 2022, after he was seen attending a neo-Nazi rally in front of the New South Wales parliament. Like Gruter, the British man can appeal his visa being revoked. He can leave Australia voluntarily or wait to be deported to his home country. It is understood police are assessing

whether to delay deporting the man so he can face court next month. The BBC has contacted the UK Foreign Office for comment. Earlier this year, Australia tightened its hate crime laws, introducing mandatory jail terms for displaying hate symbols or performing a Nazi salute. Police began investigating the British man in October over alleged posts on X. The social media platform blocked his account, prompting him to create a new one with a similar name where he continued posting offensive and harmful content, police said. Authorities searched the man's home in Caboolture, on the outskirts of Brisbane.

## TWO DEAD after Pennsylvania nursing home explosions



Two people have died and 20 others have been injured after two explosions and fire at a Pennsylvania nursing home caused a partial collapse of the building. Emergency crews were called to the Silver Lake Nursing Home in Bristol at about 14:00 local time (19:00 GMT) on Tuesday after receiving reports an initial explosion and an odour of gas, said fire chief Kevin Dippolito. Crews evacuated people from the building, and just "15 to 30 seconds" after they left, there came a second explosion and a fire, Mr Dippolito added. Authorities have suggested the cause could have been a gas leak, though their investigation is ongoing. In a statement to US media, local gas firm PECO said the explosion occurred while its crews responded to reports of a gas smell. PECO said it was not yet known whether its gas or equipment was involved. Images and videos posted on social platforms by local media outlets show a

partially collapsed building with massive flames billowing out of it. Recalling the effort to rescue people from the building after the first blast, Mr Dippolito told reporters that "there was one police officer who literally threw two people over his shoulders and ran" with them towards medical staff. Several people were trapped in the basement of the collapsed building but were rescued, Mr Dippolito also said. Five people whose whereabouts were initially unknown were later accounted for, said Charles Winik, the police chief. Debris was reportedly found scattered in the surrounding area. A man who lived a block away described hearing a "loud ka-boom" as he watched television. "I thought an airplane or something came and fell on my house," Willie Tye told the AP news agency, adding that he then saw "fire everywhere". Relatives of those living at the nursing home described their concern as they awaited news.

## Libya's army chief killed in air crash in Turkey

The Libyan army chief has been killed in an air crash in Turkey, Libya's prime minister has said. Gen Mohammed Ali Ahmed al-Haddad was on board a Falcon 50 aircraft flying out of the Turkish capital, Ankara, on Tuesday evening. He was killed along with four other military officials and three crew members. Turkish Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said signal with the business jet was lost at 20:52 local time (17:52 GMT) - about 42 minutes after it took off from Ankara's airport. The Tripoli-bound jet had issued an emergency landing request before contact was lost. The aircraft's wreckage was later found south-west of Ankara, and



its voice recorder and black box had been recovered. The emergency services are still trying to retrieve the bodies. An investigation is under way into what caused the crash. In a post on X, Yerlikaya wrote that police had spotted the debris near the village of Kesikkavak, in the Haymana district. In Libya,

Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, the prime minister of the country's internationally-recognised Government of National Unity (GNU), said he had received news of the deaths of Gen Haddad and other senior Libyan military officials on board the jet. The prime minister called it a "great loss" for the nation.

## Border villagers abducted and taken to Russia, says Ukraine

Fifty-two residents of a Ukrainian village have been taken to Russia by invading forces in a cross-border raid on the village of Hrabovske, authorities in Kyiv say. Thirteen Ukrainian soldiers were also captured in the border village in the north-eastern Sumy region. The attack occurred at night on Saturday, when about 100 Russian troops attacked the village, said Viktor Trehubov, a spokesman for Ukraine's military Joint Forces Task Force. The civilians were first rounded up in a church and then taken across the border to Russia, he told the BBC. It was unusual for invading forces to take civilians to Russia before establishing a firm presence in occupied



territory, he added. Russia has so far not commented on the fate of civilians from Hrabovske, but reports from Ukraine indicate they may have been taken to Belgorod, a major regional centre about 50 miles (80 km) inside Russia. "My friends' mother has been taken there. There is no way of contacting her even

though they tried," said Volodymyr Bitsak, a member of the Sumy regional council. "As far as I know, they've been taken to the city of Belgorod and are being held at an unknown location." Lt-Col Trehubov told the BBC on Tuesday evening that fighting was still ongoing in the southern part of Hrabovske.



