



## NATION | NEWS

Industry-friendly decisions give fresh momentum to 'Ease of Doing Business': CM Rekha Gupta



## WORLD | NEWS

Zelensky says Russia 'doesn't want peace' ahead of meeting Trump in Florida



## SPORTS | NEWS

Shubman Gill's T20 World Cup 2026 Snub Causing Disarray In Team India? Report's Big Claim

## INBRIEF

Cong marks 140th foundation day in Delhi

**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) on Sunday observed the 140 Foundation Day of the Indian National Congress (INC) at the party's Rajiv Bhawan office. DPCC President Devender Yadav hoisted the party flag and joined Seva Dal workers in singing the national song, 'Vande Mataram'.

Earlier in the day, he attended the main event at the party's national headquarters, Indira Bhawan, where Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge unfurled the flag in the presence of CPP Chairperson Sonia Gandhi and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi. Several former MPs, ministers, legislators, and party functionaries were present at the Delhi event.

Addressing attendees, Yadav stated that reaching out to people following Congress ideology was essential to provide social justice, equality, and rights to all sections of society.

## 6 months after inferno at Sigachi unit killed 54, company CEO arrested

**HYDERABAD (TSIT):** Six months after the devastating fire at Sigachi Industries Limited's unit in Telangana's Sangareddy district claimed the lives of 54 workers, police have arrested the company's Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Amit Raj Sinha.

Police presented Sinha before a magistrate, who sent him to judicial custody. In a disclosure to BSE Limited and National Stock Exchange of India Limited, the company informed that Amit Raj Sinha was remanded on Saturday in connection with the ongoing investigation relating to the fire incident.

"The company has taken all necessary measures to ensure the continuity of its operations and day-to-day activities. In the interim, Lija Stephen Chacko, Deputy Group CEO, will oversee the operations of the company," it said.

On June 30, a huge fire broke out following a major



**A case of culpable homicide was registered against six persons, all from the pharmaceutical company, the officer said.**

explosion in the manufacturing plant of Sigachi Industries, Pashamalaram industrial area unit in Sangareddy district, killing 54 workers and injuring 33

others. While 46 bodies were identified, eight missing people were presumed dead. The plant manufactures Microcrystalline Cellulose powder, which is used in tablets and capsules as a binding agent. BDL-Bhanur Police had registered a case against the company management. The police had invoked Section 105 of the BNS for culpable homicide not amounting to murder - a cognisable offence that carries a punishment of not less than five years and up to life imprisonment, along with a fine. Besides, the FIR includes charges under

Section 110 (attempt to commit culpable homicide) and Section 117 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt).

However, no arrests were made in the case. Hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL), the Telangana High Court had last month taken serious note of the delay in the probe to fix responsibility for the explosion inside the factory.

A Bench of Chief Justice Aparsh Kumar Singh and Justice G.M. Mohiuddin had summoned the Investigation Officer and directed him to furnish all documents connected to the case, including the First Information Report, case diary and the report on the progress of the investigation. In a counter-affidavit filed by the state government in August, the court was told that Sigachi had given a written undertaking to pay Rs 1 crore to each deceased worker's family, though the timeframe for disbursement remains unspecified.

## SC to hear CBI plea against bail to Kuldeep Sengar in Unnao rape case

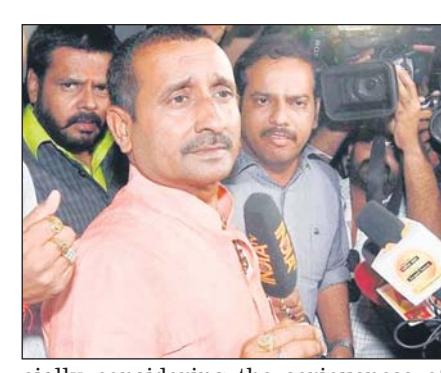
**New Delhi, Dec 28 (TSIT):** The Supreme Court will hear on Monday (December 29) a petition filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) challenging the Delhi High Court's order that granted bail to former Uttar Pradesh MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar in the Unnao rape case. A vacation bench, comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, Justices J.K. Maheshwari and Augustine George Masih, will hear the matter.

The CBI has approached the Supreme Court through a Special Leave Petition against the High Court's decision to suspend Sengar's life sentence and release him on bail while his appeal against conviction is pending.

Earlier this week, the Delhi High Court granted bail after holding that the stricter provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and Section 376(2) of the Indian Penal Code were not applicable in Sengar's case.

The High Court reasoned that Sengar could not be treated as a "public servant" under these provisions and, on that basis, suspended his sentence.

The CBI has strongly objected to this reasoning. It has argued that the High Court's order weakens the protection provided to children under the POCSO Act and is not legally sustainable, espe-



cially considering the seriousness of the crime and established principles governing suspension of life sentences. According to the CBI, treating an MLA as not being a "public servant" for the purpose of POCSO defeats the very objective of the law. The agency said the Act is meant to give stronger protection to children and to treat abuse of authority as an aggravating factor. A narrow and technical interpretation, it argued, undermines this purpose.

The investigating agency also submitted that POCSO is a welfare legislation and must be interpreted in a way that strengthens, not limits, safeguards for child victims. It added that long time spent in jail cannot, by itself, be a valid reason to suspend a life sentence in cases involving heinous crimes such as the rape of a minor.

## Multiple Delhi hotspots record AQI above 400, Minimum temp at 6.3°C



worst-affected areas at 445. Wazirpur followed closely at 437, while Jahangirpuri and Narela reported AQI levels of 433 and 435, respectively.

Bawana recorded 423, R K Puram 414, Dwarka 401, and Rohini around 429. Other areas, such as Alipur (385) and Aya Nagar (344), also remained heavily polluted.

## Telangana govt selling industrial land worth Rs 5 lac cr: KTR

**Hyderabad, Dec 28 (TSIT):** Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) working president K.T. Rama Rao reiterated that the Congress government in Telangana is selling away 9,300 acres of industrial land worth almost Rs 5 lakh crore.

"The Congress Govt in Telangana is indulging in not just sale of one chunk of industrial land but 9,300 acres of land worth almost 5 Lakh crores," Rama Rao posted on X while reacting to an X post by Congress MP Karti P. Chidambaram about Infosys selling its prime land in Attibele in Karnataka to



Puravankara for Rs 250 crore. Chidambaram wrote that if the land was given at a concession for a specific purpose and the land wasn't utilised for that purpose, Infosys has no right to sell it for a commercial rate today. "Return the land & proceeds to the

KTR alleges Telangana Congress government is selling 9,300 acres of industrial land worth Rs.5 lac cr, calling it a massive land scam.

Government of Karnataka," he posted.

Reacting to this, the BRS leader reiterated his allegation that the Congress government in Telangana is selling industrial land worth Rs 5 lakh crore. "These prime lands were given by Govt at a

concession for a specific purpose (employment generation) Our demand is also the same. They have no right to sell the land and make money for their kith & kin," wrote KTR.

"Return the land to the Govt and put it to effective use for the benefit of people of Hyderabad and Telangana. We need land for schools, hospitals, housing for poor, parks, bus stands and parking," added the former minister.

He claimed that the lands that were once given by the government to industries to create jobs for people are

now being given to private individuals.

The BRS leader alleged that the government is giving industrial lands to build apartments, villas and commercial complexes as it does not want industries. KTR claimed that while the market price for these lands is Rs one lakh per square yard, the government is handing them to private individuals for just Rs 4,000. He urged the real estate developers not to get cheated with the "sale offer" by the government and warned that once BRS returns to power, it would take back these lands.

## World looking at India with great hope due to 'youth power': PM Modi



**In his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' radio broadcast, Modi also said that on January 12, the 'National Youth Day' will be celebrated on Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary when a 'Young Leaders Dialogue' will also be organised.**

for something new and are equally aware. He said many youth often ask him how they can further contribute to nation-building and share their ideas.

He said answer to this curiosity of the youth is the 'Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue', whose first edition was held last year. "On the 12th of next month, 'National Youth Day' will be celebrated on the occasion of Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary. A 'Young Leaders Dialogue' will also be held on this day, and I will certainly participate in that. In this, our

'Smart India Hackathon 2025' concluded this month.

During this hackathon, students worked on more than 270 problems of more than 80 government departments. Students offered solutions which were related to real life challenges like traffic-related problems," he said.

Modi said over 13 lakh students and over 6,000 institutes have participated in the 'Smart India Hackathon' in the last seven to eight years.

Youth have also provided accurate solutions to hundreds of problems, he said while urging the youth to be a part of these hackathons that are organised from time to time.

The prime minister said the youth also put forward their ideas on solutions to challenges like financial frauds, digital arrests and suggestions were extended on Cyber Security Framework for digital banking in villages. Many youth remained engaged in solving the challenges in the agriculture sector, he added.

## CM Naidu thanks PM Modi for appreciating Narsapuram lace craft



**Amaravati, Dec 28 (TSIT):** Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for appreciating Narsapuram lace craft.

The Chief Minister took to X to thank the Prime Minister, who mentioned Narsapuram lace craft in his 'Mann Ki Baat' programme on Sunday.

"Thank you for your appreciation of the Narsapuram lace craft, Hon'ble Prime Minister Modi Ji. Andhra Pradesh

is home to many traditional arts that have been preserved by families and communities over generations. One such beautiful art form is crochet lace making, which originated in Narsapuram," posted CM Naidu.

