

## NATION | NEWS

PM Modi slams 'parivarvad', says BJP restored legacy of Ambedkar and Patel



## WORLD | NEWS

POPE LEO URGES 'COURAGE' TO END UKRAINE WAR IN FIRST CHRISTMAS ADDRESS

## SPORTS | NEWS

Shashi Tharoor Sends Big 'Vaibhav Suryavanshi' Message To Gautam Gambhir, Ajit Agarkar, Namedrops Sachin



## IN BRIEF

5 killed in helicopter crash on Mount Kilimanjaro

**Dar Es Salaam (TSIT):** Tanzania's Civil Aviation Authority (TCAA) on Thursday confirmed that five people were killed on Wednesday after a helicopter crashed at the Barafu Camp on Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain. "With deep regret, the authority confirms that all five people on board lost their lives as a result of the accident," the TCAA said in a statement.

**School teacher shot dead on AMU campus**

**ALIGARH (TSIT):** A school teacher was shot dead by unidentified assailants on the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) campus, police said on Thursday. AMU Proctor Mohammad Waseem Ali identified the deceased as Rao Danish Ali, a teacher at ABK Union High School, affiliated with the university.

# Telugu states mark Christmas celebrations with pomp & gaiety



plies, youngsters and children.

Huge congregations were seen at SCI Wesley Church and 200-year-old St John's Church in Secunderabad. Devotees were seen thronging the churches since Wednesday night. Churches in other towns of Telangana and neighbouring Andhra Pradesh also witnessed special prayers.

The festivities began with midnight mass at many churches in Secunderabad, which has a sizable population of Christians.

There was an air of festivity as people exchanged Christmas greetings and gifts. Churches organised different cultural pro-

grammes for senior citizens, cou-

Methodist Church. The priests

prayed for peace and highlighted

the message of Jesus' birth.

The Anglo-Indian community

in Lalaguda in Secunderabad cel-

labeled Christmas with enthui-

asm and in a traditional manner.

In Little England, as Lalaguda is

known, the community cele-

brates the festival in their unique style. Cake and wine making at home is an integral part of the celebrations for the community. Attired in their best, men, women and children attended the midnight services in specially decorated churches. Christian families cut the cakes as part of

the celebrations and greeted each other on the occasion.

A huge congregation was seen at the historic Church of South India (CSI) at Medak in Telangana. The CSI celebrated its centenary last year. The Medak Cathedral Church, the second biggest of its kind in Asia, was constructed between 1914 and 1924. It has been built with granite in the Gothic style, with the story of the Bible painted on its stained glass windows. The historic church was illuminated on the occasion.

The Christmas celebrations were also held in Khammam, Adilabad and other towns in Telangana. In Andhra Pradesh, the celebrations were held in Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, Ongole, Kadapa, Bheemavaram and other towns. Christmas celebrations were also held at the Andhra Pradesh capital, Amaravati. In Prakasam district, pastors conducted special prayers at the century-old historical church, Chirala St Louis Marks Lutheran church.

## Vajpayee made India a nuclear power, says CM Naidu

**Amaravati (TSIT):** Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday unveiled a life-size statue of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at Venkatapalem and declared that the poet-statesman's "vision and resolve" turned India into a nuclear power and placed the country on the world's strategic map.



Addressing a large Good Governance Day rally, Naidu said Vajpayee's 1998 Pokhran tests "showed the world our scientific muscle", while his decisive stance during the Kargil conflict "set the template" for the recent Operation Sindoora.

The bronze statue—erected inside the upcoming Vajpayee Smriti Vanam memorial garden—was jointly unveiled with Union Minister

Shivraj Singh Chouhan. A photo exhibition tracing Vajpayee's journey from Jan Sangh founder to three-term PM was opened on the sidelines.

Naidu recalled his personal rapport with Vajpayee, citing the Golden Quadrilateral, telecom de-regulation and the Cyberabad (Hyderabad IT corridor) foundation stone as proj-

## KARNATAKA BUS FIRE:

**Death toll rises to six, most victims burnt alive**



Flames and smoke billow out after a bus caught fire following a collision with a speeding truck, in Chitradurga, early Thursday.

## Chitradurga, Karnataka (TSIT)

A luxury sleeper coach carrying 32 people became a burning death-trap on National Highway-48 early Thursday after a speeding container truck vaulted the median and slammed head-on into its diesel tank, triggering a blaze that killed six occupants, among them a small child.

The truck driver died instantly; five bus passengers—trapped inside as flames swept through the cabin—were burnt beyond recognition.

"The fire spread so fast most victims had no time to escape," said East Zone Inspector-General Ravikanth Gowda, revising an earlier toll of nine to six after forensic teams counted remains.

Driver Rafiq, admitted to hospital with severe burns,

recalled steering at 60-70 km/h when the lorry "came flying over the divider". Cleaner Mohammed Sadiq, flung through the windshield on impact, said: "I woke up mid-air, then everything was fire." Miraculously, 26 passengers survived; nine are being treated in Sira, three in Tumakuru and one critically-burned woman was shifted to Victoria Hospital, Bengaluru.

Three friends who

jumped from a rear window,

and two others who crawled

through broken glass,

escaped with minor injuries.

Behind the ill-fated bus,

a school vehicle carrying 42

children swerved, clipped

the burning coach and skid-

ded off the road, but none of

the students was hurt.

SEE MORE ON NATION PAGE

## Attack on minorities unacceptable: CM Stalin



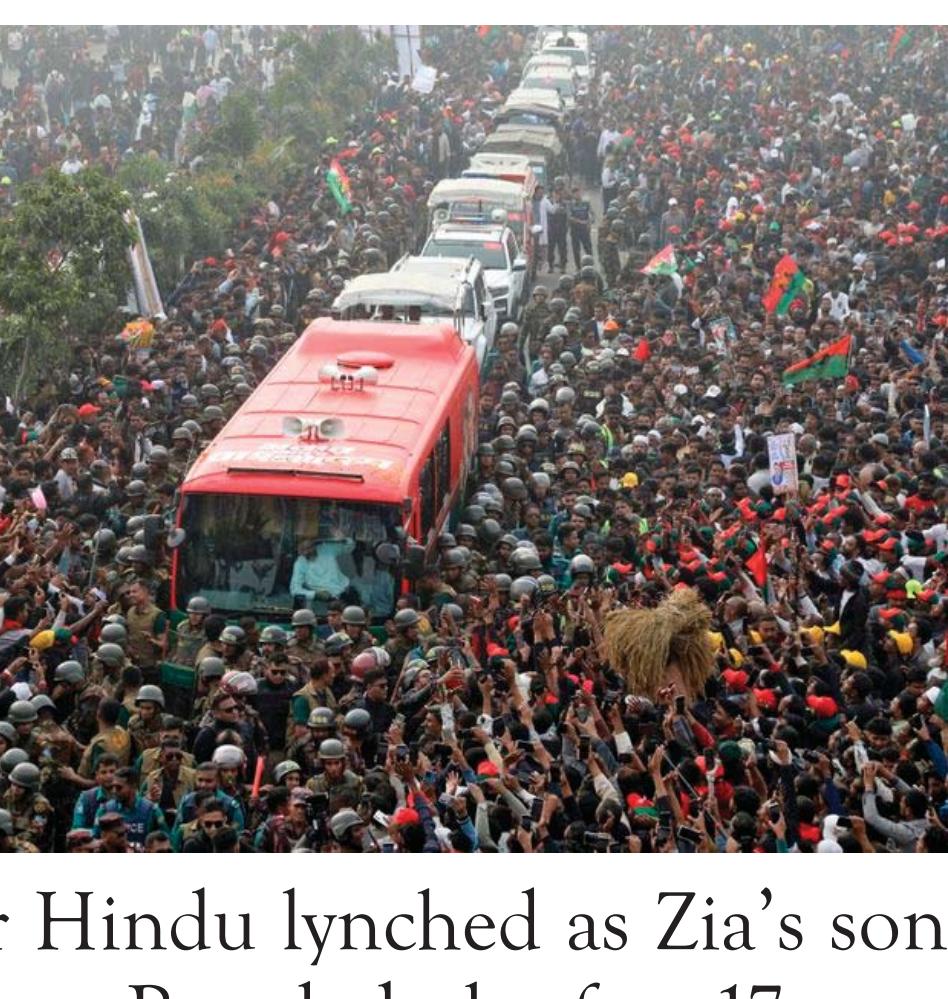
"When a few right-wing violent groups, acting in

the name of the majority, indulge in attacks and riots, even as the Prime Minister participates in Christmas celebrations, it sends a disturbing message to the nation," he said in a social media post. After Manipur, alleged "reports of attacks on minorities" in Jabalpur, Raipur, and elsewhere are unacceptable to anyone who values harmony.

Telangana to experience minimum temperatures of 3-4°C over next two days: Met

## Hyderabad (TSIT)

Minimum temperatures are likely to be below normal by 3 to 4 degrees Celsius at isolated places in Telangana during the next two days, the Meteorological Centre said on Thursday. In its daily weather report, the department said that dry weather is likely to prevail across the State for the next seven days.



## Another Hindu lynched as Zia's son returns to Bangladesh after 17 yrs

**New Delhi (TSIT):** Local media reported that Amrit Mondal, alias Samrat (29), a member of the Hindu minority community, was beaten to death by a mob late on Wednesday night in Pangsha Upazila of Rajbari district. The killing adds to a growing list of mob violence incidents amid a volatile political climate and sustained unrest following last year's collapse of the Sheikh Hasina government.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), meanwhile, seized on the incident to attack West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. "Another Hindu has been lynched in Bangladesh. No wonder Mamata Banerjee opposes the CAA, which gives citizenship to Hindus who face persecution in Bangladesh, and also opposes the SIR, which would remove her Bangladeshi and Rohingya vote bank," the West Bengal BJP posted on X.

Sheikh Moinul Islam confirmed the death, stating that the body had been recovered and sent for autopsy.

The media report quoting the police and locals claimed Mondal headed a local criminal outfit known as "Samrat Bahini" and was named in multiple cases, including murder.

He had allegedly fled to India during the Awami League regime and returned recently.

The killing comes just days after another brutal lynching of Dipu Chandras Das, a Hindu factory worker in Mymensingh, who

led to the fall of the Hasina government. Hadi's death has also triggered renewed diplomatic strain between India and Bangladesh.

India on Tuesday sought a thorough and transparent investigation into Hadi's killing, rejecting unsubstantiated allegations of an Indian hand in the incidents that have stoked anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh. New Delhi has repeatedly flagged concerns over attacks on minorities, particularly Hindus, under the interim government led by Muhammad Yunus. In another development, the Bangladesh police announced a reward for information on attackers who had set fire to a Hindu-owned house near the southeastern port city of Chattogram. According to reports, unidentified miscreants set the home on fire on Tuesday night, but the residents managed to come out of the house unharmed.

## Punjab CM approves cashless treatment of Rs 10 lakh to every family



Chandigarh, Dec 25 : In a New Year bonanza for residents, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Thursday gave the green signal to the Health Department to launch Mukh Mantri Sehat Yojna from January to enable cashless treatment of Rs 10 lakh to every family in the state.

Reviewing a meeting of the Health Department here, CM Mann said Mukh Mantri Sehat Beema Yojna is a step towards providing universal healthcare facilities to people without spending even a penny on it. "This is a step towards providing universal healthcare and ensuring that people get cashless treatment of Rs 10 lakh. Punjab will be the first state in the country where every family

will be entitled to cashless treatment of up to Rs 10 lakh," he said.

The Chief Minister said the yojna is a flagship health assurance initiative of the government aimed at providing financial protection and assured access to quality healthcare to all eligible residents of the state.

"The scheme is a major step towards universal health coverage, under

which each enrolled family is entitled to cashless medical treatment up to Rs 10 lakh per year," he added.

CM Mann said, "The scheme covers major illnesses, critical care, surgeries, and life-saving treatments at a wide network of empanelled government and private hospitals across Punjab and Chandigarh, ensuring equitable access to

healthcare services."

The key objective is to ensure cashless and paperless healthcare at empanelled hospitals and to reduce out-of-pocket expenditure on secondary and tertiary healthcare. "Likewise, it will strengthen equitable access to healthcare services across urban and rural areas and provide timely grievance redressal and beneficiary support through digital platforms," the Chief Minister said.

He said all the expenses like hospitalisation costs, surgeries and medical procedures, ICU and critical care services, diagnostics, medicines, and consumables as per approved packages, pre- and post-hospitalisation expenses and others will be covered under it.