# Rohit, Kohli Smash Statement Hundreds On Vijay Hazare Trophy Return

Star Indian batters Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli smashed centuries on their return to action in the Vijay Hazare Trophy on Wednesday. Rohit, in his first appearance in the tournament after seven years, slammed a sensational 94-ball 155 as Mumbai thrashed Sikkim by eight wickets in their Elite Group C match in Jaipur. Kohli, who last played in the Vijay Hazare Trophy during the 2010-11 season, reached triple figures in 83 balls during Delhi's Elite Group D fixture against Andhra Pradesh. Rohit was named 'Player of the Match' for his efforts after he helped Mumbai chase down a below-par target of 237 in 30.3 overs. Kohli, on the other hand, led the charge in Delhi's pursuit of 299 against the Nitish Kumar Reddy-led Andhra Pradesh side. During his knock on Wednesday, Kohli achieved the milestone of 16,000 List A runs. Kohli's 16,000-run feat makes him only the second Indian player, after legendary batter



Sachin Tendulkar, to reach this figure in List A cricket. The 37-year-old now stands as the ninth player overall to breach this milestone, joining the ranks of cricketing legends like Tendulkar, Ricky Ponting, Kumar Sangakkara, Sir Vivian Richards, and others. Kohli's last appearance in the Vijay Hazare Trophy came during the 2010-11 season, where he



captained Delhi. He would go on to play in the NKP Salve Challenger Trophy in 2013-14 but had not participated in the Vijay Hazare for nearly a decade before this comeback. His return to the competition was eagerly anticipated, and his achievement was a fitting start to Delhi's campaign. Meanwhile, in Ahmedabad, wicketkeeper-batter Ishan Kishan made a strong case

for an ODI recall after blasting a 33-ball century for Jharkhand against Karnataka. Kishan's blazing ton is the second-fastest by an Indian in List A cricket, just one delivery behind Bihar captain Sakibul Gani's record 32-ball century against Arunachal Pradesh, which also happened earlier on Wednesday. Virat Kohli has once again etched his name

in cricketing history, reaching the remarkable milestone of 16,000 List A runs during his return to the Vijay Hazare Trophy on Wednesday. Playing for Delhi in their clash against Andhra Pradesh at the BCCI's Centre of Excellence, Kohli achieved the feat with his first run in the team's chase of 299. This landmark moment further cements his status as one of the greatest ever in the 50-over format. Kohli, making a return to the Vijay Hazare Trophy, achieved the milestone in his 330th innings in the tournament. Tendulkar had achieved the landmark in 391 innings. Kohli's 16,000-run feat makes him only the second Indian player, after legendary batter Sachin Tendulkar, to reach this figure in List A cricket. The 37-year-old now stands as the ninth player overall to breach this milestone, joining the ranks of cricketing legends like Tendulkar, Ricky Ponting, Kumar Sangakkara, Sir Vivian Richards, and others.

## ISHAN KISHAN FIRES 33-BALL HUNDRED AS RECORDS TUMBLE IN VIJAY HAZARE TROPHY

Be it Vaibhav Suryavanshi, Sakibul Gani, or Ishan Kishan, Indian cricket found three knocks to cherish on the opening day of the Vijay Hazare Trophy 2025-26 campaign. While Suryavanshi and Gani scored 36-ball and 32-ball tons for Bihar on Wednesday, Ishan proved his worth by smashing a 33-ball hundred for Jharkhand. The trio's heroics with the bat kept cricket statisticians busy the entire day, compiling the standings of fastest hundreds in List A cricket history. As if the fireworks in Ranchi weren't enough for one day, Ahmedabad delivered its own cricketing aftershock in an Elite-group clash between Jharkhand and Karnataka. Jharkhand captain Ishan Kishan, who was recently named in India's squad for the T20 World Cup 2026, produced a blistering 33-ball century, securing the second-fastest ton on the all-time Indian list. Kishan's whirlwind innings sits just