"I sincerely appreciate the skill and dedication of the women who have not

only preserved this art but also taken it to the world. It is heartening to see their work flourish again and receive the recognition it truly deserves. We will continue to cherish and support this art and empower the artisans associated with it," he added.

CM Naidu responded to a post by the Prime Minister. "This effort in Narsapuram has brought back to life the local lace craft and thus empowered several people," reads the post by the Prime Minister.

## Freight loading hits new high as Indian Railways strengthens economic corridors

**NEW DELHI:** Indian Railways recorded significant progress in infrastructure expansion, passenger comfort, freight movement and safety during 2025, laying a strong foundation for faster, safer and more modern rail travel in 2026, according to the Ministry of Railways' Year-End Review released on Sunday. The national transporter commissioned over 900 km of new rail lines between April and November 2025 and carried out large-scale track renewals.

**NEW DELHI (TSIT):** On the 140th Foundation Day on Sunday, Rahul Gandhi said the Congress is not just a political party, but the voice of India's soul that has stood with every weak, deprived and hardworking person. He attended the 140th Foundation Day function at the Indira Bhawan headquarters of the party here. In a post on X, he said, "The resolve is to fight even more strongly the battle for truth, courage,



and to protect the Constitution against hatred, injustice, and dictatorship." Heartiest greetings to every Congressman on the Foundation Day of the Indian National Congress today. We pay homage to that historic legacy and those great sacrifices that won freedom for India, laid the foundation of the Constitution, and strengthened the values of democracy, secularism, social justice, and equality," he added.

## AP: Jana Sena support Dy CM's proposal to name the Polavaram Project after Potti Sriramulu : MLC Nagababu

Mangaluru (Guntur dist, Andhra Pradesh), Dec 28 (UNI) Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council Member and Jana Sena Party General Secretary K. Nagababu on Sunday said the party supports Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan's proposal to name the Polavaram irrigation project after Amarajeeyi Potti Sriramulu.

Addressing at a meeting held on the occasion of joining of Arya Vaishya community members into Jana Sena Party under the leadership of MLC Penugonda Subbarayudu here, Nagababu said Pawan Kalyan's proposal was a fitting tribute to Potti Sriramulu, whose sacrifice led to the formation of Andhra Pradesh. Nagababu said that at a time when Telugu-speaking people faced discrimination, Potti Sriramulu undertook a fast unto

death demanding a separate state for Telugu people, playing a historic role in the creation of Andhra Pradesh. He described Potti Sriramulu as a lasting source of inspiration for future generations.

Recalling his student days in Nellore, Nagababu said a statue of Potti Sriramulu stood in his college campus and students paid respects to it daily. As a student of history, he said he closely studied the life and ideals of the freedom fighter. Nagababu further said that after the formation of the coalition government, Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan has been focusing on strengthening the Panchayat Raj system and ensuring comprehensive village development. He added that breaking away from the practice of naming government projects

after political leaders, Pawan Kalyan ensured a drinking water project supplying purified water to the Godavari districts was named after Potti Sriramulu to keep his legacy alive. Speaking on the occasion, Government Whip in the Legislative Council Pidugu Hariprasad said Jana Sena Party President Pawan Kalyan was among the few leaders who had dedicated their lives entirely to public service.

He said the party would continue to function strictly in accordance with its core principles and urged new members to uphold them. The newly inducted members took a pledge to work with discipline and dedication in line with Jana Sena Party's ideology.

The programme was attended by State Police Housing Corporation Chairman Kalyanam Siva

Srinivas, Andhra Pradesh Medical Services and Infrastructure Development Corporation Chairman Chilapalli Srinivasa Rao, Jana Sena NTR district president Samineni Udayabhanu, and others. The Polavaram Project is a massive multi-purpose dam on the Godavari River in Andhra Pradesh, crucial for irrigation, power, and drinking water, with a key component being the Polavaram-Vijayawada Link Canal designed to transfer surplus Godavari water via a link canal (part of the National Interlinking of Rivers plan) to the Krishna River basin near Vijayawada, stabilizing the Krishna Delta and serving Rayalaseema's drought-prone areas, with current efforts focusing on completing its complex canal system by 2027.

## Sonowal cautions BJP workers against complacency, infighting ahead of 2026 Assam polls

**GUWAHATI:** Union Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Saturday asked BJP workers not to become complacent or indulge in infighting ahead of the 2026 assembly polls in Assam.

Speaking at the party's state executive meeting, Sonowal said the party was confident about returning to power for a third term because of the work done by the "double-engine" government over the last 10 years.

"Regarding the 2026 assembly elections, we head in from a position of strength, but everyone has to remain restrained and disciplined. The people are with us, but it is important that there is no infighting within our

own party," he said. Sonowal claimed BJP's political journey in Assam marked a clear departure from "decades of neglect and instability" under Congress governments.

"For nearly 60 years, Assam and the Northeast were denied peace, development and dignity. We were denied our due until PM Modi not only brought development and growth in the region, but also bridged the emotional gap that was perpetuated by decades of misrule by the Congress government," he claimed. Sonowal claimed that peace and stability returned only after the BJP formed the government in Assam in 2016, through dialogue,

decisive action and signing of multiple peace accords.

He claimed the PM's frequent, but everyone has to remain restrained and disciplined. The people are with us, but it is important that there is no infighting within our own party," he said. Sonowal claimed BJP's political journey in Assam marked visits and the regular presence of Union ministers in the region have replaced what he described as a "Lutyens' Delhi-centric elite" approach, with governance that is close to the people.

Sonowal said the BJP workers must always remember that "nation comes first, the party second and self last".

## Consensus eludes Thackeray cousins, Shiv Sena-BJP over seat sharing for BMC polls

**MUMBAI:** Consensus on seat sharing for the January 15 Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections eluded both the Thackeray cousins and the BJP-Shiv Sena camps, as leaders from the respective parties held hectic parleys on Saturday.

The Shiv Sena (UBT), led by Uddhav Thackeray, and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) under Raj Thackeray haven't yet declared their lists of candidates for the civic polls in the city.

Similarly, the BJP and Shiv Sena, headed by Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, are yet to share the details of their nominees. BMC has 227 civic wards.

During the day, MNS leaders Bala Nandgaonkar, Nitin Sardesai

and Sandeep Deshpande met Uddhav Thackeray to iron out differences over wards in the Mahim assembly segment, which covers areas like Dadar and Prabhadevi, where both parties are influential.

Talking to reporters, Nandgaonkar said some seats had to be exchanged, for which he met Uddhav. He said there will be another round of meetings with him on Saturday night, after which the seat-sharing talks will reach the final stage.

Nandgaonkar said MNS, which has contested all polls independently, is new to seat-sharing talks. Between the BJP and the Shiv Sena, deadlocks over seats persist, said a Sena leader, adding that talks between the two

parties, which are parts of the ruling Mahayuti coalition, are still underway for the civic bodies in Mira Bhayander, Thane, Navi Mumbai and Kalyan Dombivli.

The case wasn't much different with the NCP, led by Deputy CM Ajit Pawar, and Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP).

Talks between the two parties over a possible alliance for Pune civic polls appear to have hit a dead end, with the NCP not agreeing to the Sharad Pawar-led party's proposal for contesting the elections on their respective poll symbols.

Elections to 29 municipal corporations in Maharashtra, including Mumbai and Pune, will be held on January 15. The last date to file the nominations is December 30.

## Vande Mataram inspires national unity, vision of Viksit Bharat: Union Minister Kishan Reddy

**HYDERABAD:** Union Minister for Coal and Mines G Kishan Reddy on Saturday said 'Vande Mataram' is not merely a song, but the embodiment of sacrifice, patriotism and national unity that infused life into India's freedom struggle. He was speaking after inaugurating a special photo exhibition organised by the Central Bureau of Communication (CBC) at Vivek Vardhini Educational Institutions to commemorate 150 years of Vande Mataram and convey the spirit of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat through rare photographs, an official release said.

Addressing the gathering at V V College here, the Minister said the slogan 'Vande Mataram' symbolises the self-respect of Indians and reflects their zeal and sacrifices during the freedom movement.

He recalled that the song composed nearly 150 years ago by the great poet Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, reflects the grande



of Bharat Mata, its spiritual glory and rich cultural heritage. He noted that Vande Mataram served as a unifying force against the British policy of "divide and rule," fostering the idea of "Nation First" by transcending divisions of caste, religion and region.

Reflecting on history, Reddy said the Vande Mataram movement launched in 1938 in the then Hyderabad state was banned by the Nizam's government, and strict action was taken against students who sang Vande Mataram. "Many students and intellectuals

made immense sacrifices during that movement," he said.

Reddy described Hyderabad's history as a "source of pride", recalling how various social and national organisations united beyond political differences to wage a collective struggle against Nizam rule under the banner of Vande Mataram.

Marking the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram, he called on all citizens to participate actively in nation-building and the creation of a Viksit Bharat.

In her inaugural address, Shruti Patil, Additional Director General of CBC and PIB, highlighted the enduring significance of Vande Mataram and its crucial role in shaping India's national identity. She noted that the spirit of these words extends beyond history, inspiring generations and fostering a strong sense of patriotism throughout the country, the release added.

## Industry-friendly decisions give fresh momentum to 'Ease of Doing Business': CM Rekha Gupta



New Delhi: Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday said the government is taking consistent, practical and industry-friendly steps to strengthen the city's 'Ease of Doing Business' framework, with a clear focus on boosting enterprise growth and expanding employment opportunities.