## Delhi's air quality improves slightly, several areas record 'moderate' AQI

New Delhi, Dec 25 : Delhi's air quality recorded a noticeable improvement on Thursday morning, a day after the Commission for Air Quality Management in Delhi-NCR and adjoining areas revoked restrictions imposed under Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan, citing a sustained improvement in pollution levels.

Although the city's overall air quality continued to remain in the 'poor' category with an average Air Quality Index of 221, several locations across Delhi and the National Capital Region registered better readings, falling into the 'moderate' category.

This marks a significant shift after weeks of 'very poor' to 'severe' air quality levels across large parts of the region. As per the AQI classification, readings between 0 and 50 are considered 'good', 51 to 100 'satisfactory', 101 to 200 'moderate', 201 to 300 'poor', 301 to 400 'very poor' and 401 to 500 'severe'. On Thursday morning, the AQI at India Gate and Kartavya Path

stood at 350, while Akshardham recorded a reading of 245. Sir Aurobindo Marg saw an AQI of 159, IGI Airport reported 119, and Lodhi Road recorded 133, indicating improved air quality conditions in several key areas of the city.

Despite the improvement in pollution levels, a fog warning remains in effect for Delhi and surrounding regions during the morning hours. The India Meteorological Department has forecast a very high probability of dense to very dense fog on Thursday morning across Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, the Jammu region, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

The weather agency also issued a similar warning for isolated locations in Assam, Meghalaya, Bihar, East Madhya Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura, as well as Odisha, West Bengal and Sikkim, indicating widespread foggy conditions across multiple states.

## Tickets sale for Chennai leg of Hockey India league begins

New Delhi: Tickets for the forthcoming men's Hockey India League (HIL) 2025-26 in Chennai, starting January 3, went live on Thursday. Hockey India has decided to make tickets free of cost to encourage more fans to attend matches. The Women's HIL begins on December 28 in Ranchi and ends on January 10, while the Men's HIL begins on January 3 in Chennai, moves to Ranchi from January 11, and the final leg is held in the cradle of hockey - Bhubaneswar - from January 17 to January 26.

This year's Hockey India League will showcase an impressive roster of eight men's and four women's teams, with both leagues offering fast-paced, exciting games through their newly revamped formats.

The ticket sales for the HIL's Ranchi leg went live on Monday. As in the previous edition, Hockey India's endeavour is to take the sport to every corner of the country and make it more accessible to its passionate fans. Hockey India League (HIL) governing committee chairperson Dilip Tirkey had said, "We have once again decided to offer free tickets for hockey fans to come and enjoy all the matches across Chennai, Ranchi and Bhubaneswar. While the women's matches will be in Ranchi, the men's HIL will be played across three cities. We want to fill the hockey stands with fans who wish to see their favourite stars in action."

## Union Budget 2026-27: CII outlines 4-point strategy for macroeconomic stability

New Delhi, Dec 25 : Apex business chamber CII on Thursday proposed a four-pronged fiscal strategy ahead of the Union Budget 2026-27 that includes debt stability, fiscal transparency, revenue mobilisation and expenditure efficiency.

According to a CII statement, at the core of the roadmap is adherence to the government's debt glide path targeting 50 per cent (plus or minus 1 per cent) of GDP by FY31. Maintaining Central debt at roughly 54.5 per cent of GDP and the fiscal deficit at 4.2 per cent of GDP in FY27 will preserve macro credibility while supporting growth.

Strengthening public finances, however, must extend beyond the Centre to States and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), whose fiscal positions increasingly shape overall debt dynamics and the durability of macroeconomic stability. Second, to improve predictability and reinforce institutional credibility, CII recommends reviving the Medium-Term Fiscal Framework with a rolling 3-5 year roadmap for revenue, expenditure and debt.

Third, revenue mobilisation remains central to long-term fiscal sustainability. India's tax-to-GDP ratio at 17.5 per



cent (centre and state combined) remains below that of major emerging economies.

"To finance the developmental needs of the country, India needs to increase its tax-GDP

ratio. Leveraging the data from India's world-class digital infrastructure could help detect tax evasion and expand tax base," CII director general Chandrajit Banerjee said.

Greater use of digital and AI-based tools should be leveraged to expand the tax base through seamless data exchange between GST, income tax, and digital payment systems. Linking tax returns with high-value transactions and deploying advanced analytics can enable real-time detection of evasion while lowering compliance costs, the statement said.

To unlock value from public assets, government should announce a three-year privatisation pipeline of Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) in the non-strategic sectors as announced in the 'Strategic

Disinvestment Policy, CII further stated.

Fourth, expenditure management, particularly subsidy reform, forms the other pillar of the strategy. Public Distribution System (PDS), covering 813 million people or 57 per cent of the population, faces challenges of outdated data and leakages. Updating beneficiary lists using the latest Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (2023-24), narrowing coverage to the bottom 15 per cent, and shifting towards cash or voucher-based transfers can enhance efficiency while also promoting dietary diversification, the statement said.

## Confident in securing majority whenever Assembly polls are held: Karnataka BJP



Bengaluru, Dec 25 : The Karnataka BJP has stated that it is confident of attaining a majority whenever Assembly polls are held in the state, as public anger is rising against the Congress-led government in the state.

BJP state president and MLA B.Y. Vijayendra made the statement in this regard while speaking at the 101st birth anniversary programme of former Prime Minister and Bharat Ratna awardee Atal Bihari Vajpayee, held on Thursday at the party's state office, Jagannath Bhavan, in Bengaluru.

He added that the deteriorating condition of the Congress party was evident from the recent town panchayat election results in the state. "Whether it is EVMs or ballot papers, the fate of the Congress party will not change," he asserted. He said the BJP

has been blessed with the leadership of stalwarts like Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, and that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Amit Shah and J.P. Nadda, the BJP is steadily advancing. He also expressed confidence that

the BJP would come to power in West Bengal.

Vijayendra said the BJP was currently in the opposition due to its own shortcomings and that party workers need not be anxious.

He alleged that public anger was rising against the anti-people and anti-poor Congress government in Karnataka. "Whether elections are held in 2028 or even tomorrow, the BJP will come to power in Karnataka with a clear majority of 130-140 MLAs on its own strength. We must all work to strengthen the party," he said.

Dense morning fog likely across TN till Dec 28; light rain forecast for coastal, northern regions

Chennai, Dec 25 : The Regional Meteorological Centre has issued a weather advisory warning that dense morning fog is likely to persist across several parts of Tamil Nadu till December 28.

In a statement, the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Chennai, said that foggy conditions are expected during the early morning hours over large parts of the state for the next three days, potentially affecting visibility and early-day travel.

Alongside the fog warning, the IMD has forecast light to moderate rainfall at isolated places in

coastal areas, north Tamil Nadu, and parts of Puducherry and Karaikal over the next three days. The rainfall is expected to be scattered, with one or two locations in these regions likely to receive short spells of precipitation, mainly under cloudy conditions.

The weather department attributed the prevailing conditions to seasonal atmospheric changes and moisture accumulation over the Bay of Bengal, which are contributing to cloud formation, intermittent rainfall, and reduced visibility during early morning hours.

## What exactly is Tarique Rahman's 'plan' for Bangladesh and its people?



New Delhi, Dec 25 : Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman has a plan, he told his countrymen on Thursday, December 25, in Dhaka, but did not detail much with its details.

Both the parents of the 60-year-old BNP leader had stints as head of government at different times. While his father Ziaur Rahman was the sixth President of Bangladesh from 1977 until his assassination in 1981, Tarique's mother was the first female Prime Minister to hold office between 1991-1996, and again, from 2001 to 2006. Given that history, together with the fact that he has returned a little ahead of Bangladesh's high-stakes February general election, the content had to be political. However, he

kept short of projecting himself as the prospective premier in his short speech, though highlighting his family's legacy on occasions.

However, his return after a 17-year hiatus signals BNP's intent to reclaim leadership and mobilise mass support. He spoke of a country where there will be peace, security, and unity, where the current volatility has posed a major threat to law and order and to life itself.

"I have a plan for the people of my country; for my country," he stated in English, in between a speech in clipped Bengali – unlike the regular, local conversational tone – that may be the result of a long 17 years in exile in the United Kingdom.

That plan is yet to be elaborated, and it will only be known later

whether it will be holistic and include opponents and critics. BNP's principal Opposition party, Awami League, remains excluded from the 2026 elections; its main challenger, Sheikh Hasina, has taken refuge in neighbouring India.

Tarique should know; he has himself been in exile and has reiterated allegations of suppression and political alienation under the Hasina regime. The assertions were there again in his Thursday speech, but not the fate of his political

opponent, currently facing a death sentence.

Yet, some may find the statement "the people of Bangladesh want to reclaim their right to speak and their democratic rights" can perhaps be tied to the recent ban on Awami League leaders from contesting polls. Meanwhile, he did insist on an all-inclusive society, encompassing citizens of all faiths and religions, but did not directly condemn the arson and killings or offer extensive condolences for the victims.

He paid tributes to Osman Hadi and referred to the need to "regain economic rights" that highlight the economic grievances of ordinary citizens; tied economic justice to the sacrifices of 1971 and 2024, suggesting continuity between past struggles and present

## Bengal: Child mistakes crude bomb for ball, injured in explosion

Kolkata: A child was seriously injured in a crude bomb explosion after he mistook it for a ball, said the police on Thursday. The incident occurred in the Basanti area in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district late Wednesday night. The child has been brought to Kolkata and admitted to a hospital where he is receiving treatment. His condition is said to be serious. The police have launched an investigation to find out the source of the bomb and how it was left in the area. According to the police, the incident occurred in the Kharimachhan area under the Amjhara Gram Panchayat area of Basanti block. Local residents said the child was playing inside an abandoned house when suddenly, the sound of an explosion was heard.

People who were near the house rushed to the scene and found the child lying injured. However, it is still not clear how the crude bomb ended up inside the abandoned house. Officers from Basanti police station arrived at the scene after being informed and started an investigation. Sources said there were fragments of the exploded bomb everywhere inside the house. The area has been cordoned off. The house was examined by the forensic teams, which arrived at the scene in the morning.

A police picket was set up in the area after the incident. A senior officer of Baruipur Police District said, "A child was injured after he mistook a crude bomb for a ball. As he was playing with the bomb, it exploded. The injured child has been taken to a private hospital in Kolkata for treatment. The child was seriously injured. We have started an investigation into the matter and are trying to ascertain how the crude bomb ended up in that abandoned house. Forensic team members are examining the scene of the explosion and taking evidence. The locals are being questioned for further information."

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## DMDK chief flays 6-seat in NDA murmurs, urges to wait till January 9 over alliance

CHENNAI: DMDK general secretary Premalatha Vijayakant on Thursday fumed over media reports suggesting that the BJP and AIADMK have earmarked six Assembly constituencies for the party, cursing that anyone who had floated such a speculative list was only heading towards political ruin.

Addressing reporters after hoisting the party flag at the DMDK headquarters in Koyambedu, Premalatha questioned the authenticity of the reports and asked who had officially released such a list. "Did the AIADMK issue it or the BJP? If it was not an official announcement, why was it projected as fact?" she asked, accusing television channels of amplifying unverified social media content for ratings. She warned that public trust in the media would erode since such practices continued.

Premalatha reiterated that the



DMDK's alliance decision would be based solely on the will of its cadre. "We will align only with those whom our workers point to. A clear announcement on the alliance will be made only after the January 9 party conference in Cuddalore," she said.

She added that invitations for Vijayakant's second death anniversary would be extended to all political parties, including the DMK, AIADMK, BJP, NTK and TVK. Premalatha Vijayakant said that late DMDK founder Vijayakant had been celebrating Christmas for decades, long before it became a political spec-

tacle, in a veiled dig at TVK chief actor Vijay, who celebrated the festival recently. "Captain began celebrating Christmas from his childhood and continued the tradition for over 20 years as a political leader. He studied in a Christian school and lived a life rooted in inclusiveness," she said.

Taking a veiled swipe at TVK president Vijay, Premalatha remarked that those who were born yesterday have suddenly started celebrating Christmas after floating new parties.

Earlier, Premalatha and party treasurer LK Sudhish took part in Christmas celebrations at the party office, distributing welfare assistance and sweets to children and the public. Sudhish announced that food would be served to at least 25,000 people across Tamil Nadu on December 28, marking Captain's second death anniversary.

## Tamil Nadu Food Safety department directs idiyappam vendors to obtain food safety licence

CHENNAI: The Tamil Nadu Food Safety department has made it mandatory for idiyappam vendors to obtain a valid food safety licence before selling the popular staple across the State. Idyappam is widely sold in several districts, particularly during early morning and late evening hours. In recent weeks, authorities have observed a sharp rise in the number of idiyappam vendors operating in Chennai and its suburban pockets. However, the department received complaints that in certain areas



idiyappam was being prepared and sold without adhering to basic hygiene and safety norms.