behind Gani's record-breaking 32-ball effort and effectively demoted Suryavanshi's 36-ball hundred to fourth place, with the standings being shuffled thrice in a span of a single day. Finishing with a mammoth 125 off just 39 deliveries, Kishan propelled Jharkhand to a total of 412/9 after coming out to bat at the No. 6 spot. Earlier, Karnataka won the toss and opted to field. Jharkhand had a shaky start as opener Utkarsh Singh was removed for just eight runs. Shubh Sharma also departed early as Shreyas Gopal cleaned

him up for 15. Shikhar Mohan played a decent innings of 44 before Abhilash Shetty removed him in the 24th over. From there, Virat Singh and Kumar Kushagra took forward Jharkhand's innings, stitching a partnership of 129 runs for the fourth wicket before Kushagra was removed by Gopal for 63. Singh soon followed him back to the pavilion after making 88 runs in just 68 runs. Kishan gave Jharkhand the finishing touch to the innings with a 33-ball century, which powered Jharkhand to 412-9 in their 50 overs.

## Faster Than Vaibhav Suryavanshi: Bihar Teammate Rewrites Record Books With 32-Ball 100

It is not often that you can overshadow the brute power-hitting of 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi, but that is exactly what his Bihar teammate Sakibul Gani did during their Vijay Hazare Trophy Plate match against Arunachal Pradesh on Wednesday. While Suryavanshi slammed his century in just 36 balls en route to an 84-ball 190, Gani smashed his own century even quicker - in just 32 deliveries - making it the fastest-ever List A century by an Indian. Gani went past Punjab batter Anmolpreet Singh's 35-ball ton against Arunachal Pradesh in 2024. Gani eventually ended unbeaten on an astonishing 128 off just



40 balls, hitting 12 sixes and 10 boundaries en route to his blitzkrieg. **READ | Vaibhav Suryavanshi Triggers Cricketing Quake, Bihar Smash 'World Record' 574 In 50 Overs** The combined efforts of Gani, Suryavanshi and wicketkeeper Ayush Loharuka (116 off 56) helped Bihar pile

up a gigantic total of 574/6 in 50 overs, making it the highest-ever total put up in professional one-day cricket. Suryavanshi's own 36-ball ton in the same match is the fourth-fastest by an Indian in List A cricket. Gani walked in to bat shortly after Suryavanshi's heroics had ended, with Bihar at

391/3 in 39.3 overs. At that point, Tamil Nadu's record of the highest one-day score (506) was in sight. However, Gani's efforts ensured that not only did Bihar create history, but they also obliterated Tamil Nadu's record. 26-year-old Gani hails from the city of Motihari in Bihar. A batting all-rounder, his stats suggest that he isn't the most destructive of hitters, possessing a List A strike-rate of only 71.95 before the match. However, on Wednesday, Gani unleashed his destructive best. Just five out of the 40 balls he faced were dots, with a total of 22 deliveries ending up beyond the ropes.

## Shubman Gill Vice-Captaincy Stunt Puts Ajit Agarkar In Line Of Fire: "Zero Planning"

Team India's T20 vice-captaincy strategy has backfired following Shubman Gill's omission from the T20 World Cup squad, forcing the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to reappoint Axar Patel as Suryakumar Yadav's deputy. While many have welcomed the decision to drop Gill based on form, former India international Mohammad Kaif criticised chief selector Ajit Agarkar for the "chaos" surrounding the leadership role. Kaif lambasted the board and the selection committee for what he described as a total lack of foresight regarding the World Cup squad. Axar Patel had originally been named vice-captain during the five-match series against England earlier this year,