She said that within the first ten months of her government, several key reforms have been rolled out for the industrial sector, aimed at reducing regulatory hurdles and improving efficiency. These include the simplification of licensing procedures and the introduction of a single-window clearance system to ensure faster, time-bound and more transparent approvals for businesses.

According to the Chief

Minister, the reforms are designed to create a predictable and supportive environment for industries, encourage fresh investments and help existing enterprises scale up operations, while also contributing to sustained job creation across the national capital.

Delhi Chief Minister was addressing the centenary celebrations of the Friends Colony Industrial Area, where she extended heartfelt congratulations to the

industry fraternity for their journey marked by struggle, hard work and entrepreneurship. The event was attended by union Minister of State Harsh Malhotra, Delhi Cabinet Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa, BJP MLAs along with several representatives of the industry.

Chief Minister described the industrial sector as the cornerstone of India's development, stating that running an industry is not merely

about establishing a business but about driving the nation's economy forward and providing livelihoods to lakhs of families. She added that the Delhi Government is making sincere efforts to promote and sustain industry in the Capital.

To this end, she said, continuous practical and industry-friendly measures are being undertaken to further strengthen the Ease of Doing Business. Over the past ten months, several key decisions have been implemented, including simplification of licensing procedures and ensuring that industries do not face unnecessary hurdles from government departments. All approvals have been streamlined through a single-window system to make processes more efficient and transparent.

The high court, however, said that vital coupled with the fear of ostracisation and the desire to preserve the family unit may compel the victim to retract from the truth. In the present case as well, the subsequent hostility of the victim can be traced from her statement under Section 164 of the CrPC itself," Justice Amit Mahajan said.

The court dismissed the man's appeal challenging his conviction and 20-year jail term under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The victim girl, who was less than 12-year-old at the time of the incident in March 2016, the subsequent hostility of the victim can be traced from her statement under Section 164 of the CrPC itself," Justice Amit Mahajan said.

Nothing can justify a child being faced with the burden of shielding their perpetrator, it said.

It noted that the victim may have retracted from her testimony due to fear of losing shelter, financial stability and the desire to preserve the family unit, especially when the accused is a caregiver or

## 10.56 lakh names deleted as EC releases Assam's draft electoral rolls after Special Revision

**GUWAHATI:** The names of 10.56 lakh voters have been deleted after the Special Revision of electoral rolls in Assam, where assembly polls would be in less than six months.

According to the integrated draft rolls released by the Election Commission on Saturday, the state has a total of 2,51,09,754 voters, excluding 93,021 D-Voters or doubtful voters. Additionally, the names of 10.56,291 voters have been deleted due to death, shifting, or multiple entries.

D-Voters are a category of voters in Assam who have been disenfranchised by the government on account of their alleged lack of proper citizenship credentials. D-Voters are determined by special tribunals under the Foreigners Act, 1946, and the person declared as a D-Voter is not given a voter card.

All related particulars, such as name, age and photograph, of D-Voters have been carried forward to the draft

electoral roll without any change. The draft rolls were published after house-to-house verification of the Special Revision was held from November 22 to December 20. Now, voters will be able to file claims and objections till January 22, and the final electoral rolls will be published on February 10, a statement said.

Of the 10.56 lakh, 4,78,992 names were deleted because of deaths, 5,23,680 voters were found to have moved from their registered addresses, and 53,619 demo-

raphically similar entries were identified for correction, it said. The verification was conducted in 61,03,103 households across the state, it added. The exercise involved 35 District Election Officers (DEOs), 126 Electoral Registration Officers (EROS), 1,260 AEROS, 29,656 Booth Level Officers (BLOs) and 2,578 BLO Supervisors, the statement said.

Political parties deployed 61,533 Booth Level Agents (BLAs) to assist and monitor the process, it said. While the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral

## HC upholds man's conviction for stepdaughter's rape, says victim turning hostile can't dismiss case

**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi High Court has upheld the 20-year jail term of a man for raping his minor stepdaughter, observing that guilt under the POCSO Act cannot be dismissed merely because the victim turned hostile, particularly when scientific evidence was available.

The high court said it considered it apposite to take notice of the plight of such victims, who are defenceless against pressure from their family members and are susceptible to influence.

Nothing can justify a child being faced with the burden of shielding their perpetrator, it said.

It noted that the victim may have retracted from her testimony due to fear of losing shelter, financial stability and the desire to preserve the family unit, especially when the accused is a caregiver or

she was sexually assaulted by her stepfather while she was sleeping at midnight. Later she informed her mother about the incident and a complaint was lodged.

She was sexually assaulted by her stepfather while she was sleeping at midnight. Later she informed her mother about the incident and a complaint was lodged.

The court dismissed the man's appeal challenging his conviction and 20-year jail term under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The victim girl, who was less than 12-year-old at the time of the incident in March 2016, the subsequent hostility of the victim can be traced from her statement under Section 164 of the CrPC itself," Justice Amit Mahajan said.

Nothing can justify a child being faced with the burden of shielding their perpetrator, it said.

It noted that the victim may have retracted from her testimony due to fear of losing shelter, financial stability and the desire to preserve the family unit, especially when the accused is a caregiver or

she was sexually assaulted by her stepfather while she was sleeping at midnight. Later she informed her mother about the incident and a complaint was lodged.

The court dismissed the man's appeal challenging his conviction and 20-year jail term under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The victim girl, who was less than 12-year-old at the time of the incident in March 2016, the subsequent hostility of the victim can be traced from her statement under Section 164 of the CrPC itself," Justice Amit Mahajan said.

Nothing can justify a child being faced with the burden of shielding their perpetrator, it said.

It noted that the victim may have retracted from her testimony due to fear of losing shelter, financial stability and the desire to preserve the family unit, especially when the accused is a caregiver or

she was sexually assaulted by her stepfather while she was sleeping at midnight. Later she informed her mother about the incident and a complaint was lodged.

The court dismissed the man's appeal challenging his conviction and 20-year jail term under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The victim girl, who was less than 12-year-old at the time of the incident in March 2016, the subsequent hostility of the victim can be traced from her statement under Section 164 of the CrPC itself," Justice Amit Mahajan said.

Nothing can justify a child being faced with the burden of shielding their perpetrator, it said.

It noted that the victim may have retracted from her testimony due to fear of losing shelter, financial stability and the desire to preserve the family unit, especially when the accused is a caregiver or

she was sexually assaulted by her stepfather while she was sleeping at midnight. Later she informed her mother about the incident and a complaint was lodged.

The court dismissed the man's appeal challenging his conviction and 20-year jail term under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The victim girl, who was less than 12-year-old at the time of the incident in March 2016, the subsequent hostility of the victim can be traced from her statement under Section 164 of the CrPC itself," Justice Amit Mahajan said.

Nothing can justify a child being faced with the burden of shielding their perpetrator, it said.

It noted that the victim may have retracted from her testimony due to fear of losing shelter, financial stability and the desire to preserve the family unit, especially when the accused is a caregiver or

she was sexually assaulted by her stepfather while she was sleeping at midnight. Later she informed her mother about the incident and a complaint was lodged.

The court dismissed the man's appeal challenging his conviction and 20-year jail term under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The victim girl, who was less than 12-year-old at the time of the incident in March 2016, the subsequent hostility of the victim can be traced from her statement under Section 164 of the CrPC itself," Justice Amit Mahajan said.

Nothing can justify a child being faced with the burden of shielding their perpetrator, it said.

It noted that the victim may have retracted from her testimony due to fear of losing shelter, financial stability and the desire to preserve the family unit, especially when the accused is a caregiver or

she was sexually assaulted by her stepfather while she was sleeping at midnight. Later she informed her mother about the incident and a complaint was lodged.

The court dismissed the man's appeal challenging his conviction and 20-year jail term under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The victim girl, who was less than 12-year-old at the time of the incident in March 2016, the subsequent hostility of the victim can be traced from her statement under Section 164 of the CrPC itself," Justice Amit Mahajan said.

Nothing can justify a child being faced with the burden of shielding their perpetrator, it said.

It noted that the victim may have retracted from her testimony due to fear of losing shelter, financial stability and the desire to preserve the family unit, especially when the accused is a caregiver or

she was sexually assaulted by her stepfather while she was sleeping at midnight. Later she informed her mother about the incident and a complaint was lodged.

The court dismissed the man's appeal challenging his conviction and 20-year jail term under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The victim girl, who was less than 12-year-old at the time of the incident in March 2016, the subsequent hostility of the victim can be traced from her statement under Section 164 of the CrPC itself," Justice Amit Mahajan said.

Nothing can justify a child being faced with the burden of shielding their perpetrator, it said.

It noted that the victim may have retracted from her testimony due to fear of losing shelter, financial stability and the desire to preserve the family unit, especially when the accused is a caregiver or

she was sexually assaulted by her stepfather while she was sleeping at midnight. Later she informed her mother about the incident and a complaint was lodged.

The court dismissed the man's appeal challenging his conviction and 20-year jail term under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The victim girl, who was less than 12-year-old at the time of the incident in March 2016, the subsequent hostility of the victim can be traced from her statement under Section 164 of the CrPC itself," Justice Amit Mahajan said.

Nothing can justify a child being faced with the burden of shielding their perpetrator, it said.