Acting on these inputs, the Food Safety department has directed all idiyappam

sellers to register formally and obtain a food safety licence. Officials said the licence can be obtained online for free and must be renewed annually. The department has also issued a set of hygiene guidelines for vendors. Idyappam must be prepared using safe, quality ingredients under clean conditions, officials said, stressing that food handlers should ensure proper personal hygiene at all stages of preparation and sale. Vendors have been instructed to wear gloves, head covers and other protective gear while handling food meant for public consumption. Special instructions have been issued to vendors selling idiyappam using bicycles and two-wheelers,

## Creating a cyber-safe learning environment for students



As people from across the globe come together today to commemorate the World Environment Day by cleaning up beaches, planting trees, and holding marches in an effort to revive what environment advocates say is a planet on the precipice, these startups have taken their businesses a notch upwards with cleaner practices. While over 150 countries are slated to host environmentally-themed events, environment experts hope for this year's World Environment Day is to encourage a global effort to tackle what they describe as the decline of the natural world. Inger Andersen, the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) said, "we are running against the clock. Today, as we look to a... future of heatwaves, droughts, floods, wildfires, pandemics, dirty air, wars, and plastic-ridden oceans, action is more important than ever." On World Environment Day, here's a look into five Indian startups that are working across different sectors with the aim to make environmentally conscious decisions and contribute the transition to a greener future.

### 1. PHOOL

This is India's very first biomaterial startup and a fragrance-focussed wellness brand. Phool.co is a flower recycling technology startup and so far it has raised \$8 million (Rs60.5 crore) in a Series A round from Sixth Sense Ventures, a consumer-centric venture fund. Phool.co was founded in 2017 by engineering graduates Ankit Agarwal and Prateek Kumar. The startup company uses floral waste, collected from dumping temple waste in rivers, to make patented organic fertiliser and charcoal-free luxury incense products. As of now, this Kanpur-based startup accumulates floral waste from three Indian cities, including one of the

biggest temples (Kashi Vishwanath), averting 13 tonnes of waste flowers and toxic chemicals from reaching into the river every day. It is worth noting that self-help women groups handcraft the waste into patented charcoal-free incense sticks and essential oils through the 'flower cycling' technology. Additionally, it is India's first direct-to-consumer wellness brand to obtain the coveted Fair for Life, Fairtrade, and Ecocert Organic and Natural certifications. And, there's more, this IIT-backed startup has invented Fleather—'leather made from flowers'. With this commercially viable, vegan alternative to animal leather, the startup hopes to make the use of animal leather obsolete.

### 2. BANYAN NATION

One of India's first vertically integrated plastic recycling companies, Banyan Nation is a waste management company that collects plastic wastes from industries and recycles them for further use. The startup utilizes its unique technology platform to integrate thousands of informal workers and produces premium-quality recycled polyolefin plas-

tics (PE and PP) for mainstream and high-quality applications. Founded by Mani Vajipeyajula and Rajkiran Madangopal, this Hyderabad-based company leverages tech-based solutions to collect plastic from informal recyclers and businesses. Interestingly, the company won the World Economic Forum Global Technology Pioneers (2021), Circulars Award at the World Economic Forum (2018) Intel-DST Award Innovations for Digital India (2017), Millennium Alliance Grant (2016), and mBillionth Award (2015).

Beginning its operations in 2019, BlueSmart is an app-based all-electric ride-hailing business to consumer platform with about 600 electric vehicles (EV) operating in the Delhi-NCR region. This Indian company is currently competing with the industry behemoths Ola and Uber, with dedicated electric vehicle fleet for customers looking for sustainable mobility. Founded by Anmol Jaggi and Punit Goyal, the electric vehicle ride-hailing and charging startup recently raised USD 25 million (around Rs.194 crore) in a fresh funding round.

The funding is a follow-up to the Series A round that closed in September 2021, bringing the total Series A investment to USD 50.7 million. The company said it has raised USD 25 million in the Series A1 round, comprising USD 15 million in equity capital and venture debt of USD 10 million. The equity round was led by BP Ventures and Green Frontier Capital, with participation from existing investors. The venture debt funding comes from Stride Ventures, Alteria Capital, BlackSoil and UCIC. Additionally, Blusmart said it plans to use the funds to scale up its all-electric ride-hailing fleet to over 5,000 EVs and expand its network of EV superhubs across Delhi-NCR.

As is a leading solar energy startup in India, ZunRoof is creating waves by focusing on the residential solar segment by providing best on-grid solar solutions. Currently with major operations in the Delhi NCR region, the four-year-old startup is expanding in other geographies rapidly. As per the company release, "out of the 1805 solar net meters installed in Delhi, ZunRoof has installed more than 300 solar net meters,

## Secure release of all fishers from SL: Ramadoss to Centre

CHENNAI: PMK founder S Ramadoss has urged the Union Government to take urgent steps to secure the immediate release of all Tamil Nadu fishermen arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy.

He said that on December 22, over 300 mechanised boats sailed from the Rameswaram fishing harbour with valid permits. While more than 60 boats were fishing near the Indian maritime boundary late at night, Sri Lankan Navy personnel patrolling from the Gulf of Mannar chased the fishermen away.

"They allegedly surrounded some boats, arrested 12 fishermen and seized their vessels. The fishermen were taken to the Mannar naval camp and later handed over to Sri Lankan fisheries officials, who booked them on charges such as cross-border fishing and use of banned nets. After being produced before a court,



they were lodged in Vavuniya prison," he added. Condemning the incident, fishermen's families staged a road blockade on the Madurai-Rameswaram National Highway on December 23, while Rameswaram fishermen staged a strike of work. A protest has also been planned near the Rameswaram bus stand on December 26.

Ramadoss said repeated arrests, assaults and seizure of boats have severely affected the livelihood of fishermen and caused fear and hardship among

Tamil Nadu notifies designated locations for virtual examination of witnesses

CHENNAI: As part of its continuous push for digital integration with the criminal justice system, the State government has issued a notification designating specific locations for the examination of witnesses through audio-video electronic means. The notification issued by the Home Department (Police-XI), operationalises provisions under relevant Sections of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023.

The order aims to facilitate efficient, secure, and accessible judicial proceedings by allowing witnesses to be examined remotely using video conferencing infrastructure. This move is intended to reduce delays, improve access to justice, and ensure the safety and convenience of witnesses and officials. According to the notification, video conferencing rooms in the Madras High Court and in District Court complexes, including Judicial Magistrate Courts across districts, have been designated for this purpose. In

## Chandirapadi fisheries project on fast track

CHENNAI: (BUREAU) The construction of river training walls and additional infrastructure at the fish landing centre in Chandirapadi village in Tamil Nadu's Tharangambadi has gathered significant momentum and is expected to be completed by March 2026, officials said, well ahead of the stipulated deadline of December next year.

The Rs 32-crore project is being implemented under the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) scheme through the Fisheries and Fishermen Welfare Department.

The project aims to strength-

en coastal protection measures and improve fish landing infrastructure for the local fishing community that depends on the Nandalar estuary for daily fishing operations.

Chandirapadi is a traditional fishing village with about 2,895 fisherfolk engaged in marine fishing using 13 mechanised boats and 212 fibre boats. The estuary and landing facilities are vital for sustaining livelihoods in the village. According to T. Gowthaman, Assistant Engineer, Fisheries Department, the ongoing works include the construction of stone pitching river

training walls extending 260 metres on the southern side and 220 metres on the northern side of the river, a 60-metre-long boat berthing jetty, and dredging of around 96,250 cubic metres to improve navigability and safety.

The project commenced in February 2025 and has achieved nearly 75 per cent physical progress. "Work on the jetty is currently underway. Dredging is yet to begin and is expected to commence within a month. At present, about 235 metres of the southern wall and 205 metres of the northern wall have been completed," the official said.

Earlier, a fish landing centre was constructed at Chandirapadi for Rs 10 crore and inaugurated on August 20, 2024. The facility includes a 75-metre boat berthing jetty, a fish auction hall, a net mending shed, 150 metres of road connectivity, and dredging of 50,000 cubic metres at the river mouth. Based on requests from fisherfolk, further infrastructure improvement works are now being taken up. Fishermen in Chandirapadi have welcomed the pace of work, noting that the new facility will significantly reduce their dependence on distant harbours.

NORTHERN ARC CAPITAL LIMITED  
NORTHERN Regd. Off: 10<sup>th</sup> Floor, Phase-I, IIT-Madras Research Park, Kanagam Village, Taramani, Chennai - 600113, Tamil Nadu.

### [RULE - 8 (1), POSSESSION NOTICE]

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of Northern Arc Capital Ltd under Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a Demand Notice dated 23rd August 2025 calling upon the Borrower (1) BABU VIJAYA KUMAR (Borrower) Address: NO 43 26B SALABOGAM Selabogam, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu-631502 (2) T Shalini (Co-Borrower) Add: NO 43 26B SALABOGAM Selabogam, Salabogam, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu-631502 to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs.2638739.32/- (Rupees twenty six lakh thirty eight thousand seven hundred thirty nine rupees and thirty two paisa only), as on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2025 along with interest from 15<sup>th</sup> August 2025 within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

The Borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower/Guarantor/Co Borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him / her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on this possession notice dated 24<sup>th</sup> December 2025.

The Borrower/Guarantor/Co Borrower and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of Northern Arc Capital Ltd for an amount of Rs.2638739.32/- (Rupees twenty six lakh thirty eight thousand seven hundred thirty nine rupees and thirty two paisa only), as on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2025 along with interest from 15<sup>th</sup> August 2025, costs, etc. thereon.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY  
S.F.No: 426/part, New S.F.No 461/4, No.26, Door No.43, Patta No.198, Putheri village, Kanchipuram Taluk, Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu-600440 Within following Boundaries: North: Perumal Kovil Street, South: S.No.461/5, East: S.No.461/7, West: S.No.461/3

Sd/-  
Date :- 24th December 2025  
Place: - Kanchipuram  
Authorised Officer  
NORTHERN ARC CAPITAL LIMITED

NORTHERN ARC CAPITAL LIMITED  
NORTHERN Regd. Off: 10<sup>th</sup> Floor, Phase-I, IIT-Madras Research Park, Kanagam Village, Taramani, Chennai - 600113, Tamil Nadu.

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The Borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower/Guarantor/Co Borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him / her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on this possession notice dated 24<sup>th</sup> December 2025.

The Borrower/Guarantor/Co Borrower and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of Northern Arc Capital Ltd for an amount of Rs.2041627.54/- (Rupees twenty lakh forty one thousand six hundred twenty seven rupees and fifty four paisa only), as on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2025 along with interest from 15<sup>th</sup> August 2025, costs, etc. thereon.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY  
In Thiruvannamalai District, Cheyyar Registration District, Cheyyar Taluk, within Limits of Dusi Sub-Registration district of Akkur Village a House and site property Old Survey no306/6, New Survey No.306/10, as per Patta No.725, New Sub-district Survey No.306/10B Within following Boundaries; North: Plot Belongs to Thirumal, East: Plot Belongs to Uma Maheshwar, South: Plot Belongs to Thirumal, West: Street

Sd/-  
Date :- 24th December 2025  
Place: - Kanchipuram  
Authorised Officer  
NORTHERN ARC CAPITAL LIMITED

## EDITORIAL

*Why You Can't Put A 'Measuring Tape' On The 2-Billion-Year Old Aravallis*

When the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change took the question of what constitutes an 'Aravalli hill' to the Supreme Court, the expectation was clarity that would strengthen protection for one of India's most fragile and strategically vital landscapes. What emerged instead was a technical, elevation-based yardstick, rooted in committee recommendations and an older forest-centric exercise, which risks turning judicial approval into a mechanism for narrowing, rather than safeguarding, the Aravalli ecosystem.

The Supreme Court's November order accepted a uniform operational definition, under which a landform must rise at least 100 metres above local relief to qualify as an Aravalli hill, with clustering rules to identify ranges. It also directed the preparation of a "Management Plan for Sustainable Mining" and barred new mining leases until that plan is finalised. The government has since argued that this brings long-needed clarity, prevents misuse of vague definitions, and does not weaken protection, repeatedly citing figures that over 90% of the Aravalli area remains protected and that mining eligibility extends to only 0.19% of the total footprint.