but the management transferred the role to Gill upon his return to the side. However, after Gill was dropped following a dip in performance, the BCCI performed a U-turn to reinstate Axar. "The selectors knew there were better players

that the constant switching of deputies hindered Axar's development as a leader. "It is a loss for both Axar and the national team. If he had remained vice-captain, he would have been consistently involved in high-level team meetings and had the chance to refine his leadership skills. If Suryakumar Yadav were to pick up an injury, a better-prepared Axar would have known his squad inside out. That opportunity for growth was taken away from him," he remarked. While Kaif agreed that dropping Gill was the correct tactical move, he was scathing about the timing. "You backed Gill until the very last moment only to drop him at the finish line. It is the right call, but it has come far too late.

## Japanese golf great 'Jumbo' Ozaki dies aged 78



Japan's most successful professional golfer, Masashi 'Jumbo' Ozaki, has died at the age of 78. Nicknamed Jumbo because of his length off the tee, Ozaki won 94 times on the Japan Tour and topped the country's order of merit 12 times. He was in the top 10 of golf's rankings for nearly 200 weeks and was inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame in 2011. "While golf has long been popular in Japan, it was Ozaki who brought a new vitality to the game and his emergence spawned an unprecedented growth in the game in the country," said his profile on the World Golf Hall of Fame website., external Ozaki was a professional baseball player before switching to golf and winning his first tournament in 1973 at the age of 26, with his last coming when he was 55.

He had top 10 finishes at The Open, Masters and US Open and used to take a sushi chef with him when he played away from Japan "so that he and his entourage would feel more at home outside of their homeland". Ozaki also ventured into singing and had three singles in the Japanese charts in the late 1980s. A statement on the Japan Golf Tour Organisation (JGTO) website said Ozaki's son Tomoharu had announced his father had passed away after being diagnosed with colon cancer about a year ago. "The golf world has lost a truly great man," said JGTO chairman Yutaka Morohoshi., external "He long steered the men's professional golf world and overwhelmed others with his unparalleled strength."

## Excited To Work With Sourav Ganguly, Shaun Pollock: Pretoria Capitals Captain Keshav Maharaj

Pretoria Capitals skipper Keshav Maharaj is excited to have former Indian captain Sourav Ganguly and former all-rounder Shaun Pollock in their coaching staff. While Ganguly is the head coach of the Pretoria Capitals, Pollock is the assistant coach. "Yeah, obviously it's my first year with Pretoria Capitals. Managed to have a couple of conversations with Sourav sir, so really excited to get stuck in. I know the guys are playing two warm-up games, so wonderful opportunities to sort of put the plans into place and the style of cricket that we want to play," Maharaj said during a JioStar Press Room



ahead of SA20 Season 4. "But I think generally Pretoria is a high-scoring ground, so I think you want to allow the batters to do their job and find ways as a bowler to combat that. But it's really exciting. We've got some legends

of the game amongst our coaching staff and looking forward to feeding off their knowledge and energy come the competition," said Maharaj. Graeme Smith, the SA20 Commissioner, said the league has ticked several

boxes in its four-year existence, working as a fine feeder line for the national team. "I think credit needs to go to the players and the national team for their performance over the last couple of years. "I think our role at SA20 from the beginning, we've always said that we want to put 50, 60 players on the global map every year, expose them to the best possible cricket and help develop the player pool around the national teams. "And I think over the last couple of years, we've certainly seen a lot of players develop their game, go from talented youngsters to great international cricketers," said Smith.