It noted that the victim may have retracted from her testimony due to fear of losing shelter, financial stability and the desire to preserve the family unit, especially when the accused is a caregiver or

she was sexually assaulted by her stepfather while she was sleeping at midnight. Later she informed her mother about the incident and a complaint was lodged.

The court dismissed the man's appeal challenging his conviction and 20-year jail term under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act

## Stalin, EPS, Vijay and other leaders pay tribute to 'Captain' Vijayakanth on second death anniversary

CHENNAI: Chief Minister M K Stalin, Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin, AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami, Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC) president K Selvaperunthagai, Tamilaga Vettai Kazhagam (TVK) president and actor Vijay, besides several senior political leaders, members of the film fraternity and thousands of cadres on Sunday paid rich tributes to late Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMK) founder-president 'Captain' Vijayakanth on his second death anniversary at the party headquarters in Koyambedu.

In a social media post, the Chief Minister shared a photograph with Vijayakanth and remembered him as a leader who earned the immense love of the Tamil people through his deep concern for the poor and his unwavering commitment to helping those in need. Stalin said Vijayakanth would be remembered for his large-heartedness and his tireless service to the underprivileged.

Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin, along with Ministers E V Velu and Ma Subramanian, visited the DMK headquarters and paid floral tributes at the memorial. AIADMK general secretary and former Chief Minister



Edappadi K Palaniswami, who participated in the second annual 'Guru Pooja' at the 'Captain Alayam' memorial along with DMK general secretary Premalatha Vijayakanth, recalled Vijayakanth as a leader who lived by the principle of extending help to the needy and left a lasting impact in both public life and the film industry. TNCC president K Selvaperunthagai described Vijayakanth as a man of integrity whose dedication to public welfare would remain etched in the hearts of the people. Recalling his personal association with Vijayakanth during his tenure as an MLA, Selvaperunthagai said Tamil Nadu had lost a great leader and extended wishes to

Premalatha Vijayakanth for continuing the party's work for the people. Responding to a query on alliance overtures, he said the DMK leadership should take a decision in keeping with the ideals of Vijayakanth, asserting that the late leader never aligned himself with divisive politics. Actor and TVK president Vijay paid homage, stating that Vijayakanth had secured an indelible place in the hearts of the people and hailed him as a revolutionary artiste and leader. Dravida Vettai Kazhagam leader Mallai Sathy said Vijayakanth was a humane leader who could have achieved more politically, alleging that the 2016 Makkal Nala Koottai had derailed his political journey.

## Palaniswami resumes AIADMK's People-Connect campaign from Chennai

Chennai: As part of the continuing his statewide mass contact programme titled 'Makkalai Kappom, Thamizhagathai Meetpom' (Let's Protect the People, Let's Retrieve Tamil Nadu), AIADMK General Secretary and Leader of the Opposition in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly Edappadi K. Palaniswami (EPS), today resumed his next phase of his continuous whirlwind campaign tour covering Tamil Nadu. Mr Palaniswami started his second phase of his yatra/campaign by addressing the people from an open jeep at Thaivur in the Chengalpattu East and in Chennai suburbs this evening. The yatra will continue till December 30, 2025. The campaign, conducted constituency by constituency, seeks to directly engage with the people of Tamil Nadu, listen to their grievances, highlight the failures of the DMK government, and reaffirm the AIADMK's unwavering commitment to protecting the rights, welfare, and future of the people of the State. T AIADMK said EPS will be covering Thiruvallur West tomorrow and on December 30 Mr Palaniswami will tour Thiruvallur North, Thirupuror Sholinganallur, Tiruttani and Gummidipoondi constituencies. All concerned district party secretaries have made comprehensive arrangements to ensure the smooth and successful conduct of the yatra.



Chief Minister visited the Government Model School at Tiruvannamalai District and interacted with the students...

## Great performance in civil services exams under Naan Mudhalvan: DyCM Udhayanidhi

CHENNAI: Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin on Sunday said Tamil Nadu has shown a strong comeback in national-level competitive examinations, particularly the civil services, with a sharp rise in successful candidates under the State government's 'Naan Mudhalvan Competitive Examinations' (NMCE) initiative.

In a statement, Udhayanidhi said the programme was conceived after Tamil Nadu's performance in the UPSC civil services examination



dipped to a low of 27 successful candidates in 2021, exposing deep inequities in access to quality coaching, guidance and financial support. "The Dravidian model of gov-

ernance intervened to correct this imbalance and restore equal opportunity," he said.

The results, he noted, reflect a decisive turnaround. In 2023-24, 453 students from Tamil Nadu cleared the UPSC preliminary examination. The number rose to 559 in 2024-25, of whom 134 qualified for the Mains exam and 50 secured a place in the final list. In the ongoing 2025-26 cycle, 659 candidates have cleared the prelims so far, while 155 students have qualified for the interview stage.

## Revisit farmer connect scheme, appeals Association

CHENNAI: The AITUC-affiliated Tamil Nadu Farmers' Association has appealed to Chief Minister MK Stalin to stop the implementation of the newly launched Uzhavar Aluvalar Thodarbu 2.0 scheme, warning that it would adversely impact agricultural growth and create confusion among farmers.

In a statement on Saturday, general secre-

tary BS Masilamani said the State has justified the new model by citing the high workload of existing field officers, who each handle an average of 6 villages. Under the revised system, officials from agriculture, horticulture, hill crops, agricultural engineering and agricultural marketing departments will be jointly assigned to fewer villages to improve regular interaction with



farmers. He said the arrangement may look efficient on paper, but will falter in practice. Officers are trained and experienced only in their respective fields and cannot be expected to advise farmers on all crops and technologies. This would affect productivity and restrict farmers' access to proper technical knowledge, he said.

Masilamani noted that field officers are already

burdened with clerical tasks, forcing farmers to depend on private retailers for guidance. Instead of restructuring, the government should fill long-pending vacancies and appoint more field officers to ensure timely services, he said. He also cautioned that the move would weaken the standalone horticulture department, which contributes significantly to production value and

exports despite its smaller cultivation footprint. Undermining its role would be a setback at a time when horticulture is critical to future food and income security.

Calling the scheme unnecessary and harmful, he urged the Chief Minister to revisit the plan and take steps that genuinely strengthen agricultural support systems in the State.

## The Human Immunome Project's Strategic Blueprint To Harness AI and Immunology

The Human Immunome Project has released a Scientific Plan to create the world's largest immunological dataset and develop AI models to better understand and leverage the immune system for improved health outcomes globally. The plan involves establishing global study sites and developing advanced AI tools to analyze immune system variations and responses.

The Human Immunome Project (HIP), a global nonprofit scientific initiative, released its Scientific Plan today, April 29, on World Immunology Day, the organization announced. The plan provides a detailed roadmap of how the Human Immunome Project and its network of global study sites will generate the world's largest and most diverse immunological dataset and use these data to power publicly available AI models of the immune system. Importance of the Immune System

"The immune system is the epicenter of human health, and our newly released Scientific Plan outlines an actionable, global strategy for how we can unlock the secrets of the immune system and harness its power to improve health for all," said Dr. Hans Keirstead, CEO of the Human Immunome Project.

The human immune system is one of the most complex systems in the world—and one of its most important. It determines whether we survive infancy, which diseases we get, how we age, and how long we'll live. Understanding our immune system is the key to fighting disease and improving health for all. Yet its complexity has limited our ability to tap into its potential—until now. Despite these tremendous advances, our understanding of the immune system remains



limited: less than one percent of the immunological data necessary to understand immune function and diversity on a global scale are available. As such, HIP's first mission is generating diverse immunological datasets at scale.

"The Human Immunome Project is at the cutting edge of scientific discovery and is uniquely positioned to provide the scientific and medical communities with the knowledge and tools to innovate new diagnostics, drugs, vaccines, and immunotherapies that can address disease, elongate healthspans, and enable more personalized and more effective healthcare for all. I could not be prouder to lead this global effort," said Dr. Keirstead.

**Global Data Collection Efforts**  
To generate these data, HIP is establishing a network of global study sites that reflect the diversity of humanity (across age, ethnicity, geography, sex, and socioeconomic status) and immune responses. Data will be generated through a phased approach and enabled by HIP-engineered Immune Monitoring

Kits—a collection of assays and operating procedures that facilitate rapid, robust, and standardized data collection worldwide.

This collaborative, global effort will produce longitudinal, baseline datasets that enable scientists to assess developmental and age-dependent changes and computationally stitch together the health trajectory of different population groups worldwide. For more details on the global study protocol, review the summary.

**Pilot Sites and AI Development**  
With the Scientific Plan now fully articulated, the Human Immunome Project is working to establish its initial Pilot Sites—up to 10 state-of-the-art sites that will collect data, help refine the site model, and prepare HIP for scale. These sites will be spread globally with a focus on the Global South and sub-Saharan Africa, specifically. As data collection progresses, HIP will begin to develop AI models—first predictive, then mechanistic—that will deepen our understanding of immune

responses and individual and population-based health trajectories. These models will provide a holistic view of the immune system and empower scientists with a new, transformative tool to advance drug development, strengthen personalized medicine, and increase healthspans. These data and models will additionally produce new insights relevant to nearly all health conditions, including key global health challenges related to maternal health, aging and cognitive decline, and disease evolution.