**Who Knows The Aravallis? Not The Supreme Court**

Those assurances sound neat, but they mask deeper flaws in both process and substance. The Aravallis are not merely a set of peaks that can be filtered through a height threshold. They are an ancient, eroded system of ridges, hillocks, pediments and shallow slopes stretching roughly 650 kilometres from Delhi through Haryana and Rajasthan into Gujarat. Their ecological value lies precisely in these low relief formations; they recharge groundwater across some of the most water-stressed districts in the country, stabilise soils, moderate microclimates, support biodiversity, and act as a critical barrier against desert expansion and dust movement from the west. Reducing this complex landscape to a single elevation test ignores how ecological systems actually function.

Before even assessing whether the 100 metre criterion is scientifically appropriate, a more basic constitutional question arises. Does the Supreme Court have the mandate to define hills and mountain systems? Indian courts have unquestionably played a vital role in environmental protection under Article 21, stepping in where executive action has been weak or absent. But courts are not scientific bodies, nor are they meant to settle geomorphological questions through judicial orders. In this case, the Court has accepted a technical definition supplied by the executive even as a comprehensive, Aravalli-specific ecological survey remains incomplete. That blurs the line between judicial oversight and scientific determination. If courts begin freezing technical definitions of landscapes - hills today, perhaps floodplains, wetlands, deserts or coastal systems tomorrow - judicial review risks sliding into environmental rule-making by fiat rather than precaution guided by evolving science."

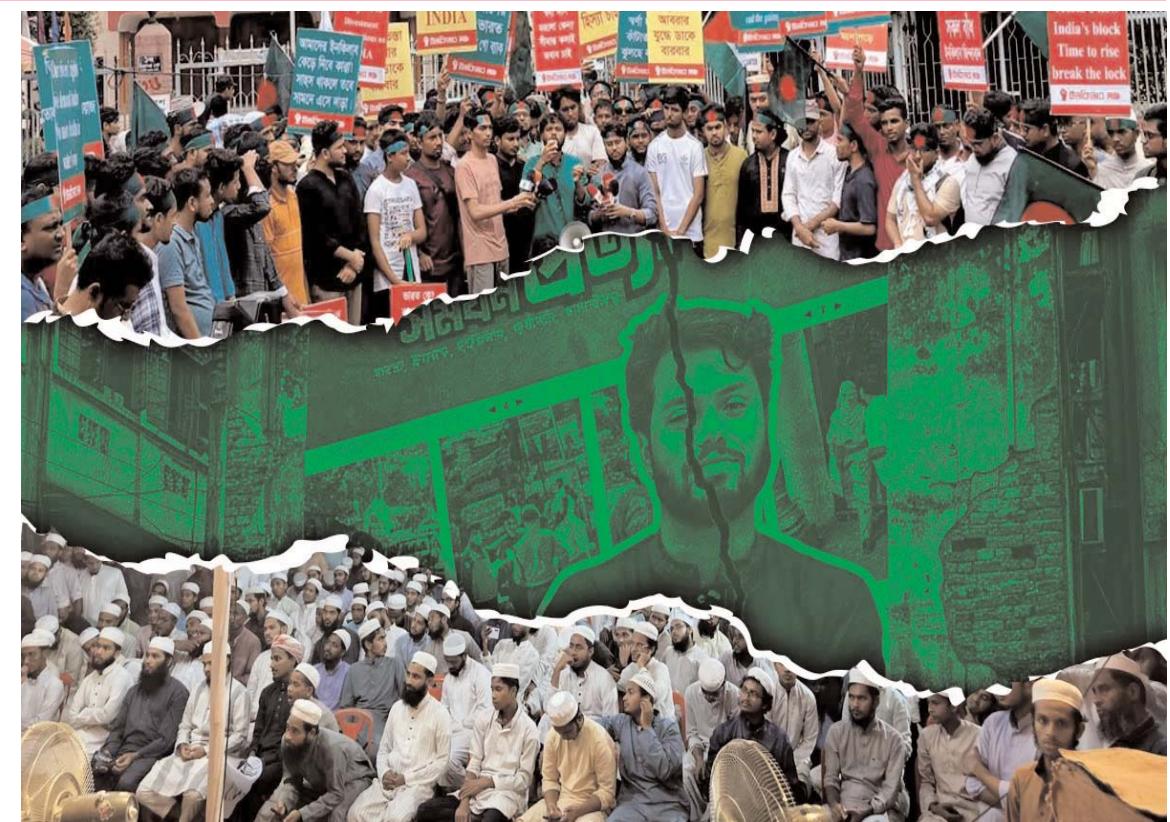
**Bring Science Back**

The scientific basis itself is thin. The Forest Survey of India - Central Empowered Committee exercise of 2010, often cited in defence of the new definition, was forest-centric and advisory in nature. It was not designed as a multidisciplinary landscape-level assessment of groundwater recharge zones, wildlife corridors, ridge continuity or climate functions. Treating that exercise as definitive in 2025, after years of urban expansion, mining pressure and land-use change, violates the precautionary principle that underpins India's environmental jurisprudence.

This methodological weakness creates concrete loopholes. The 100-metre relative relief cut-off is blunt and exclusionary. Many ecologically critical ridges and low hills that support recharge and suppress dust fall below that threshold and risk being pushed outside formal protection. The mapping exercise mandated by the Court is still underway, yet the definition is already being operationalised, reversing the logical sequence of science first, regulation second. And headline figures about "90%" or "0.19% mining" are meaningless without publicly available, geo-referenced maps, a transparent registry of mining leases, disclosure of exemptions.

**BANGLADESH: A LYNCHING, Nationalism, And Blood Sacrifice**

"Dream delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion." The morning of December 16, 1971, was one such dream, delivered nine months after it was first dreamt on March 26. The birth of a nation. Bangladesh was free. Pakistan had been defeated. The colonial trope had been replicated barely two decades after the British left the Indian subcontinent. It was all supposed to go well for the 'baby' of the region. The carnage in East Pakistan, leading up to the historic surrender of the Pakistan Army to India, was meant to birth a terrible beauty. Except it didn't. And that's one of the biggest paradoxes of the idea of nationalism. An idea as strong as any to mobilise multitudes. Autonomy And Nationhood It suits almost all stakeholders to imagine the independence of Bangladesh as an example of the nationalist collective will finding its just culmination. A beleaguered people, facing political discrimination based on their linguistic and cultural identity, seceded from the hegemonic West Pakistan. The independence of Bangladesh was, after all, a belated correction to address the mistake of the earlier independence project. The dream of 1947 delivering 1971, to go back to the opening quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Anthony D Smith, a prominent theorist of nationalism, asserts, "Autonomy is the goal of every nationalist." In Bangladesh's case, the autonomy was achieved twice in less than a quarter of a century. Smith, along with many others, believes in the primordial idea of nationhood: nations predate modernity because they are rooted in associations that are almost visceral. The civic framing of a nation - governance, citizenship, the whole nine yards - is just a vessel to contain and legitimise this a priori idea of belonging. There has been a vehement criticism of this idea of nationalism by the modernists like Elie Kedourie and John Breuilly, who situate nation-ality in rationality. Nations are well-reasoned units of governance, emerging out of the various processes associated



with modernity, including the Industrial Revolution. The modernists argue that for the nationalist, unity makes sense because it achieves several goals ranging from good governance to territorial integrity. But why are we delving into the theory of nationalism? Who Is The More 'Important' One? Because the answers that we are looking for in the aftermath of the latest blood-lust in Bangladesh are all written in the boring pages that historians, psychologists, and political philosophers painstakingly produced. The "Too Long, Didn't Read" cohort can stop after the following sentence: The us-and-them framing of human associations finds and rationalises ways to assert that some of us are more important than others, and the latter can be conveniently eliminated for the greater good. For the present idea of Bangladeshi nationalism, a Hindu factory worker claiming that God is one and the same for everyone, despite different names, is an inconvenience. It hasn't been a new inconvenience, though. The much-eulogised secularism of Bangladesh has always had the subterranean current of religious

extremism. It's easy to romanticise Sheikh Mujibur Rehman's call for arms to protect the Bengali pluralism because it's far enough in history. But was it truly that? Or, did it remain so for long? The answer to the second question is a definitive no. And the fault lies in the nature of the beast called nationalism. What To Do With A Coloniser - Once They Leave? Since nationalism, an idea that refuses to die despite its many obituaries, remains one of the most powerful mobilising forces in human society, it doesn't stop at achieving the goals it originally stated. In the context of post-colonial nations, it was the independence from the colonial master. But what does society do with all the energy and momentum once the coloniser has been ousted? The stronger the push to the coloniser, the greater the chances of the unmanageability of the 'yes, we can' euphoria. The nobleness of the decolonising project can go only thus far and no further. We must remember that the birth of Bangladesh was the consequence of a war that caught the attention of the world's superpowers. Now, let's invoke theorists Marvin and Ingle, who shock us by stating that nations can stay together only when the ritual of blood sacrifice is done periodically. So, picture a people mobilised for a noble cause, doing all it takes to assert themselves, suddenly finding themselves twitching, restless once the goal has been achieved. Once "Mukti" from the oppressor - the British, the Pakistani, Sheikh Hasina - is attained, the rites of unity must be performed. The victims are the 'others'. They must be expended to purify, unify, and fructify the 'true' idea of a nation. Because what came before was impure, imperfect, yet impudent. A perfect nation ought to perform and progress unbothered. Wasn't this, after all, the face (of a new perfect nation) that launched a thousand ships? Who knows if Helen was real or just an illusion? To conclude, "Once independence was achieved, however, the new state was faced with the problem of giving substance to that illusion," says Margaret Canovan about the burden that nationalism carries. It has to offload somewhere. Anywhere will do, but the site of least resistance works the best.

**Is Congress Looking At A Rahul-Priyanka-Sachin Pilot Troika For 2029?**

These are exciting times for the grand old party. The All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary in charge of organisation (GSO), KC Venugopal, has reportedly requested Rahul Gandhi to assign him "mission Kerala" and relieve him of the 'GSO responsibilities' he has been holding since 2019. While a question mark hangs over whether Venugopal, aka KCV, would be projected as a chief ministerial candidate for the May 2026 polls, there is a near unanimity that it is curtains down for him as GSO. The million-dollar question is who would replace KCV as the next GSO. The Congress is undergoing a big churn that may see a meatier and bigger role for Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. The Grand Old Party is, supposedly, a big believer in celestial movements. In such a scheme of things, Congress insiders claim nothing would move till January 14, when the ongoing 'inauspicious' period of 'malmas' would end, and, in astrological terms, astral directions would become more conducive. Apparently, a letter appointing Priyanka Gandhi Vadra as head of the AICC's election management department has been ready

for weeks now. Whether that letter would be junked now and a new assignment would be given to Priyanka remains to be seen. Broadly, there are many contenders to replace Venugopal. A powerful lobby of party leaders known as 'Jai Jagat Groupies' is eyeing the coveted post. The cluster consists of leaders known for their left-of-centre, social justice-oriented leanings. It includes leaders such as Sashikant Senthil, Sachin Rao, Meenakshi Nattrajan, Krishna Allavaru and Bhunwar Jitendra Singh, who are all hoping to be in the Rajya Sabha soon and like to sign off as "Jai Jagat" in all modes of in-house communications. However, most traditional Congress leaders resent the rise of this clique, resulting in veterans such as Ashok Gehlot, Ajay Makan and Digvijaya Singh throwing their hats in the ring too. However, a Gehlot or a Digvijaya becoming the GSO is unlikely, even more so after the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) move to appoint a 45-year-old Nitin Nabi as their working president. The Congress leadership, that is, the three Gandhis - Rahul, Sonia, Priyanka - and AICC chief Mallikarjun Kharge are under pressure to infuse fresh blood and bring in a younger leader as GSO. These internal rumblings have brought the spotlight on Sachin Pilot, currently the AICC general secretary looking after Chhattisgarh. In Pilot's scheme of things, As

**Ain't No Mountain High Enough ... To Keep Them From Getting To Aravallis**

*Ain't no mountain high enough  
Ain't no valley low enough  
Ain't no river wide enough  
To keep me from gettin' to you, babe*

The lyrics of this 1960s song perhaps encompass the controversy surrounding the Aravallis best after the Environment Ministry came up with a new definition to allow for what is being termed 'sustainable mining' of the ancient mountain range. A wave of public euphoria for the Aravallis has evenirked the Environment Minister, Bhupender Yadav, leading him to lash out at activists and blame YouTube reels for spreading false information. The widespread anger from citizen groups and activists came in the wake of the Supreme Court judgment in late November, adopting the Environment Ministry's new criteria for defining what constitutes the Aravallis. The judgment says that only hills rising at least 100 metres above local relief, or clusters of such hills (of 100 metres and above) within 500 metres of each other, will now be recognised as part of the Aravalli range. Why Do Away With 'Mean Sea Level' Formula? Mr Yadav, whose Ministry



submitted this new criterion, has vociferously defended this stand. The height of 100 metres will be measured from the base of the mountain structure, and mining will not be allowed around or beneath the hill's structure, clarified the Minister. But clearly, this clarification is not enough. Key questions remain. One of the most pertinent questions that the Minister has not responded to is that when hills are measured scientifically from mean sea level (MSL), why has the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change strangely decided to do away with this conventional standard and add the word 'local relief'? Take the height of the

Qutab Miran, once considered one of the most iconic minaret structures not just in India but in the world. Its height is less than 100 metres, standing at approximately 72 metres. Can we one day pass a rule stating that all heritage structures that are below 100 metres are no longer heritage buildings and therefore need to be razed to the ground to make way for roads and mining projects? That is exactly what we are doing to the Aravallis. In a press release, there is some attempt made to clarify the matter by stating, "Aravalli range has been explained as all the landforms which exist within 500 metres of two adjoining hills of height 100 metres or more."