## SA20 Will Make Up For Few T20I Games Ahead Of T20 World Cup: Kagiso Rabada

The SA20 fourth season will commence on December 26 and will run till January 25, 2026. With the T20 World Cup (February 7 to March 8) soon following the franchise league, the South African players are at a major advantage. Pacer Kagiso Rabada said the upcoming SA20 gives him a wonderful opportunity to get some valuable game time ahead of next year's T20 World Cup. Rabada missed the action during South Africa's recent tour to India because of a rib injury, but the MI Cape Town player now wants to sharpen his skills in the fourth edition of SA20. "Yeah, it's a fantastic opportunity to get games under your belt and get used to the flow of T20 cricket. We haven't really played much T20 cricket this year. So yeah, it's going to be a great tournament," Rabada said during a



JioStar Press Room ahead of SA20 Season 4. Rabada believes that playing in different conditions across South Africa during the league will pose a healthy challenge for players ahead of the ICC showpiece. "I think the teams this season have balanced out really well. In the previous three seasons, the management and the people who are responsible for

picking the teams have figured out what it takes to do well in South Africa with the varying conditions around the country. "So, those are the challenges-playing well in the different regions of the country. And as a bowler, how you need to adjust to that. The batters are looking strong and it's really exciting. So, it's going to be fantastic prep, I guess, if chosen for the

World Cup," said Rabada. South Africa's T20 captain Aiden Markram, who will be leading Durban Super Giants in this edition of the SA20, concurred with Rabada's views. "Naturally, it's great that we'll be playing T20 cricket literally up until days before the World Cup starts. But I don't think you want to be putting too much energy into your SA20 teams and asking guys to worry about the World Cup," he said. "It's two completely separate events and I think it's important that the players treat it that way. When we get to the World Cup, guys would have had a lot of T20 games under their belt. So, hopefully, there's some good confidence and good form that we can take forward and take care of the World Cup when we get to Indian shores," said Markram.

## DOES RELIGION HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN SPORT?



When Crystal Palace's Marc Guehi scored against Arsenal on Tuesday night, he did what he often does - point to the sky. Arsenal's Jurrien Timber - nicknamed 'Pastor Timber' by fans - followed suit when he scored in the penalty shoot-out at the end of the game. Both teams have influential players who have recently been discussing the importance of their Christian beliefs. And it's not just in football where we've seen contrasting headlines about professional athletes displaying their faith. Earlier this year, at the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo, GB sprinter Jeremiah Azu was warned not to wear a "100% Jesus" headband. But can your beliefs impact your performance - and how you are treated - in the sport you play? Sport governing bodies often have rules against displaying religious and political slogans during competition. Jeremiah wasn't formally punished for wearing his "100% Jesus" headband in a 400m semi-final, but World Athletics bosses

said they spoke to his team about the accessory. The 24-year-old says he now backs the rules separating religion from the track, but he's glad he did it. He tells BBC Newsbeat he believes his "strength" comes from his faith, and he wore the headband to show that. His father is a pastor, so Jeremiah says religion has always been a part of his life. "We read the Bible at home, we prayed at home," he recalls. He says his religion helps his performance in athletics. "As a Christian you have to be disciplined," he says, a trait he feels transfers over to track and field. "There's days where it's difficult to push, but I know I have to from the discipline I've got from my faith," he explains. Though Jeremiah says he's never felt "muted" when talking about his faith, up-and-coming athletes tell Newsbeat it's not always that simple. Semi-pro footballer Zainab El-Mouden, who plays for Chesham United FC Women, says there are challenges as a female Muslim player who wears a hijab.



# FUNKY’s First Single Dheere Dheere Out Now

The first single Dheere Dheere from FUNKY is out now. The melodious track is sung by Sanjith Hegde and Rohini Soratt, with lyrics penned by director KV Anudeep himself and music composed by Bheems Ceciroleo. The song is a soothing melody that effortlessly finds its place in listeners’ playlists. Featuring Vishwak Sen and Kayadu Lohar as the lead pair, the track presents a fresh and youthful chemistry that feels energetic and instantly engaging. Staying true to Bheems Ceciroleo’s signature style, the song emerges as an instant chartbuster. FUNKY brings together a power-packed team known for laughter, chaos, and pure entertainment. Director KV Anudeep returns to his trademark comic universe, promising a bigger, louder, and crazier cinematic experience. After the success of Jathi Ratnalu, he once again aims to captivate audiences with his quirky storytelling and infectious humour. Music director Bheems Ceciroleo set to deliver his style of foot-tap-



ping compositions, hinting at a lively and catchy album that adds rhythm and colour to the narrative. Produced by Naga Vamsi and Sai Soujanya, FUNKY is backed by Sithara Entertainments, Fortune Four Cinemas, and Srikrara Studios. Known for their rich production values and stylish presentation, these banners assure a grand and wholesome theatrical experience. With these power-

houses coming together, expectations are naturally high. With quirky characters, a refreshing lead pair, peppy music, and a director celebrated for comic chaos, FUNKY is set to deliver unlimited entertainment on the big screen. Film is scheduled for a theatrical release on February 13, making it a perfect entertainer for the Valentine’s weekend.