**Collaboration and Refinement of the Scientific Plan**

An initial draft of HIP's Scientific Plan was shared with a group of global experts at the "Human Immunome Project Into Action Conference," hosted at CosmoCaixa Museum of Science by the CaixaResearch Institute and HIP in November 2023. The conference provided participants an opportunity to input into the Scientific Plan and concluded with an endorsement of the mission and vision of the Human Immunome Project. Since November, HIP's science team, led by Dr. John Tsang, Dr. Shai Shen-Orr, and Dr. Orit Lavi, has refined the plan using feedback gathered at the conference. The result is a detailed strategy to decode and model the immune system with the ultimate goal of improving health for all. "The Human Immunome Project is at the cutting edge of scientific discovery and is uniquely positioned to provide the scientific and medical communities with the knowledge and tools to innovate new diagnostics, drugs, vaccines, and immunotherapies that can address disease, elongate healthspans, and enable more personalized and more effective healthcare for all. I could not be prouder to lead this global effort," said Dr. Keirstead.

## From Theory to Therapy: MIT's Computational Breakthrough in Protein Optimization

MIT researchers plan to search for proteins that could be used to measure electrical activity in the brain. To engineer proteins with useful functions, researchers usually begin with a natural protein that has a desirable function, such as emitting fluorescent light, and put it through many rounds of random mutation that eventually generate an optimized version of the protein. This process has yielded optimized versions of many important proteins, including green fluorescent protein (GFP). However, for other proteins, it has proven difficult to generate an optimized version. MIT researchers have now developed a computational approach that makes it easier to predict mutations that will lead to better proteins, based on a relatively small amount of data.

**Advancements in Computational Protein Design**  
Using this model, the researchers generated proteins with mutations that were predicted to lead to improved versions of GFP and a protein from adenovirus-associated virus (AAV), which is used to deliver DNA for gene therapy. They hope it could also be used to develop additional tools for neuroscience research and medical applications. "Protein design is a hard problem because the mapping from DNA sequence to protein structure and function is really complex. There might be a great protein 10 changes away in the sequence, but each intermediate change might correspond to a totally nonfunctional protein. It's like trying to find your way to the river basin in a mountain range, when there are craggy peaks along the way that block your view. The current work tries to make the riverbed easier to find," says Ila Fiete, a professor of brain and cognitive sciences at MIT, a member of MIT's McGovern Institute for Brain Research, director of the K. Lisa Yang Integrative Computational Neuroscience Center, and one of the senior authors of the study.

Regina Barzilay, the School of Engineering Distinguished Professor for AI and Health at MIT, and Tommi Jaakkola, the Thomas Siebel Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at MIT, are also

senior authors of an open-access paper on the work, which will be presented at the International Conference on Learning Representations in May. MIT graduate students Andrew Kirjner and Jason Yim are the lead authors of the study. Other authors include Shahar Bracha, an MIT postdoc, and Raman Samavich, a graduate student at Czech Technical University.

**Optimizing Proteins**  
Many naturally occurring proteins have functions that could make them useful for research or medical applications, but they need a little extra engineering to optimize them. In this study, the researchers were originally interested in developing proteins that could be used in living cells as voltage indicators. These proteins, produced by some bacteria and algae, emit fluorescent light when an electric potential is detected. If engineered for use in mammalian cells, such proteins could allow researchers to measure neuron activity without using electrodes.

While decades of research have gone into engineering these proteins to produce a stronger fluorescent signal, on a faster timescale, they haven't become effective enough for widespread use. Bracha, who works in Edward Boyden's lab at the McGovern Institute, reached out to Fiete's lab to see if they could work together on a computational approach that might help speed up the process of optimizing the proteins. "This work exemplifies the human serendipity that characterizes so much science discovery," Fiete says. "It grew out of the Yang Tan Collective retreat, a scientific meeting of researchers from multiple centers at MIT with distinct missions unified by the shared support of K. Lisa Yang. We learned that some of our interests and tools in modeling how brains learn and optimize could be applied in the totally different domain of protein design, as being practiced in the Boyden lab." For any given protein that researchers might want to optimize, there is a nearly infinite number of possible sequences that could be generated by swapping in different amino acids at each point within the sequence. With so many possible variants, it is impossible to test all of them experimentally.

# EDITORIAL

## Manufactured Traditions

In the landscape of modern Indian socio-politics, if there is such a word, December 25 has become a date of peculiar botanical urgency. Suddenly, the air is thick with the smell of incense and the aggressive rustle of holy basil. We are told, via high-resolution WhatsApp forwards and saffron-tinted infographics, that it is "Tulsi Pujan Diwas". To the uninitiated, it looks like a quaint revival of Vedic piety. To anyone with a history book and a functioning memory, however, it is a masterclass in the "invention of tradition" - a duplicitous branding exercise designed to turn a plant of peace into a picket line of cultural intolerance. Let us be clear: the Tulsi plant is, and has always been, a cornerstone of the Hindu household. For centuries, it has sat in the Vrindavan of the courtyard, a biological deity representing Lakshmi's grace and the medicinal wisdom of Ayurveda. We have Tulsi Vivah, an ancient, structurally complex festival tied to the lunar cycle of the Hindu calendar. But "Tulsi Pujan Diwas", fixed stubbornly to the Gregorian calendar date of December 25 (a most unVedic practice), is not an ancient ritual. It is a 2014 startup. It has the same historical depth as a seasonal discount sale.

### Colonising The Calendar

The manufacture of this "Diwas" is a classic example of what historian Eric Hobsbawm called "Invented Tradition". These are practices that appear old but are actually quite new, designed to instil certain values through repetition and a false sense of continuity with "glorious past". By pinning Tulsi worship to Christmas Day, the architects of this movement aren't trying to honour the plant or our culture; they are trying to colonise the calendar.

The logic is transparently reactive. It stems from a profound cultural insecurity that views the celebration of Christmas - or even the mere acknowledgment of it - as a zero-sum game. If a neighbour puts up a star, one must counter with a shrub. If they sing a carol, we must chant a shloka, not out of devotion, but out of a desperate need to "reclaim" a space that was never actually lost. It is "spirituality" as a contact sport, kabbadi with chanting rather than panting. The duplicity lies in the justification. Proponents argue that they are protecting "Indian values" from the "onslaught of Westernisation". This creates a false binary: you are either a "Sattvic" Tulsi-worshipper or a "corrupted" consumer of cake and tinsel. By framing a modern creation as an ancient necessity, they provide a theological shield for contemporary xenophobia. It allows the practitioner to say, "I am not being intolerant of your holiday; I am simply being observant of my own (one-decade-old) tradition."

### A Trojan Horse For Intolerance

This is how "manufactured tradition" serves as a Trojan Horse for intolerance. It rewrites history to suggest that Indian culture is a fragile thing that can only survive if it is constantly positioned against an imagined enemy. It replaces the expansive, pluralistic heart of Hinduism - which historically had no trouble assimilating various influences - with a brittle, reactionary mimicry. Furthermore, there is a profound irony in using the Tulsi plant for this purpose. In the Puranas, Tulsi is a symbol of bhakti (devotion), a quality that is internal, quiet, and deeply personal. To turn her into a tool for a "Cultural Cold War" is a form of spiritual malpractice. When worship is motivated by the desire to "cancel out" another person's joy, it ceases to be prayer and becomes a political weapon of intolerance. We see this pattern everywhere: the sudden "discovery" of ancient reasons to do modern, exclusionary things. Whether it is the rebranding of Valentine's Day as "Parents' Worship Day" (why not Karmadeva Diwas, I ask you?) or the fixating of festivals onto specific Western holidays, the goal is the same: to create a psychological ghetto where the "Other" is always an intruder.

### Let Tulsi Be Sacred

By pretending that "Tulsi Pujan Diwas" has always existed in this specific, reactionary form, its promoters are gaslighting the public. They are erasing the genuine, organic history of Indian festivals, which are diverse, regional, and tied to the earth's own rhythms, and replacing them with a standardised, "Vedic-flavoured" version of modern "cultural nationalism".

## Congress Meltdown: In Digvijaya Singh's 'RSS' Post, A Reckoning For Rahul



"Multiple Chanakyas are advising the prince. The trouble is, there is only one prince. A problem that Machiavelli and Kautilya never faced. Plus, their respective Princes were able," says a senior Congress leader about the meltdown set off by Digvijaya Singh, 78, the former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh. Singh, a master politician, recently threw a gauntlet at Rahul Gandhi through a social media post, in which he praised the organisational strength of the RSS and even tagged everyone from Rahul, Priyanka Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge and Jairam Ramesh to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Singh then attended the last Congress Working Committee meeting and made the same point in person. There, he was heard in utter silence, with his intervention espousing no comments from the audience. I spoke to a cross-section of Congress leaders before writing this column - both the rebels who want change in the party and the coterie to Rahul Gandhi who want status quo. The biggest takeaway is that Rahul cannot avoid a change if he continues to be unavailable and elusive. The last five days of the

winter session, Rahul, despite being the leader of opposition, chose to be in Germany to address the diaspora instead of taking up pressing issues such as the air pollution in Delhi, a state the Congress once ruled and where it has now been reduced to zero. The decentralisation and the lack of organisation that Singh underlined in his CWC address is unexceptionable. It is a point that any objective observer would agree with. A Warning For Venugopal? This also points to KC Venugopal, the General Secretary in charge of organisation, who has reduced the Congress party organisation to a hollow shell with state units almost out of business. Many say that is because Venugopal doesn't allow state

leaders to make decisions while endlessly dithering on decisions himself. In fact, the chorus for his ouster is only growing. Venugopal survives on Gandhi's patronage as his chief palace courtier. But he's no Ahmed Patel, who performed a similar role for Sonia Gandhi and was indispensable for the party. The question now is what lies in store for Venugopal. Will he get his dream job as the Congress face in the upcoming Kerala elections, or will he be kicked upstairs to some meaningless office? It may not be a stretch to say that Singh, in fact, was basically targeting Venugopal through his social media post, and by tagging Priyanka Gandhi Vadra publicly, he was seeking her intervention in the party's sorry state of affairs.