# India revamps tax regime in 2025, new I-T Act to take effect from April 1

New Delhi: India overhauled its tax regime in 2025 with sharp cuts in Goods and Services Tax (GST) rates and a higher income tax exemption limit, with the spotlight now turning to customs duty rationalisation and procedural simplification in the coming Budget. Next year will see the new simplified Income Tax Act, 2025, to come into effect from April 1, replacing the over six-decade-old current Income Tax Act, 1961. Also, two new laws—one to levy additional excise duty on cigarettes and another to levy cess on pan masala over and above GST rates—will be implemented on a date decided by the government. The tax reforms rolled out by the government in 2025 were aimed at stimulating demand amid a challenging global economic environment. With tariff uncertainties casting a shadow over economic decision-making, India's tax reform measures focused on boosting domestic demand to drive consumption and support growth. A key highlight was the reduction of GST rates on about 375 goods and services effective September 22, which lowered



the tax burden on commonly used items and addressed long-standing concerns over inverted duty structures. The move to compress the four-tier GST slab structure of 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent into two principal rates of 5 and 18 per cent, with a 40 per cent levy retained only for sin goods, marked a major step towards rationalisation and simplification of the indirect tax regime. The GST overhaul was designed to make the indirect tax regime simpler and more predictable, with fewer rate slabs and reduced litigation. On the

collections front, GST mop up touched a record high of Rs 2.37 lakh crore in April, and was averaging Rs 1.9 lakh crore during the current fiscal year. The sweeping rate cuts have put some pressure on the GST revenues with a slowing growth rate. India's Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections slipped to a year-low of Rs 1.70 lakh crore in November—growing at a meagre 0.7 per cent year-on-year. November was the first month that recorded the full impact of the GST rate cut effective September 22. On the direct tax front,

the government raised the income tax exemption limit, providing relief to middle-income taxpayers and leaving more disposable income in the hands of consumers. The move was seen as a consumption booster, particularly for urban households, while also reinforcing voluntary compliance under the simplified tax regime. The Budget for 2025 announced that no income tax will be payable on income of Rs 12 lakh a year under the new income tax regime, which offers lower tax rates without the benefit of claiming exemptions and

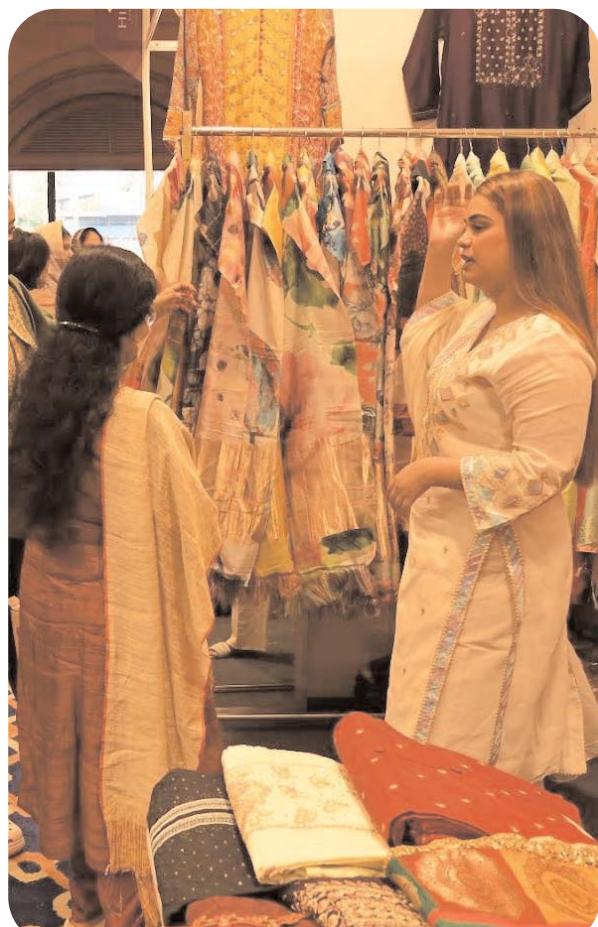


## STOCK MARKETS TRADE HIGHER IN EARLY DEALS

**Mumbai:** Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rallied in early trade on Wednesday, tracking a positive trend in global markets and consistent buying by domestic institutional investors. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 115.8 points to 85,640.64 in early trade. The 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 40.7 points to 26,217.85. From the 30-Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance, NTPC, Trent, Bharat Electronics, Adani Ports and Eternal were among the gainers. However, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, HCL Tech and Sun Pharma were among the laggards. In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index traded in positive territory. US markets ended higher on Tuesday. "As 2025 draws to a close the market appears to be moving to a consolidation phase with an upward bias. The strong domestic macros and the supportive earnings growth expectations in Q3 and Q4 of FY26 and for FY27 will provide the fundamental support to the market. "The sustained domestic inflows and consistent DII buying will impart resilience to the

market. However, since FIIs may sell the rallies, a sharp breakout is unlikely," VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said. Vijayakumar further said that the RBI decision to do an additional OMO (Open Market Operations) to the tune of Rs 2 lakh crore will significantly enhance liquidity and bring down yields. "This is positive for credit growth and banking stocks," he added. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Tuesday said it will purchase government securities worth Rs 2 lakh crore and conduct a USD 10 billion buy/sell dollar-rupee swap auction to inject liquidity in the banking system. The OMO (Open

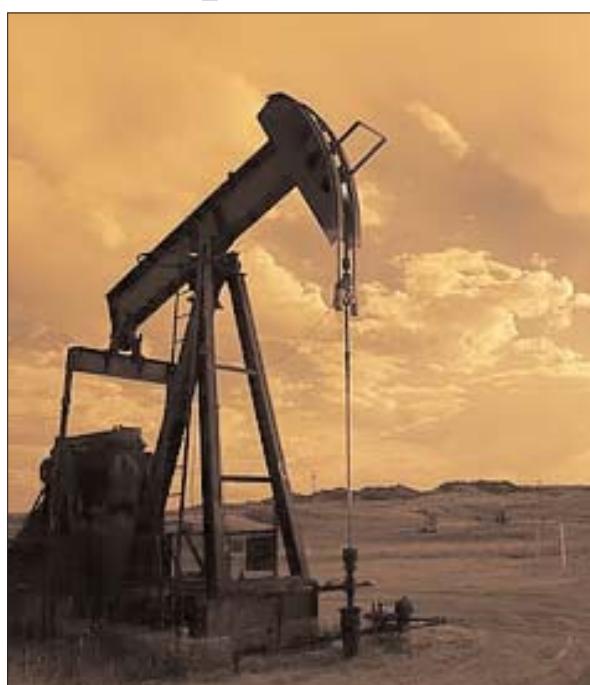
Market Operations) purchase and swap auctions will be conducted between December 29, 2025 and January 22, 2026. Announcing the decision, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said it will continue to monitor evolving liquidity and market conditions and take measures as appropriate to ensure orderly liquidity conditions. The latest announcement comes days after the RBI conducted Rs 1 lakh crore OMO purchase auctions of Government of India securities and USD/INR Buy/Sell Swap auction of USD 5 billion for a tenor of three years. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,794.80 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.



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Join us on 27th, 28th & 29th December at Novotel HICC, and experience fashion, luxury, and creativity come alive.

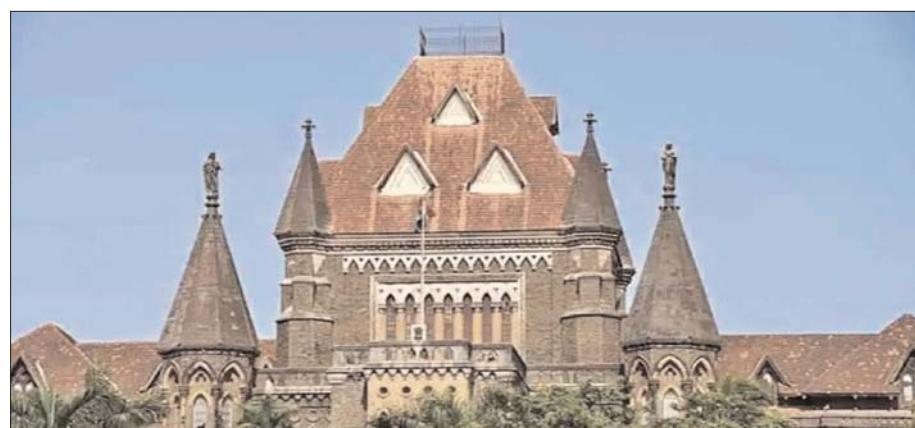
## Crude oil futures gain on spot demand



**New Delhi:** Crude oil prices on Wednesday rose Rs 26 to Rs 5,280 per barrel in futures trade as participants increased their positions following firm spot demand. On the Multi Commodity Exchange, crude oil for January delivery traded higher by Rs 26 or 0.49 per cent at Rs 5,280 per barrel

in 18,718 lots. Analysts said the rise of bets by participants kept crude oil prices higher in futures trade. Globally, West Texas Intermediate crude was trading 0.17 per cent higher at USD 58.48 per barrel, while Brent crude rose 0.13 per cent to USD 62.46 per barrel in New York.

## BOMBAY HC ASKS VIJAY MALLYA TO SUBMIT TO INDIAN JURISDICTION FIRST



**Mumbai:** The Bombay High Court on Tuesday sent a clear message to fugitive businessman Vijay Mallya that the court will not consider his challenge to the Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEO) Act until he submits to Indian jurisdiction. A bench of Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekhar and Justice Gautam Ankhad also questioned when the businessman plans to return to India. Mallya, based in the UK since 2016, has filed two petitions in the HC—one challenging an order declaring him as a fugitive economic offender and the other questioning the constitutional validity of the 2018 Act. The HC posed the question to the 70-year-old liquor baron, wanted in India to face trial on fraud and money laundering charges, on his return home while hearing his twin pleas. The court made it clear to the embattled businessman's counsel Amit Desai that it would not hear Mallya's plea against the Act unless he first submits himself to the court's jurisdiction. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for

now-defunct Kingfisher Airlines to clarify which plea he wants to press and which one to withdraw. Desai told the court that financial liability had been effectively neutralised with Mallya's assets worth Rs 14,000 crore attached and liabilities worth Rs 6,000 crore recovered by lending banks. The Solicitor General maintained the fugitive businessman was entitled to legal representation even while staying abroad. The bench, however, questioned as to how does one wipe out criminal liability without submitting to the jurisdiction of the court. The HC posted the matter for further hearing on February 12 by when Mallya will have to inform the court about which petition he wants to proceed with.

ther hearing on February 12 by when Mallya will have to inform the court about which petition he wants to proceed with. Mallya was declared a Fugitive Economic Offender in January 2019 by a special court hearing cases under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The businessman, accused of defaulting on multiple loan repayments and facing money laundering charges, left India in March 2016. The HC posted the matter for further hearing on February 12 by when Mallya will have to inform the court about which petition he wants to proceed with.