# “Haunted by My Words and Unable to Sleep for 36 Hours”: Shivaji Holds Press Meet, Apologises for His Remarks at the Dhandoraa Pre-Release Event

Actor Shivaji addressed the media at a specially convened press meet, offering a detailed and emotional apology for the remarks he made during the Dhandoraa pre-release event. Speaking with visible remorse, Shivaji said he deeply regrets using two unparliamentary words on stage and admitted that he realised the gravity of his mistake almost immediately after stepping down. He revealed that the impact of his words weighed heavily on him from the moment the event ended. “I couldn’t sleep for nearly 36 hours,” he said, explaining that he felt haunted by what he had said. The realisation, he noted, stayed with him continuously and pushed him to reflect on his responsibility as a public figure. Shivaji said the first apology he offered was to his wife, even before speaking publicly. Soon after, he released a video apology acknowledging his mistake. He admitted that his comments were born out of an emotional and protective instinct that surfaced after witnessing disturbing incidents at public events, including what happened to actress Nidhi Agerwal, followed by earlier incidents involving Samantha. He said these moments deeply shook him and pushed him into a heightened emotional state. Referring to how elders often speak about preserving culture and values, Shivaji said he spoke in a similar emotional line, but conceded that intent does not justify language. He acknowledged that the words he used were wrong and that speaking on a film-related public stage made the mistake even more serious. Reflecting on his public life, Shivaji pointed out that he has also been active in politics. He said that in all his years in public discourse, he has never used such language, not against political opponents and not in heated debates. His voice



faltered as he spoke about the consequences of this episode, admitting that he does not know how long it will take him to recover from it. With tears in his eyes, he said the impact would not be limited to him alone but would affect his family as well, reiterating his utmost respect for women. Explaining why he chose to hold a separate press meet, Shivaji said the decision was taken consciously in the interest of the film. He stated that he did not want his personal mistake to overshadow Dhandoraa, which he described as a content-driven film rooted in social reality. The promotional rollout for Dhandoraa has gathered strong traction. The first single, Pilla,

introduced a softer emotional register and crossed 3.2 million views, with its hook step gaining wide traction across social media. This was followed by the intense title track composed by Mark K. Robin, signalling a tonal shift and reinforcing the film’s confrontational edge. The teaser further strengthened anticipation with its grounded rural imagery, clocking 1.7 million views, while the trailer expanded the film’s reach even further, crossing 2.1 million views within just four days of release. Positioned as a rooted village drama within a fully commercial Telugu framework, Dhandoraa engages with caste and social hierarchies through a grounded narrative approach. Directed by Muralikant and produced by Ravindra Benarjee Muppaneni under Loukya Entertainments, the film features an ensemble cast including Shivaji, Navadeep, Nandu, Ravikrishna, Manika Chikkala, Mounika Reddy, Bindu Madhavi, Radhya, and Aditi Bhavaraju. On the distribution front, the Nizam rights have been acquired by Mythri Movie Makers, while Prime Show Entertainment is handling distribution across Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and the Ceded regions. Atharvana Bhadrakali Pictures has locked the overseas distribution, ensuring a wide international rollout, while T-Series holds the film’s audio rights. The film has completed censor formalities with 16 cuts and is witnessing early premieres today. With its strong pre-release momentum, wide distribution network, and a subject that directly confronts social realities, Dhandoraa now heads into theatres as a film positioned to leave an impact. Slated for a worldwide theatrical release on December 25, 2025, it arrives as a DRAMATIC end-of-the-year release for Telugu Cinéma.