# Edit

CHENNAI  
MONDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2025

4

info.southindientimes@gmail.com

## HONOURING THE PUNJAB BOY, SHARVAN SINGH, IS HONOURING THE MANKIND, VELOUR AND PATRIOTISM

Jag Mohan Thaken

History repeats itself; but a few are fortunate to get the recognition. The spiritual world, especially the Sikh world, is proud of the act of kindness, humility and service to mankind exemplified by Bhai Kanhaiya Ji, who is widely known for his water seva during Sri Guru Gobind Singh Maharaj Ji's time in the battlefield. Once again in the History, a 10-year-old Sikh boy, Sharvan Singh, resident of a village hardly 2 kilometres from India-Pakistan border in Punjab's Ferozepur District, has earned national recognition for his act of compassion, exceptional courage and sense of patriotism by serving 'Milk-Lassi and Water' to the Military Persons deployed near his village during operation Sindoar. Akal Takht's former Jathedar, Giani Harpreet Singh in a tweet on 26 December, 2025, said, "Even on the battlefield, the spirit of selfless service and fearless courage, as exemplified by Bhai Kanhaiya Ji and Sikh history, has always continued to inspire our younger generations. During the war-like situation with Pakistan, 10-year-old Sharvan Singh from Firozpur, Punjab, displayed remarkable selfless service by providing tea, water, and ice to our soldiers. In recognition of this noble act, he has been honoured with the 'National Child Award' by the Honourable President of India, Mrs. Droupadi Murmu. I commend Sharvan Singh and, while appreciating his spirit of service, courage, and humanity, appeal to the people of Punjab to connect their children with the teachings of Sikh history—values of service, compassion, and bravery". While presenting the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar to Sharvan Singh and other children for their exceptional achievements in the fields of Bravery, Social Service, Environment, Sports, Art & Culture and Science & Technology at a ceremony held in New Delhi on December 26, 2025, on the occasion of 'Veer Baal Diwas', the President of India, Smt Droupadi Murmu, said that about 320 years ago, Guru Gobind Singh Ji—the tenth Guru of the Sikh faith and



revered by all Indians—and his four sons made supreme sacrifices while fighting in support of truth and justice. She said that the bravery of the two youngest Sahibzadas, is honoured and respected both in India and abroad. She remembered with reverence the great child heroes who laid down their lives with pride for truth and justice. Terror of Mughal Rulers was on such a dreadful, scary, spooky and fearsome pitch that after the martyrdom of the younger Sahibzadas and Mata Ji, when no one dared to perform their last rites due to fear of the tyrannical government, Diwan Todar Mal Ji bought land by laying gold ashrafis and cremated the holy bodies of the Sahibzadas and Mata Ji. In this way, Diwan Todar Mal Ji became the hero of Saka Sirkhind, due to this unique act, his name was recorded among the respected personalities of the Sikh Panth. Still the people bow to the good-hearted personality of Diwan Todar Mal Ji, who had immense devotion towards the Guru Ghar. It is pertinent to mention here that Sikhism is the religion which always keeps humanity as its serving motto. It had not only given the religious Gurus, who preached equality without any discrimination of caste and creed, service to humanity, compassion and a deep sense of

spirituality, but also gave the brave heroes, who martyred their lives for protection of religious freedom and the rights of the oppressed. History can never forget the unparalleled, supreme and extraordinary sacrifice of Guru Arjan Dev Ji, Guru Teg Bahadur Ji, Mata Gujri Ji and the younger Sahibzadas -- Baba Zorawar Singh Ji and Baba Fateh Singh Ji. The brave heroes like Sardar Bhagat Singh, Sardar Udham Singh and others, who fought against the tyranny of the English rulers for the sake of the country, are and will also remain the lighthouse for the present and coming generations. Bravery, humanity, kindness and fearless actions are the main elements in Sikhism. Presently also these elements can be noticed even in the children of the sect.

The story of Ten-year-old Shravan Singh, amidst the risks associated with war during Operation Sindoar,

regularly delivered water, milk, and lassi to the Indian soldiers stationed at the border near his home. Smt. Murmu was happy to note that the children have showcased their exceptional talent in various fields such as bravery, art and culture, environment, innovation, science and technology, social service, and sports. She said that it is because of talented children such as the seven-year-old Vaka Lakshmi Pragnika that India is considered a chess powerhouse on the world stage. Ajay Raj and Mohammed Sidan P, who saved the lives of others with their bravery and intelligence, deserve all the praise they receive. Nine-year-old daughter Vyoma Priya and eleven-year-old brave son Kamlesh Kumar lost their lives while saving the lives of others with their courage. Whereas, the differently-abled daughter Shivani Hosuru Uppara has achieved extraordinary accomplishments in the world of sports, overcoming economic and physical limitations. Vaibhav Suryavanshi has made a name for himself in the highly competitive and talent-filled world of cricket and has set many records. She expressed confidence that brave and talented children like them will continue to do good work and make India's future bright.

## Faith vs. Breath: Pigeons, Laws, and Our Collective Irresponsibility

— Dr. Satyawan Saurabh

In India, faith often trumps reason. That's why the sound of temple bells sometimes feels more suffocating than the sound of a suffocating sound, but we don't want to listen. A recent Mumbai court ruling—imposing a fine of ₹5,000 for feeding pigeons in a public place—is a clear and bold example of this confrontation. This decision is not against pigeons, but against the mindset that tramples on science, law, and public health in the name of sentimentality.

In our society, feeding pigeons is considered a "virtuous act." Early in the morning, we find a sense of satisfaction in throwing a handful of grains onto our balcony, terrace, or park—as if we've served humanity in a significant way. But the question is: can an act performed without considering the consequences truly be considered compassion? Medical science has consistently warned that dried pigeon droppings can spread into the air and spread deadly diseases like cryptococcosis, histoplasmosis, hypersensitivity pneumonitis, and salmonella. These diseases are not imaginary fears, but true stories from real patients admitted to hospitals. Cities are no longer villages. With dense populations, tall buildings, limited air, and shared spaces, even small negligence can turn into a major crisis. Grain left on a balcony not only attracts pigeons, but also brings with it a whole chain of disease, filth, and infection. Ironically, the same people who question masks, vaccines, and scientific warnings are, in the name of virtue, turning cities into a cesspool of biological waste.

In this debate, it's important to clarify that the pigeons aren't at fault. They're simply living their lives according to their natural instincts. We are to blame—our unscientific sentimentality, our belief in convenience, and our collective irresponsibility. If you truly want to show compassion, do so in controlled, safe, and scientific ways—through animal welfare organizations, not in open public spaces.

This decision by the Mumbai court sends a clear message that faith may be private, but its impact cannot harm public life. Compassion does not necessarily mean harm, and the law is now recognizing this distinction.

# ROLLS ROYCE PLANS MAJOR EXPANSION IN INDIA

New Delhi: British aero-engine maker Rolls-Royce on Sunday said it is looking at making India its third "home market" outside of the UK in line with a plan to unlock the full potential of opportunities across an array of domains including jet engine, naval propulsion, land systems and advanced engineering. In an interview to PTI, Sashi Mukundan, the executive vice president of Rolls-Royce India, elaborating on the move, said the company is planning for a "big investment" in the country and listed developing a next-generation aero engine in India as a priority to power the combat jets that New Delhi will produce under the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) programme. Besides the UK, Rolls Royce considers the US and Germany as its "home markets" as the company has considerable presence including manufacturing facilities in these two countries. Mukundan also highlighted how Rolls Royce can contribute significantly to address India's requirement for



electric propulsion capability for boosting the Indian Navy's combat prowess. He suggested that the development of the jet engine for the AMCA involving Rolls Royce could also help India manufacture engines for naval propulsion as the company is among very few engine makers globally to have the capability to "marinize the aero engine". Mukundan, without divulging specific details, said Rolls Royce was eye-

ing to make significant investment to expand its footprint in India, noting that the country has "scale, policy clarity, and a strong push" towards a defence and industrial ecosystem that is expanding rapidly and becoming more sophisticated. "If everything goes well, it would be a significant investment. It'll be big enough that people will notice it, but I don't want to put a number to it. What matters is the impact of this investment, which

would be the development of the entire value chain and ecosystem here across sectors that we operate in," he said. The top Rolls Royce executive said the company will firm up two MoUs with (Memorandum of Understanding) with two defence public sector undertakings in India. While one pact is for manufacturing the engines for the Arjun tanks, the other is for engines for the future ready combat vehicles. In October, CEO Tufan

Erginbilic, during a business roundtable had conveyed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi that India is going to be very critical for Rolls-Royce going forward. "We have developed two other home markets outside the UK — the US and Germany. We want to make India our next one. What do we mean by that? We want to do everything across the field, and it's not just defence," Mukundan said. "That ambition cuts across defence, naval propulsion, land systems, manufacturing, advanced engineering skills, and technology development, all of which align closely with India's own priorities," he said. On the engines for AMCA, Mukundan said extensive discussions and background work are underway on how to move forward. "If India is thinking about next-generation engines, Rolls-Royce is probably the best partner. We have the capability, we have the experience both in India and globally, and we have repeatedly demonstrated that we can do it," he said.