## Ola Electric secures Rs 366.78 cr PLI-Auto incentive for FY25



**New Delhi:** Ola Electric on Thursday said it has received a sanction order from the Ministry of Heavy Industries for the release of incentives amounting to Rs 366.78 crore under the production-linked incentive scheme. The sanction pertains to the demand incentive for the determined sales value for FY 2024-25, and authorises a payment of Rs 366.78 crore to be released through IFCI Limited, the designated financial institution for disbursement under the scheme, the Bengaluru-based firm said in a statement. The incentive has been sanctioned in accordance with the applicable terms and conditions of the PLI-Auto Scheme, as amended from time to time, it added. This milestone reinforces Ola Electric's role as a key contributor to India's advanced automotive manufacturing ecosystem and reflects the company's strong execution

across scale, localisation, and technology-led vertically integrated manufacturing, it stated. Commenting on the development, an Ola Electric spokesperson said, "The sanction of Rs 366.78 crore under the PLI-Auto Scheme is a strong endorsement of Ola Electric's manufacturing capabilities and our commitment to building world-class EV technology in India". This incentive recognises the company's sustained efforts in scaling domestic production, deepening localisation, and driving innovation

## IPO BOOM LIFTS FUNDRAISING TO RECORD RS 1.76 LAKH CR IN 2025



accounting for about 60 per cent of total capital raised in 2025. Overall, companies across market capitalisations, large, mid and small, tapped the IPO route, with the average issue size exceeding Rs 1,700 crore, suggesting the breadth of participation. Looking ahead, market participants remain optimistic about the IPO activity in 2026. Bhavesh Shah, Managing Director and Head of Investment Banking at Equirus Capital, said the IPO

themes. It is also expected to feature marquee offerings such as Reliance Jio, SBI Mutual Fund, Oyo and PhonePe. According to data compiled by IPO Central, 103 maiden public issues, launched in 2025, raised a total of Rs 1.76 lakh crore. The fundraising exceeded the Rs 1.6 lakh crore raised by 90 firms in 2024, and the Rs 49,436 crore garnered by 57 companies in 2023. According to Neha Agarwal, Managing Director and Head, Equity Capital Markets at JM Financial Institutional Securities, strong domestic liquidity and resilient investor confidence drove record fund mobilisation. Equirus Capital's Shah said that India's macroeconomic stability, marked by strong GDP growth, contained inflation and a predictable policy environment, boosted confidence among global and domestic investors. The momentum, however, was not uniform throughout the year. Primary market activity remained muted in the

# Officials discover a million more documents potentially related to Epstein case

US authorities have discovered more than a million more documents potentially related to the late paedophile Jeffrey Epstein that they plan to release in the coming days and weeks, officials say. The FBI and federal prosecutors in New York informed the Department of Justice (DoJ) of the discovery. "We have lawyers working around the clock to review and make the legally required redactions to protect victims, and we will release the documents as soon as possible," the DoJ said on Wednesday. The department said it could take "a few more weeks" before all the files are released. The DoJ has been under scrutiny after not releasing all Epstein files by 19 December, the deadline mandated under a new law. The agency said it would "continue to fully comply with federal law and President Trump's direction to release the files". The



statement did not specify how the FBI and the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York came across the additional material. Epstein had been facing charges of sex trafficking minors in the state when he died awaiting trial in a New York prison. The news comes after the justice department released thousands of documents - some heavily redacted - related to their investigations into Epstein. The department has been releasing the documents in batches and top officials have said hundreds of thousands of documents still are to be released. Who and what are in the Epstein files? Who was Jeffrey Epstein? The disgraced financier with powerful associates Trump trips, a fake video and 10 possible co-conspirators: Takeaways from new Epstein files. The files were released after Congress passed the Epstein Files Transparency Act - signed

into law by US President Donald Trump - that ordered the agency to share all the documents with the public while protecting victims' identities. Many of the released documents, which include videos, photos, emails and investigative documents, have heavy redactions, including names of people the FBI appears to cite as possible co-conspirators in the Epstein case. The justice department has faced criticism from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle over the amount of redactions, which the law permits only to protect victims' iden-

tities and active criminal investigations. In a post on X after the discovery of the additional documents was announced, the top Democrat on the House Oversight Committee, a congressional panel that has been investigating the Epstein saga, accused the White House of "illegally" withholding the files. "Every day we see lies, incompentence, missed deadlines, and illegal redactions," Representative Robert Garcia said in a statement. The law passed by Congress and signed last month by Trump states that names

and information that might be embarrassing or cause "reputational harm" are not allowed to be redacted. It specifically asks the DoJ for internal communications and memos detailing who was investigated and decisions on whether "to charge, not charge, investigate, or decline to investigate Epstein or his associates". Included in the documents are emails appearing to be exchanged between FBI personnel and six of the group had been served with subpoenas. This included three in Florida, one in Boston, one in New York City, and one in Connecticut. Possible co-conspirators in Epstein's crimes are a major focus for his victims, and for several lawmakers who have demanded more transparency from the justice department. Previous releases of Epstein documents have

included revelations that reverberated across the Atlantic. Andrew and Epstein is the story that will not go away. Andrew stripped of 'prince' title and will move out of Royal Lodge Peter Mandelson: Rise and fall of Labour's political fixer Peter Mandelson was sacked as the UK's ambassador to the US after details emerged about his friendship with the convicted paedophile, and that he told Epstein "I think the world of you", the day before Epstein began his sentence for soliciting prostitution from a minor in June 2008. Lord Mandelson said in a letter to staff that "I deeply regret" the circumstances of his departure from the British embassy in Washington DC. He said being ambassador had been "the privilege of my life" and he continued "to feel utterly awful about my association with Epstein twenty years ago and the plight of his victims".

## Democratic lawmaker sues to remove Trump's name from Kennedy Center



Democratic US Representative Joyce Beatty has filed a lawsuit seeking to remove President Donald Trump's name from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Last week, the board of the Kennedy Center - which Trump filled with allies - voted to rename the performing arts centre the Trump-Kennedy Center. Beatty is one of several Democratic lawmakers designated as members of the board by US law. She claimed in her lawsuit that the renaming was illegal because changing the name requires "an act of Congress". The suit says Beatty had called into the meeting about the name change but was muted when she tried to voice her opposition. Beatty argues that Congress intended for the centre to be a "living memorial" to former President Kennedy. "[I]n scenes more reminiscent of authoritarian regimes than the American republic - the sitting President and his handpicked loyal-

## Turkey arrests 115 IS suspects 'planning New Year's attacks'



Turkish authorities say they have disrupted planned attacks on Christmas and New Year's events after arresting more than 100 suspected members of the so-called Islamic State group. Mass raids were carried out at 124 addresses across Istanbul, the city's chief prosecutor said, with firearms, ammunition and "organisational documents" seized. Officials said IS supporters had been actively planning attacks across Turkey this week, particularly against non-Muslims. Police detained 115 suspects but efforts are ongoing to trace a further 22, an official statement read. The prosecutor's office said the suspects were in contact with IS operatives outside Turkey. The

announcement comes two days after Turkish intelligence agents carried out a raid against the group on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. A Turkish national who is alleged to have held a senior role with the IS wing operating in the region was detained and accused of planning attacks against civilians. Turkey's security serv-

ices regularly target people with suspected links to IS. The country shares a 900km (560 mile) border with Syria, where the group continues to operate in parts of the country. Syria's president Ahmed al-Shara, who has close ties to the Turkish government, has vowed to work with the US and Europe to root out surviving elements of IS.

## Sean 'Diddy' Combs files appeal asking for immediate prison release

Sean "Diddy" Combs has asked an appeals court to release him from prison and overturn his conviction on two prostitution-related crimes. In a court filing for an expedited appeal, the rap mogul's attorney argued that he was improperly sentenced, and that the conduct that resulted in his conviction was not criminal in nature. Attorney Alexandra Shapiro called Combs' 50-month prison sentence "unlawful, unconstitutional, and a perversion of justice". She asked an appeals court to order that Combs be resentenced, should the panel choose not to throw out his conviction in its entirety. The request is the latest attempt by his team to reduce his sentence or

throw out his conviction. The Southern District of New York, which prosecuted Combs, declined to comment on the request to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. Combs' lawyers had previously said they would appeal his sentence and conviction. Federal prosecutors in New York accused Combs of using his money, power, and the threat of violence to coerce women into unwanted sexual encounters. During a high-profile trial this spring, the jury heard from two of Combs' ex-girlfriends, Cassie Ventura and a woman who testified as "Jane Doe". They said Combs abused them and forced them to participate in so-called "freak-offs" with male escorts.

## ELEVEN ARRESTED OVER MASS SHOOTING IN SOUTH AFRICA TAVERN



Eleven suspects have been arrested in connection with a mass shooting that left nine people dead at a tavern in South Africa on Sunday. Police launched a manhunt for the 12 unidentified gunmen who had opened fire at patrons at around 01:00 local time (23:00 GMT Saturday) in the Bekkersdal establishment, near Johannesburg. On Wednesday, provincial deputy commissioner of police, Major General Fred Kekana said nine of the arrested suspects are Lesotho nationals, while one is from Mozambique. Another suspect, believed to be a South African mineworker, was also detained. Murders in South Africa - which has one

of the highest rates in the world - are often the result of arguments, robberies and gang violence. While the attack appeared "unprovoked" at the time, preliminary investigations now appear to suggest a motive linked to illegal mining turf wars. During the attack, gunmen continued to shoot as

## POPE LEO URGES 'COURAGE' TO END UKRAINE WAR IN FIRST CHRISTMAS ADDRESS



Pope Leo has urged Ukraine and Russia to find the "courage" to hold direct talks to end the war during his first Christmas remarks to crowds in St Peter's square. He called for an end to conflicts around the world during his Urbi et Orbi address, which is traditionally delivered by the pontiff on Christmas Day to worshippers gathered in Vatican City. Speaking about Ukraine, the Pope said: "May the clamour of weapons cease, and may the parties involved, with the support and commitment of the international community, find the courage to engage in sincere, direct and respectful dialogue." His plea comes as US-led negotiations on a deal to end the fighting continues. The US has sought to mediate between Kyiv and

Moscow as it seeks to put together an agreement to end the fighting acceptable to both sides, but direct talks between the warring parties have not taken place during this latest round of diplomatic efforts. Pope Leo also decried turmoil and conflict plaguing other parts of the world, including Thailand and Cambodia where deadly border clashes have flared up despite a ceasefire in July.

He asked that the South East Asian nations' "ancient friendship" be restored and "to work towards reconciliation and peace". During an earlier Christmas Day sermon in St Peter's Basilica, Pope Leo lamented conditions for homeless people the world over, and the damage caused by conflicts. "Fragile is the flesh of defenceless populations, tried by so many wars, ongoing or con-

cluded, leaving behind rubble and open wounds," he said. He said the story of the birth of Jesus showed that God had "pitched his fragile tent" among the people of the world. "How, then," he asked, turning his attention to the conditions of Palestinians, "can we not think of the tents in Gaza, exposed for weeks to rain, wind and cold?" Gaza has been devastated by Israeli bombardment in a two-year war, triggered by Hamas's attack on Israel on 7 October 2023. Winter storms have compounded the plight of the territory's 2.1m population, nearly all of whom have been displaced and their homes damaged or destroyed. Aid agencies have called for Israel to allow more tents and urgently needed supplies into Gaza.

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Luis Redondo, posted saying the result was "completely illegal". The vote was held on 30 November but the count was delayed twice by technical outages, which electoral officials called "inexcusable". The president of the CNE, Ana Paola Hall, blamed the private company tasked with tabulating the results for the delay. She said the firm had carried out maintenance without warning or checking with the CNE. The stoppage came a day after the portal displaying real-time results had crashed. Results of the election were tight and, because of the tumultuous nature of the processing system, around 15% of the tally sheets had to be counted by hand for the winner to be decided. There have been tensions in Honduras as a result of the delays with protests held across the country last week. Thousands of supporters of the governing Libre party demonstrated in the capital Tegucigalpa over what they considered fraud in the vote. The outgoing President, Xiomara Castro, had alleged that an "electoral coup" was taking place and earlier this month said the election was being marred by "interference" from Trump.

Nasry Asfura has been declared the winner of Honduras' razor-thin presidential election, after weeks of delays following technical problems and allegations of fraud. The conservative National Party candidate - backed by US President Donald Trump - won with 40.3% of the vote, according to the National Electoral Council (CNE), edging out Salvador Nasralla of the centre-right Liberal Party, who got 39.5%. In a post on X, Asfura said: "Honduras: I am ready to govern. I will not let you down." Meanwhile, Nasralla said at a press conference: "I will not accept a result built on omissions." But he also urged his supporters to remain calm.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio urged all parties to respect the result "so that Honduran authorities may ensure a peaceful transition of authority". But the president of the country's Congress, Luis Redondo, posted saying the result was "completely illegal". The vote was held on 30 November but the count was delayed twice by technical outages, which electoral officials called "inexcusable". The president of the CNE, Ana Paola Hall, blamed the private company tasked with tabulating the results for the delay. She said the firm had carried out maintenance without warning or checking with the CNE. The stoppage came a day after the portal displaying real-time results had crashed. Results of the election were tight and, because of the tumultuous nature of the processing system, around 15% of the tally sheets had to be counted by hand for the winner to be decided. There have been tensions in Honduras as a result of the delays with protests held across the country last week. Thousands of supporters of the governing Libre party demonstrated in the capital Tegucigalpa over what they considered fraud in the vote. The outgoing President, Xiomara Castro, had alleged that an "electoral coup" was taking place and earlier this month said the election was being marred by "interference" from Trump.