# ‘Sumathi Sathakam’ teaser launched by ap chief whip G.V. Anjaneyulu – film releasing on february 6, 2026

The teaser of the upcoming Telugu film Sumathi sathakam was grandly launched by Andhra Pradesh Chief Whip Sri G. V. Anjaneyulu. The film is produced by Sai Sudhakar Kommalapati under the Vision Movie Makers banner and is written and directed by M. M. Naidu. Sumathi Shatakam is scheduled for a theatrical release on February 6, 2026. The film stars Amardeep Choudary and Sayli as the lead pair. Prominent roles are played by Tasty Teja, Mahesh Vitta, JDV Prasad, Akella Gopi Krishna, Kiran Vijay, Mirchi Kiran, Nellore Neeraja, Malakpet Shailaja, and others. The music is composed by Subhash Anand, cinematography is handled by S.

Halesh, and editing is done by Nahid Mohammed. Speaking at the event, Chief Guest Sri G. V. Anjaneyulu congratulated the entire team for making a good film and said that the teaser itself suggests that the movie will be a big hit. He wished the team great success and encouraged them to continue making more quality films in the future. Guest producer and actor Ashok Kolla appreciated the teaser and said that small films are achieving big successes these days, expressing confidence that Sumathi Shatakam would also emerge as a major success. He wished the producer, director, and the entire team all the best. Guest Kantamaneni Siva thanked everyone for attending the



event and extended his best wishes to the film unit for a successful release. Producer Bellamkonda Suresh said that the teaser clearly indicates the film’s success potential and expressed strong confidence that the movie would definitely be a hit. Producer Vamsi Nandipati said the

teaser felt very refreshing and wished the hero Amardeep, heroine Shaili, and director M. M. Naidu great success with the film. Kommalapati Sridhar thanked everyone who attended the teaser launch and expressed hope that the film would bring good recog-

nition to the hero, heroine, and director. He stated that Sumathi Shatakam is a clean, message-oriented entertainer made without hurting anyone’s sentiments. Music director Subhash Anand said he was happy to be part of the film’s journey and assured that the songs and background score would be a major highlight, with no compromise in quality. Actor Arjun Ambati appreciated the director’s dedication and thanked the producers for trusting Amardeep, wishing the entire team great success. Producer Sudhakar Kommalapati said the story impressed him as a complete family entertainer right from the narration stage. He highlighted Amardeep’s energetic and lively screen presence

and said the casting of Shaili added strong Telugu nativity to the film. He expressed confidence that the film, with its rooted title and content, would connect well with audiences. Heroine Sayli, making her debut with Sumathi Shatakam, thanked the director and producers for the opportunity and requested the media and audiences to support the film. Director M. M. Naidu thanked the producers for trusting him and appreciated the cast and technical team for their dedication. He expressed confidence that the audience’s support would make the film a success. Hero Amardeep Choudary said the film will be a complete entertainer with strong content, impressive music.

# Within first five minutes, the audience will be transported into the world of Shambhala: Heroine Archana Iyer



Shambhala: A Mystic World stars versatile actor Aadi Saikumar in the lead and is produced by Mahidhar Reddy and Rajasekhar Annabhimoju under the Shining Pictures banner. The film is directed by Ugandhar Muni, with music composed by Sricharan Pakala. Scheduled for a grand release on December 25, every piece of content released so far from Shambhala has impressed audiences. As part of the film’s promotions, heroine Archana Iyer interacted with the media. Here are the highlights from her conversation: Tell us about your background I’m a Telugu girl. I’m from Chittoor district, though I completed my education in Bengaluru. Telugu is my mother tongue. How has the response been for the Shambhala premieres? The response has been very good. Every premiere show is running houseful. In many places, audiences are genuinely getting scared while watching the film. Tell us about your character Devi Audiences