BP has struck a \$6bn (£4.4bn) deal to sell a majority stake in its motor oil division Castrol to a US investment firm.

The oil giant sold a 65% stake in Castrol, which makes lubricants for cars, motorcycles and industrial vehicles, to New York-based Stonepeak. The deal valued Castrol at \$10.1bn (£7.5bn), with BP receiving \$6bn in cash, which it will use to pay down debts and allow it to focus on its core business. BP will hold onto a 35% stake in Castrol, which it first took control of in 2000. The London-based oil major

lagged behind rivals. Rivals Shell and Norwegian company Equinor have also scaled back plans to invest in green energy and US President Donald Trump's call to "drill baby drill" has encouraged firms to invest in fossil fuels. The Castrol sale comes a week after BP unveiled its first female chief executive, Meg O'Neill, who will take the helm in April 2026. Her surprise appointment came only three months after BP appointed a new chairman, Albert Manifold. And she was handed the top job less than two years after Murray Auchincloss took

over from Bernard Looney as chief executive. Wednesday's deal is the latest in a series of sales by the firm, which included offloading its US onshore wind energy business and its Dutch mobility and convenience arm. Interim chief executive Carol Howle said the sale is a "very good outcome for all stakeholders". "We are reducing complexity, focusing the downstream on our leading integrated businesses, and accelerating delivery of our plan," she added. Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell, said the deal was "an early Christmas present" for BP shareholders.

## BP sells stake in motor oil arm Castrol for \$6bn



## Amazon blocks 1,800 job applications from suspected North Korean agents

A top Amazon executive has said the US technology giant has blocked more than 1,800 job applications from suspected North Korean agents. North Koreans tried to apply for remote working IT jobs using stolen or fake identities, Amazon's chief security officer Stephen Schmidt said in a LinkedIn post. "Their objective is typically straightforward: get hired, get paid, and funnel wages back to fund the regime's weapons programs," he said, adding that this trend is likely to be happening at scale across the industry, especially in the US. Authorities in the US and South Korea have warned about Pyongyang's operatives carrying out online scams. Amazon has seen a nearly one-third increase in job applications from North Koreans in the past year, said Mr Schmidt in his post. He said the operatives typically work with people managing "laptop farms" - referring to computers based in the US that are run remotely from outside



of the country. The firm used a combination of artificial intelligence (AI) tools and verification by its staff to screen job applications, he said. The strategies used by such fraudsters have become more sophisticated, Mr Schmidt said. Bad actors are hijacking dormant LinkedIn accounts using leaked credentials to gain verification. They target genuine software engineers to appear credible, he said, urging firms to report suspicious job applications to the

authorities. Mr Schmidt warned employers to look out for indicators of fraudulent North Korean job applications, including incorrectly formatted phone numbers and mismatched education histories. In June, the US government said it had uncovered 29 "laptop farms" that were being operated illegally across the country by North Korean IT workers. They used stolen or forged identities of Americans to help North Korean nationals get jobs in

The US, said the Department of Justice (DOJ). It also indicted US brokers who had helped secure jobs for the North Korean operatives. In July, a woman from Arizona was sentenced to more than eight years in jail for running a laptop farm to help North Korean IT workers secure remote jobs at more than 300 US companies. The DOJ said the scheme generated more than \$17m (£12.6m) in illicit gains for her and Pyongyang.

## TREASURY TO COVER BAYEUX TAPESTRY FOR ESTIMATED £800M



The Treasury is set to insure the Bayeux Tapestry against damage for an estimated £800m while it is on loan to the British Museum next year. The 70m-long embroidery depicting the Battle of Hastings in 1066 will travel from France to London as part of a deal between the two nations' governments. The artefact's transit and its time in storage and on display will be covered under the Government Indemnity Scheme (GIS). Indemnity insurance covers situations like loss or damage. A Treasury spokesperson said that, without the long-standing scheme, "public museums and galleries would face a substantial commercial insurance premium, which would be significantly less cost effective". There are concerns about the move, as some French art experts have suggested the nearly 1,000-year-old work was in far too a delicate state to be transported - something French officials have denied. It is understood the Treasury has received an initial valuation for cover-

ing the Bayeux Tapestry that has been provisionally approved. The loan will not be formally confirmed until it receives the final valuation. That final valuation is estimated to be around £800m, according to the Financial Times, citing unnamed officials. The Treasury did not dispute this figure when approached by the BBC. The Bayeux Tapestry will be displayed in the Sainsbury Exhibitions Gallery of the British Museum from next September until July 2027 while its current home, the

Bayeux Museum, undergoes renovations. Comprising 58 scenes, 620 characters and 202 horses, the huge masterpiece charts a contested time in Anglo-French relations when William the Conqueror took the English throne from Harold Godwinson, becoming the first Norman king of England. The government's indemnity scheme allows art and cultural objects to be shown publicly in the UK which "might not have been otherwise because the cost of insurance would have been too high". The scheme -

## Ola Electric fast-tracks rollout of 4680 Bharat Cell powered vehicles

New Delhi: Ola Electric on Sunday said it has scaled up deliveries of its 4680 Bharat Cell powered S1 Pro+ (5.2 kWh) across Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, and Karnataka. The company has commenced deliveries across Coimbatore, Kochi, and Hyderabad, along with continued ramp-up in Bengaluru. Ola Electric said in a statement. The S1 Pro+ (5.2 kWh) is the first product powered by the company's indigenously manufactured 4680 Bharat Cell battery pack, delivering more range, higher performance and enhanced safety, it added. "Customers are now taking deliveries of the scooters powered by our own 4680 Bharat Cell, and the rollout is picking up strong momentum. With deliveries scaling across multiple states, we are now gearing up to take the 4680 Bharat Cell powered vehicles nationwide, reaching every corner of the country," an Ola



Electric spokesperson said. With its own 4680 Bharat Cell battery packs in the vehicles, Ola Electric is now India's first company to fully own the cell and battery pack manufacturing process in-

## Adani plans Rs 1.8 lakh cr defence spend to boost indigenous military capabilities



New Delhi: Adani Group plans to invest Rs 1.8 lakh crore next year in defence manufacturing, with a focus on strengthening capabilities in unmanned and autonomous systems as well as advanced guided weapons as it looks to play a stealth anchor role in India's future warfare capabilities, sources said. Adani Defence & Aerospace in 2025 transitioned from extended planning cycles to rapid deployment with some of its military hardware being used in Operation Sindo. Next year, it will invest in unmanned and autonomous systems, advanced guided weapons, sensors and electronics, AI-enabled multi-domain operations, and scaled-up maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) and training infrastructure, company sources said. Autonomous systems across air, sea and land domains are unmanned platforms that use sensors, software and secure networks to operate with minimal human intervention, expanding military reach while reducing risk to personnel. In the air, they include UAVs that conduct intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, communications relay and precision-support

missions with long endurance. At sea, unmanned surface and underwater vehicles perform tasks such as maritime surveillance, anti-submarine warfare and mine countermeasures over wide areas. On land, unmanned ground vehicles support logistics, reconnaissance, explosive ordnance disposal and perimeter security. Adani Defence & Aerospace has emerged as India's largest integrated private-sector defence player, with capabilities spanning unmanned aerial and

underwater systems, counter-UAS solutions, guided weapons and loitering munitions, small arms and ammunition, aircraft MRO, simulator-driven training and airborne warning and control systems (AWACS). Sources said in 2025, the company's Drishti 10 UAVs were inducted into the Indian Navy and Army for long-endurance ISR mission (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance). Also, its counter-drone systems cleared trials conducted by the Army, Navy and Air Force, Agniakaa loitering munitions demonstrated endurance and resistance to electronic warfare and ARKA MANPADS - a shoulder-fired missile system - achieved tri-service deployment readiness within compressed timelines. Sources said the company's entry into AWACS platforms helped position it as a sole private-sector player in this segment. Integration of Air Works and Indamer created a major defence-civil MRO platform while the acquisition of FSTC strengthened pilot and engineering training capabilities, they said. Adani Defence & Aerospace has embedded sustainability through digital twins, predictive maintenance and modular design, while higher indigenous sourcing has strengthened supply-chain resilience. Looking ahead to 2026, the company plans to scale autonomous systems across air, sea and land domains, expand precision-strike capabilities, deepen its MRO and training footprint, and advance AI-enabled, multi-domain operational systems in line with India's planned defence investment trajectory, sources added.