## Front-runner to be Bangladesh PM returns after 17 years in exile



Tarique Rahman, the front-runner to be the next prime minister of Bangladesh, has returned to the country after 17 years in exile ahead of landmark general elections. The 60-year-old is the figurehead of the influential Zia family and the son of former prime minister Khaleda Zia. The party he leads, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), is eyeing a return to power when Bangladesh goes to the polls in the new year. Rahman, who has lived in London since 2008, is expected to become the country's new leader if the BNP emerges as the largest party. Rahman's return comes in the wake of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina being ousted last

year. He had been the subject of various criminal investigations launched while her Awami League party was in power but was cleared of all charges when her regime fell. Hasina is living in exile in India and her party is unlikely to be permitted to take part in the elections, which many view as among the most consequential in Bangladesh's history. Last month, Hasina was sentenced to death for her role in suppressing anti-government protests. According to UN investigators, up to 1,400 people died in the student-led unrest. Hasina, who was put on trial in absentia, has denied committing crimes against humanity.

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## Rohtak Royals Appoint Legendary Defender Surender Nada As Head Coach Ahead Of Inaugural Kabaddi Champions League Season

Rohtak Royals, the franchise representing the city of Rohtak in the inaugural season of the Kabaddi Champions League (KCL), has announced the appointment of Surender Nada as its Head Coach. One of the most respected figures in Indian kabaddi, Nada brings a wealth of experience, leadership, and tactical acumen to the Royals as they prepare for their first-ever campaign in the league. Born on July 1, 1987, in Haryana's Jhajjar, Surender Nada is widely regarded as one of the finest defenders the sport has produced. Renowned for his lethal ankle-hold technique and defensive consistency, Nada rose to prominence as the highest tackle point scorer in the inaugural season of the Pro Kabaddi League. Over the course of his illustrious playing career, he achieved the rare distinction of registering five consecutive High 5s, a record that underlined his



dominance in defence. Speaking on his appointment as the Head Coach for Rohtak Royals, Surender Nada said, "I am honoured to take on the responsibility of Head Coach for Rohtak Royals. This team represents a region with a deep-rooted kabaddi culture, and I am excited to work closely with the players to build a competitive unit that plays fearless and intelligent kabaddi. The Kabaddi Champions League is a great platform, and our goal will be to set high standards from the very first season." At the international level, Nada has been a key contributor to India's success, winning gold medals at the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup, the 2017 Asian Kabaddi Championship, the 2018 Dubai Kabaddi Masters, and the 2019 South Asian Games. His transition into coaching marks the next chapter of a career defined by discipline, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to excellence.

Owned and managed by Adroit Sports Ventures LLP, Rohtak Royals draw their philosophy from a deep-rooted commitment to youth development, performance excellence and long-term sustainability in sport. The franchise's vision is to inspire the youth of Haryana by shaping

warriors from its villages into world-class kabaddi champions who carry forward the Rohtak legacy with heart and honour. With a mission to take Haryana's fearless DNA onto the mat, Rohtak Royals are committed to overpowering every opponent and making the name of Rohtak echo across kabaddi arenas worldwide. The franchise aligns with Adroit Sports Ventures' belief that every talented athlete deserves the right opportunity, guidance, and platform to succeed. Speaking on the appointment, Mr. Gajendra Sharma, Founder Adroit Sports and Owner, Rohtak Royals said, "Surender Nada embodies everything we stand for as a franchise - integrity, professionalism, and an unrelenting passion for kabaddi. His experience at the highest level of the sport will be invaluable as we shape our identity in the inaugural season of the Kabaddi Champions League. Owned by Adroit Sports Ventures LLP, the franchise is committed to promoting excellence in sport through structured development, ethical leadership, and a focus on youth empowerment. Rohtak Royals aim to build a sustainable and competitive team that upholds regional pride while contributing to the long-term growth of Indian kabaddi.

## Ex-Australia Star Adds Fresh Twist To England's Noosa 'Drinking' Row: "I Was There"

Former Australia batter Darren Lehmann has defended the England team over reports suggesting that the visitors had too much to drink during their mid-Ashes break in Noosa. According to reports in the English media, a number of players got too drunk during their six-day stay in Noosa, a resort town, ahead of the third Test in Adelaide. Ben Duckett has come under scrutiny, with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) investigating for verification of a video appearing to show the batter drunk and struggling to find his way back to the team hotel. However, Lehmann, who represented Australia in 27 Tests and



117 ODIs, has defended the visitors, saying that the Ben Stokes-led side was "really well behaved" during their time in Noosa. "I was in Noosa and this bugs me. I am all for getting stuck into England. They haven't played well enough, their preparation before the first game of the series

(was not good) I get all that. But I was actually there. They were actually really well behaved. They mixed with the locals, had a good time," Lehmann told ABC Sports. The 55-year-old also rubbished media reports of 'too much alcohol' as he revealed that the English players engaged in other

sports and bonded well with the locals. "The reports of them stagging it up are just wrong. They were polite and a delight to the people of Noosa, played golf, played soccer with the locals - all that sort of stuff. They were well liked there," he added. The accusations were levelled at the touring party following their 82-run loss in the third Ashes Test, which ended their hopes of regaining the Urn. Lehmann also addressed the remarks made by England's Director of Cricket, Rob Key, who assured that the allegations of drinking would be investigated. "I would defend them a bit because that's just out of order.

## 'I'M NOT RETIRING' - KIPCHOGE'S MARATHON WORLD TOUR



For more than two decades, Eliud Kipchoge ran with history on his back and won almost everything there was to win. He rewrote what the human body was believed capable of and became, by near-universal agreement, the greatest marathon runner ever. Now the 41-year-old says the chase for medals and validation is over. "What I am doing is not retiring," he says. "I am evolving. I am running for purpose." Kipchoge plans to take his running to the edges of the world with the Eliud Kipchoge World Tour - not to prove his greatness, but to give it away. Over the next two and a half years, the two-time Olympic champion will complete a marathon on all seven continents "Running is the most universal sport," he tells Newsday on the BBC World Service. "It connects us all. With this project, I want to compete not only for records, but for the people. "I want to inspire, to give back, and to remind everyone that no human is

## Shashi Tharoor Sends Big 'Vaibhav Suryavanshi' Message To Gautam Gambhir, Ajit Agarkar, Namedrops Sachin Tendulkar



Vaibhav Suryavanshi has had a 2025 to remember, and even in the last week of the year, the records continue to tumble. On Wednesday, December 24, the 14-year-old sensation smashed the fastest 150 in List A cricket history, beating AB de Villiers. Following Suryavanshi's astonishing 84-ball 190, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor compared his talent to Sachin Tendulkar. He also urged India head coach Gautam Gambhir and Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) chief selector Ajit Agarkar to not hesitate any further and give Suryavanshi an India call-up. "The last time a fourteen year old showed

such prodigious cricketing talent, it was Sachin Tendulkar - and we all know what became of him. What are waiting for? Vaibhav Suryavanshi for India" posted Tharoor on X, tagging Gautam Gambhir and

Ajit Agarkar's official accounts as well. Bihar's batters went on a record-breaking spree with teen sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi and skipper Sakibul Gani leading the carnage with the quickest hundreds to power them to a

world record team total of 574/6 in a Vijay Hazare Trophy match here Wednesday. Bearing the brunt of the sustained onslaught in the plate group match was minnows Arunachal Pradesh, as Gani (128 off 40 balls) raced to his hundred in just 32 balls, the fastest by Indian in List A cricket. Wicketkeeper Ayush Loharua too joined the party with a 116 off 56 balls but, at a venue that has already witnessed 49 fours and 38 sixes, his whirlwind knock was somewhat put to shade by the unreal batting of Suryavanshi and Gani. With his brutal onslaught against an attack that was pedestrian in terms of quality.

## No spinner for Australia on 'grassy' MCG pitch



Australia will not play a spinner in the Boxing Day Test on a Melbourne pitch stand-in captain Steve Smith described as "quite furry, quite green". The home side have named a 12-man squad for the fourth Ashes Test against England, starting on Friday (23:30 GMT Thursday). The group includes only specialist pace bowlers, meaning off-spinner Todd Murphy misses out. Smith, deputising as captain for Pat Cummins, said Australia will play four seamers, plus all-rounder Cameron Green. Michael Neser, Brendon Doggett and Jhye Richardson are vying for two places in the final XI. Smith is returning after missing the third Test through illness. Usman Khawaja was initially left out of the third Test, then replaced Smith and made scores of 82 and 40 in Adelaide. Khawaja is retained in Melbourne at the

expense of Josh Inglis. Khawaja will bat at number five, with all-rounder Green dropping to seven. The previous Ashes Test in Melbourne, in 2021, was over inside three days as England were bowled out for 185 and 68. "I daresay it's going to offer quite a bit," said Smith in his Christmas Day news conference. "Tomorrow looks similar conditions today - quite cold and overcast. There's going to be quite a bit of movement in

## R ASHWIN GIVES BIG VERDICT AS FANS SLAM VIJAY HAZARE TROPHY LIMITED BROADCAST



Former Indian cricket team spinner R Ashwin delivered a clear verdict on the limited telecast of the group stage matches of the Vijay Hazare Trophy 2025-26. Stalwarts like Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli were in action as the tournament began on Wednesday, but fans were left disappointed as only a handful of matches were broadcast. Considering that Rohit and Virat have both retired from T20Is and Test cricket, the matches were a big occasion for fans to see the star batters in action. However, Ashwin pointed out: "Fans are asking, 'what the hell?' Only Elon Musk can telecast these matches on X. Everyone wants to follow Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, no doubt. They had a great series and will be facing New Zealand next. They both have turned up, and turned up how! One scores 150 and the other 130, both with incredible strike rates. When players like these come and play, the

matches become more exciting," he said on his YouTube channel. Both Virat and Rohit slammed brilliant hundreds for their respective teams. Rohit slammed 155 off 94 deliveries, while Virat's 131 off 101 guided Delhi to victory over Andhra Pradesh. While fans were not happy with the lack of broadcasting, Ashwin explained that decisions regarding the telecast are taken well in advance and cannot be changed at the last minute, even if big names like Rohit and Virat decide to take part in the competition. "Everyone

wants to see Rohit and Virat in action, sure. But we have to see how early they [the broadcasters] got the information that Rohit and Virat would play. When the international calendar is given, the domestic calendar is given at the same time. Once it is given, the BCCI and broadcasters decide which stadiums are easy to cover from and which matches can be televised in advance. So, the conversation was that Rohit and Virat will play, but when? Making that last-minute switch is difficult," he said.

## "Cricket Has Created This": Ex-England Captain's Stunning Take On Mid-Ashes Drinking Row



England's reported mid-Ashes drinking-gate has soured what has already been a tour to forget in Australia. Several reports claimed some England players spent as many as six days drinking between the second and third Ashes Tests, particularly during their four-day break at the Noosa beach resort. A video of England opener Ben Duckett seemingly drunk and unable to find his way back to the team hotel has gone viral on social media. Reflecting on it, former England captain Michael Vaughan has refused to pin the blame on Duckett, instead stating that cricket suffers from a "drinking culture". "I am not going to point the finger at a group of young people who have had

a few beers on a couple of days off. I did exactly the same as them when I played for England, although I did at least know when it was time to go home and that is probably what Ben Duckett needs to learn," Vaughan wrote in his column for The Telegraph. Vaughan stated that cricketers from nations like England, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa all have the same culture," Vaughan wrote. "You give a

group of young people three or four days off to relax and they are going to do something like this," he added. Vaughan, instead, criticised England's Ashes preparation. Vaughan, who led England to a famous Ashes series win in 2005, slammed the fact that the trip to Noosa had been booked well in advance, but no prior plan had been made for warm-up games. "The thing about Noosa is that it was booked a year ago. But they did not book the Waca a year ago. How did they not prepare for a bouncy pitch leading into a first Test, but at the same time had booked their holiday in Noosa?" Vaughan. "They also do not have a fielding coach on tour and are dropping catches.