are really appreciating my role in Shambhala. Every time I appear on screen, they seem to feel happy. The combination scenes with Aadi are getting a great response. Many directors have already called me to congratulate me. What was your feeling when the director narrated the story of Shambhala? I actually said yes even before listening to the complete narration. The screenplay is brilliant. They clearly told me it’s not a role with romantic songs and dance numbers. I’m very happy that such a different role came to me at the very beginning of my career. Audience taste has changed a lot, hasn’t it? Yes, audiences are no longer very interested in watching routine films. They come to theatres only if there’s something new and interesting. After COVID, audience preferences have changed a lot. I feel lucky to get such a good film and role. How is Shambhala going to be? Within the first five minutes, the audience will be transported into the world of Shambhala.

# Tollywood Pro League, which was launched with great fanfare by Kapil Dev, Virender Sehwag, Suresh Raina, and Dil Raju...



Everyone knows that cricket and cinema are entertainment for Indians. There is an inseparable connection between the two. Keeping this in mind, Vamsi Chaganti, who has gained a good reputation as an actor, along with Irrfan Khan and Hari, organized the Tollywood Pro League. The inaugural ceremony of the ‘Tollywood Pro League’ was held with great pomp at the Novotel Hotel in Hyderabad. Legendary cricketers Kapil Dev, Virender Sehwag and Suresh Raina were present as the chief guests for this event. On this occasion, Vamsi Chaganti, one of the founders of the

Tollywood Pro League, said – “So far, we have all seen only stars playing cricket. What if everyone working in the 24 branches of the film industry put aside their posts and played cricket together? Our Tollywood Pro League was born from the idea. Once, when the police department was playing cricket with them, the openers, Police Boss C.V. Anand and Constable Loknad Naik, came out to bat and played very well with good coordination. Leaving aside their posts that day, the cricket game they played together remained in my mind. At that time, it seemed to me that many people working

in many departments in our industry also play cricket well. When I told ‘Dil’ Raju the idea that it would be good to bring them all under one roof, he assured me by saying, “Good idea, Vamsi, you execute this, I am behind you.” When Raju said, “Go head,” I did not think anything else. I immediately told this idea to Irrfan Khan and Hari of the EBG Group. They came forward and cooperated a lot in making such a great program. This five-day cricket tournament will be held on February 13, 14, 15, 21, 22 at the Uppal Stadium. Six teams will participate in these competitions. The six teams will be owned by leading

production houses in Tollywood. Who those producers are is a matter of suspense at the moment,” he said. Tollywood Pro League organizers Irrfan Khan and Hari said, “If your cooperation continues like this, our company EBG will continue such leagues all over India. We will donate a portion of the income generated from this cricket league to welfare programs through FDC Chairman ‘Dil’ Raju.” Dil Raju said, “The name of this league is Tollywood Pro League, but in my opinion, it feels like a Telugu film Alai-Balai, according to the Telangana tradition. When Vamsi came and

suggested this idea, it seemed very good. No matter what, I will take this Tollywood Cricket League forward and make it successful,” he said. The Tollywood Pro League logo, jerseys, and winner’s cup were released by Kapil, Sehwag, Suresh Raina, Dil Raju, music director Thaman, Irrfan Khan, Sonu Sood, Raashi Khanna, and Hari. Directors Anil Ravipudi, Prashanth Varma, Shailesh Kolanu, and Omkar, who attended the event, said, “The idea is to play cricket with everyone in the film industry. All the cricketers from 24 branches should be ready..let’s get ready.” A

cricket ad video starring Shailesh Kolanu was released. Producers People’s Media Factory TG Vishwaprasad, First Frame Entertainment Rajiv Reddy, ‘Sitara’ Naga Vamsi, Shine Screen Sahu Garapati, SVCC Bapineedu along with actors Ashwin Babu, Qayyum, Harsha Chemudu ‘Committee Kurrollu’ movie director Yadhu Vamsi and the entire team of the movie participated in this ceremony. Actors Murali Sharma, Ashish Vidyarthi, Dino Morea along with about 150 people playing cricket in various departments of 24 departments participated in this program.