## 'Impossible to replace' - Fernandes could miss up to a month



Manchester United head coach Ruben Amorim says it is "impossible" to replace Bruno Fernandes as he faces up to a month without his captain. Fernandes was forced out of Sunday's 2-1 defeat at Aston Villa with a hamstring problem, which Amorim said at the time would rule the Portugal midfielder out of Friday's visit of Newcastle (20:00 GMT). Amorim refused to put a definitive timescale on Fernandes' absence when he spoke to the media on Wednesday, although he did say the expectation was it is "not going to take a lot of time". Sources have said privately they believe the 31-year-old will return for the Manchester derby with City at Old Trafford on 17 January, which would mean a five-match absence. It is a huge blow at a time when key attackers Bryan Mbeumo and Amad Diallo are away at the Africa Cup of Nations and Kobbie Mainoo, Fernandes' obvious replacement, is also missing with a calf injury. "It is impossible to replace Bruno," said Amorim. "He is the guy who is organising the team. "He understands every position on the field, he pays attention to every detail. When you have a substitution, he is always the guy telling the other guys where they should be." Amorim named Lisandro Martinez and Luke Shaw as two of the senior players who could step up, although it was Fernandes' fellow Portugal international Diogo Dalot who took the captain's armband at Villa Park.

## EESHA MOVIE REVIEW & RATING

The Telugu film Eesha, featuring Trigun (Adith Arun), Hebah Patel, and Siri Hanumanth, released on December 25, 2025. If you are looking for the highlights and reasons to watch the film, here is a breakdown

### 1. Atmospheric Technical Values

The film's strongest suit lies in its technical execution.

\* Sound Design & BGM: RR Dhruvan's background score is widely praised. Most positive reviews mention that the sound design (creaks, thuds, and eerie effects) effectively builds tension and delivers the jump scares that horror fans expect.

\* Cinematography: Santosh Sanamoni's visuals help create a dark, unsettling atmosphere, particularly in the scenes set within the abandoned house.

### 2. Strong Climax & Message

While the first half follows a standard horror template, the film finds its footing toward the end.

### \* The Twist: Many viewers noted that the mystery



THE SOUTH INDIA TIME'S RATING: 3/5.

surrounding "Eesha" is resolved well in the final 20 minutes.

\* Social Message: The film attempts to blend horror with a message about social awareness and exposing fake godmen, which some found to be a thoughtful departure from "brainless" horror.

### 3. Reliable Performances

The cast delivers sincere performances that ground the supernatural elements:

\* Trigun & Hebah Patel: Both leads are credited with carrying the emotional weight of the story effectively.

\* Babloo Prithiveeraj: His role as the mysterious "Aadidev" adds a layer of intrigue and intensity to the second half.

\* Mime Madhu: His portrayal of the spirit Punyavathi is noted for being genuinely eerie and impactful.

## Karthik Raju's Powerful first look from Vilaya Thandavam Released

By deliberately backing scripts with strong narratives and unconventional themes, young hero Karthik Raju has steadily been shaping a distinct space for himself in the industry. Staying true to this approach, he is now starring in an upcoming action-packed film titled Vilaya Thandavam. This high voltage new age thriller is helmed by director VS Vasu. The project stars Karthik Raju alongside Parvathi Arun and Pushpa fame Jagadeesh in prominent roles. Marking Production No. 1 for GMR Movie Makers, the film is being bankrolled by Mandala Dharmra Rao and Gumpu Bhaskar Rao. Notably, the title poster released earlier during the Dasara festivities created considerable buzz and was met with an encouraging response. Adding to the growing excitement, the makers have now revealed the first look poster as a special Christmas treat.

The striking poster is drenched in intensity, hinting at high-octane action and a raw, powerful narrative. Flames engulf the frame, charred remnants lie scattered, a shattered photo frame rests nearby, and fire courses across the hero's hand. With a bandage wrapped around his head and a piercing, resolute gaze, Karthik Raju appears in an aggressive and commanding avatar, promising a character driven by grit and fury. Designed for a pan-India release, Vilaya Thandavam is currently progressing rapidly through its shooting schedule, with more updates from the production team expected in the coming days.



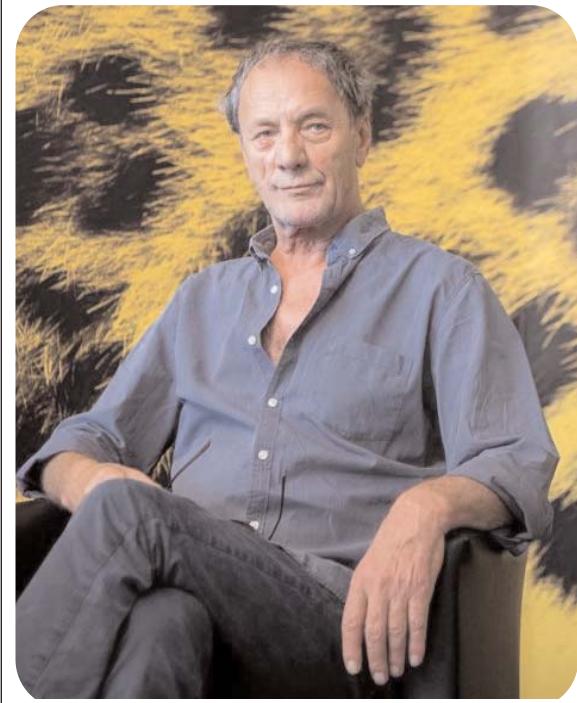
## Trivikram Srinivas Praises Patang, Calls It a Promising Kite-Flying Sports Drama



Whenever new talent emerges in the film industry, a few directors and heroes come forward to appreciate the creativity and work of such teams. One such rare personality is the famous director Trivikram Srinivas. Recently, after watching the trailer of the film Patang, and getting impressed by the promotional content and the film's concept, Trivikram Srinivas invited the team and congratulated them, also conveying his best wishes. He said that this is the first attempt in South India with a concept based on kite-flying competi-

tions and expressed his hope that the team's effort would become a big success. His highly positive words, saying "I somehow feel this film will definitely work," filled the Patang team with great energy. Those who met Trivikram from the Patang team include heroes Vamsi Pujith and Pranav Kaushik, director Praneeth Pathipati, costume designer Meghana Seshavapuri, one of the producers Santhap Makkala of Rishan Cinemas, and the film's VFX supervisor and executive producer Nikhil Koduru, among others.

Palestinian actor-director Mohammad Bakri dies at 72



## FACT CHECK: DID GOVIND MAKE CAMEO IN AVATAR: FIRE AND ASH?

**Mumbai:** Social media users are sharing several videos that appear to show Bollywood actor Govinda as a blue Na'vi character in James Cameron's film Avatar: Fire and Ash. In the clips, he wears flashy, colorful outfits and delivers dialogues in his familiar Mumbai style, while Jake Sully and his family are seen in the background. The videos sparked curiosity, laughter, and confusion, with many people asking if Govinda actually made a surprise cameo. What Is the Truth? The viral clips are not real scenes from the movie. They are AI-generated edits created for online buzz and memes. Govinda has not acted in Avatar:

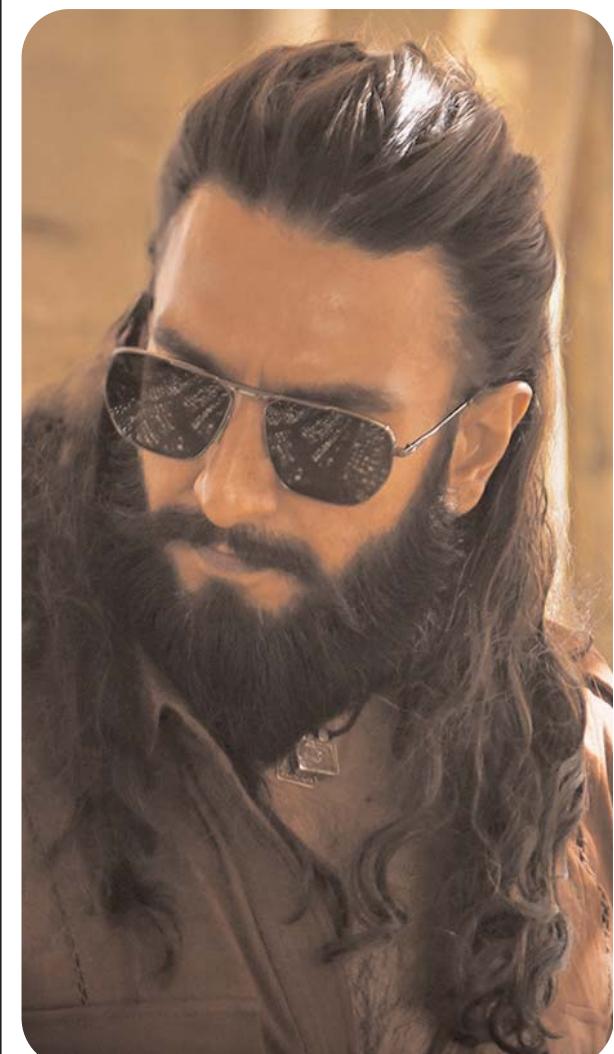


Fire and Ash, and he has not made a Hollywood debut through the franchise. Why the Meme Returned. Now the trend connects to an older controversy. In a past interview, Govinda claimed that James Cameron had once

offered him a role in Avatar, with a large payment and a 410-day shoot. He said he refused because the role needed body paint, and he feared it could harm his health. That statement led to heavy trolling online. As Avatar: Fire and Ash is

being discussed widely, the old claim has resurfaced, and trolls have turned it into a new joke using AI videos. The result is a convincing-looking "Govinda Na'vi" crossover that is purely fan-made and fictional.

## DHURANDHAR NEARS RS 1,000 CR CLUB



## 'Animal' to release in Japan on February 13 next year



Chennai: The makers of director Sandeep Reddy Vanga's immensely popular film 'Animal', featuring actors Ranbir Kapoor, Rashmika Mandanna and Bobby Deol in the lead, on Wednesday announced that the film would release in Japan on February 13 next year. Taking to its X timeline, Bhadrakali Pictures, the production house that made the film, wrote, "Kono otoko wa Darenimo Tomerarenai. The most talked-about, debated, and unforgettable cinematic experience is coming to Japan. Animal releases in Japanese theatres on February 13, 2026. #Animal #AnimalinJapan #AnimalTheFilm. Japan Distribution @GEEKPICTURESinc @geekpictures\_d @geekpictures\_IN @Arjunarcv @mokshamodgill." It may be recalled that only at the beginning of this month, Bollywood superstar Anil Kapoor and director Sandeep Reddy Vanga had celebrated the second anniversary of the film. The actor and the director marked the milestone with emotional posts and stories on their social media

accounts. Anil shared a series of on-set pictures and wrote, "Two years of a film that didn't just release, it erupted #2yearsofAnimal". The director of the movie, Sandeep Reddy Vanga, echoed the sentiment with a powerful still of Ranbir Kapoor in full intensity and captioned it as "Two years for 'ANIMAL'." Anil Kapoor shared various clips of the movie and also a BTS of the same. From preparing for scenes and

interacting with director Sandeep Reddy Vanga to sitting in character as Balbir Singh, Anil shared a collage of all the pictures. The other picture shared by Sandeep showed the lead actor of 'Animal', Ranbir Kapoor, in an aggressive, action-driven moment. The movie, directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga, released on December 1, 2023, and went on to become one of the year's biggest commercial successes.

## MS Dhoni, Salman Khan 'flirt with dirt' at farmhouse



**Mumbai:** A day after the most viral frame featuring three superstars from Bollywood, cricket and music took the internet by storm, another unseen photo has now grabbed attention online.

This time, it features former Indian cricket captain MS Dhoni and Salman Khan's during a relaxed outing at the actor's serene and luxurious Panvel farmhouse.

In the newly surfaced image, Dhoni and Salman Khan are seen standing beside a mud-splattered tractor at the Panvel farm, soaked in rain and earth, far removed from the glitz and glamour they are usually associated with. Set against lush green fields and wet farmland, the picture reflects a raw, grounded side of the stars that fans rarely get to see. These throwback photos have resurfaced after Salman Khan's brother-in-law Atul Agnihotri shared them on Instagram ahead of the actor's birthday, instantly setting social media abuzz. While the exact timeline of the images remains unclear, they are believed to have

been taken during the COVID-19 lockdown period. More about Salman Khan's Panvel Farmhouse: Salman Khan's Panvel farmhouse has long been known as a hotspot for close-knit gatherings and quiet retreats. Spread across nearly 150 acres, Arpita Farms is a luxurious nature haven named after his sister. Valued at approximately Rs 80 crore, the farmhouse blends rustic charm with modern amenities such as a swimming pool, gym and horse stables, and has served as a personal sanctuary for Salman and his family, especially during lockdowns, reflecting his love for nature, family and life away from the city's chaos.