# Zelensky says Russia 'doesn't want peace' ahead of meeting Trump in Florida

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will meet his US counterpart Donald Trump in Florida on Sunday, for the latest round of talks aimed at ending nearly four years of war with Russia. The pair will discuss an updated version of a US-brokered peace plan, which Moscow has yet to support, as well as separate proposals for US security guarantees. Their meeting at the US president's Mar-a-Lago home follows intense Russian bombardment of Kyiv over the weekend, which Zelensky said was evidence that Moscow "doesn't want peace". On Friday night, a 10-hour missile and drone barrage targeting Ukraine's capital killed two people and left 32 others injured, local authorities said. There were further Russian strikes on Saturday night. At the meeting in Florida, Zelensky is expected to raise security guarantees for Ukraine and



territorial concessions, both issues that Russia has previously been unwilling to compromise on. They will also discuss the new 20-point peace plan, a revised version of an earlier 28-point plan drafted by US special envoy Steve Witkoff that was widely seen as being too favourable to Russia. Control of Ukraine's eastern Donbas region has

been a major sticking point so far, but Zelensky has now said a "free economic zone" could be an option. Moscow currently controls about 75% of the Donetsk region, and around 99% of the neighbouring Luhansk. The regions are collectively known as the Donbas. The Kremlin has not commented on Zelensky's offer to withdraw troops from the

Donbas if Russia pulls back too. But on Saturday, Russian President Vladimir Putin said Ukraine was "in no hurry to resolve this conflict peacefully", according to state-owned news agency Tass. Putin added that if Kyiv did not want to resolve the conflict peacefully, Russia would accomplish its objectives militarily. The Ukrainian president has

voiced optimism about the new peace plan draft, describing it as "a foundational document on ending the war". On Friday, he told reporters that it was 90% complete: "Our task is to make sure everything is 100% ready." But Trump warned in an interview with Politico that Zelensky "doesn't have anything until I approve it".

Trump added that he was expecting to see the new draft on Sunday. "I think it's going to go good with him. I think it's going to go good with Putin," he said in the interview, adding that he expects to speak to Russia's president "soon". Following meetings with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, Zelensky said Moscow's latest attack on Kyiv was "Russia's answer [to] our peace efforts and this really shows that Putin doesn't want peace". Zelensky also took a call with European leaders to

discuss diplomatic "priorities" ahead of his meeting with Trump, adding that "strong positions are needed" to move forward with the plan. Kyiv has the "full support" of European and Nato leaders, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said.

Russia launched attacks on Ukraine over the weekend - the most destructive of which happened Friday night into Saturday morning. Ukrainian officials said Russia's attacks on Kyiv caused significant damage to energy infrastructure, with 40% of residential buildings in Kyiv and nearby districts left without heating. Russia's defence ministry said long-range precision weapons were used to target energy facilities, which it claimed were being used "in the interests of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and enterprises of the Ukrainian military-industrial complex".

## THREE KILLED IN SWEDEN AS MAJOR STORM SWEEPS ACROSS NORDIC COUNTRIES



A third person has died in Sweden after a powerful winter storm swept across Nordic countries, causing travel disruption and power outages. Sweden's meteorological agency issued alerts for strong winds for large parts of the northern half of the country as Storm Johannes hit. One man in his 50s died after being struck by a tree at the Kungsberget ski resort in the country's south, local media and police reported. Further north, regional utility company Hemab said one of its employees died in an accident while out working. Police also said a man in his 60s was taken to hospital after being hit by a tree while working in a forest in Hofors, east-central Sweden, and later died of his injuries. Tens of thousands of homes in Sweden, Norway and Finland have been left without power as a result of the storm. In Sweden, more than 40,000 homes were affected by power outages and numerous rail services were cancelled, Swedish news agency TT reported. Several flights, rail and ferry services across parts of the Nordic nations have been cancelled. Roads and rail services have also been disrupted due to the storm conditions.

## Cruise ship hits reef on first trip since leaving passenger on island



A cruise ship has run aground in Papua New Guinea (PNG) on its first trip since the death of an elderly passenger in late October. The Coral Adventurer is currently under investigation over the death of Suzanne Rees, 80, who died on a remote Australian island after being left behind by the ship. On Saturday, the vessel suffered a "grounding incident" off the eastern coast of PNG, around 30km (18 miles) from the city of Lae, a spokesperson for the ship said. All passengers and crew aboard the cruise ship have been reported safe, and initial inspections have not revealed any damage to the hull. Further inspections will take place on Sunday. A spokesperson for the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (Amsa) told the BBC in a statement that it had not received a distress call from the Coral Adventurer. It added it was monitoring the situation and would support PNG authorities if necessary. No decisions have

## Fearing deportation, Hondurans in the US send more cash home than ever before



For over a year, Elias Padilla had been saving up to make the journey from Honduras to the United States as an undocumented immigrant. As an Uber driver in the snarled streets of the capital, Tegucigalpa, it hasn't been easy for him to put money aside. On bad days he makes as little as \$12 (£9) in 12 hours. Now, though, his plans are on

hold. The images of undocumented immigrants in major US cities being dragged away by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, their wrists in zip-ties, have deterred at least one would-be immigrant in Central America from travelling north. "I want to improve my life conditions because we earn very little here," Elias explains as we drive around the city. "Take this line of work, for example: an Uber driver in the US makes in an hour what I'd make in a day." Like most Honduran immigrants, Elias says the main aim of reaching the US would be to send remittances home. "But I see what Trump is doing, and it's made me think twice," he admits.

## FRENCH CINEMA ACTRESS BRIGITTE BARDOT DIES AGED 91



French actress Brigitte Bardot, who revolutionised 1950s French cinema and became a symbol of sexual liberation, has died age 91. The cinema icon - BB as she was known in her home country - acted in almost 50 films, including *And God Created Woman*, but retired in 1973 to devote her life to animal welfare. French President Emmanuel

Macron said the nation was

mourning "a legend of the century", while the Brigitte Bardot Foundation

remembered her as a "world-renowned actress". Later in life, Bardot's reputation was

damaged after she made

homophobic slurs and was

fined multiple times for

inciting racial hatred. The

animal welfare foundation

she established said in a

statement that it was

announcing her death with

"immense sadness". The

Brigitte Bardot Foundation

said she was "a world-

renowned actress and

singer, who chose to aban-

don her prestigious career to

dedicate her life and energy to

animal welfare and her

foundation." It did not speci-

fy where or when Bardot

died. Paying tribute, Macron

said

France had lost "an

exceptional woman, through her talent, her courage, her frankness, her beauty". Bardot's husband, whom she married in 1992, was Bernard d'Ormale, a former adviser to the late far-right politician Jean-Marie Le Pen - the father of Marine. Brigitte Anne-Marie Bardot was born in Paris in 1934 to a wealthy family, who wanted her to become a ballerina. She was discovered in her teens after posing on the cover of Elle magazine, swiftly becoming a sensation in her home country, and was persuaded to enter the cinema world. She played iconic roles, the most notable in the 1956 film *And God Created Woman*, directed by her then-husband Roger Vadim, in which she played a sexually liberated woman.

## Executions in Iran estimated to have doubled in 2025, report says



The number of executions in Iran in 2025 is estimated to have more than doubled compared to the number that took place across the country in 2024. Norwegian-based Iran Human Rights (IHR) group told the BBC it had verified at least 1,500 executions up until the start of December, adding that many more have taken place since. Last year, IHR was able to verify 975 executions - although the exact number is never completely clear as Iranian authorities do not give official figures. However, the analysis shows another significant annual rise, and the figures chime with those provided by other monitoring groups. Iran's government has previously defended its use of the death penalty, saying it is limited to only "the most severe crimes". Execution figures were already on the rise before mass demonstrations broke out across the country in 2022 following the death in custody of Mahsa Amini. The 22-year-old Kurdish woman was detained by morality police in Tehran for allegedly wearing her hijab "improperly". That protest movement represented the biggest challenge to the legitimacy of Iran's theocratic leadership for many years. In response, authorities intensified the rate of executions from around 520 in 2022 to 832 the following year - according to the figures verified by IHR. There have been some executions for protesters or alleged spies - but 99% of those executed have been for murder or drug offences - a ratio which has remained constant. Activists have said that the rate of executions in Iran increases when the regime feels under threat and that the aim is to forestall internal opposition by instilling fear in the population. It seems to be borne out by the fact that since the 12-day war with Israel in June, as well as major setbacks for Iran's proxy forces across the region, there's been another big surge.

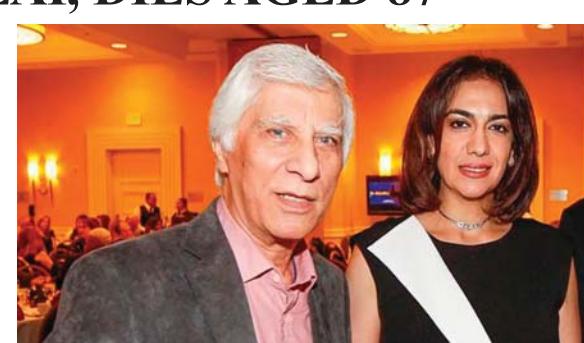
## Nine arrested in Italy for allegedly raising millions for Hamas



Italian police have arrested nine people accused of raising around 7m (£6m) for Hamas over more than two years. The money was ostensibly collected as humanitarian aid for Palestinian civilians, a police statement said, but was instead sent to the militant group via a "complex fundraising system". Alongside the arrests, police say they have seized more than 8m (£7m) in assets as part of the investigation. Police say the suspects are "specifically accused of carrying out financing operations believed to have contributed to terrorist activities". The arrests were made as part of a joint initiative between Italy's counter-terror police and financial police. The investigation

began after the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack in southern Israel. Police say they analysed "a series of reports of suspicious financial transactions" involving some of the suspects in the lead up to the attack. Investigators uncovered a "complex" system of fundraising, which was headquartered in Genoa, with branches in Milan, the

## IRANIAN CINEMA GIANT, BAHRAM BEYZAI, DIES AGED 87



Widespread tributes have been shared for Bahram Beyzai, a giant of Iranian cinema and theatre, who has died aged 87 in the US. The front pages of Iranian newspapers mourn his loss, with opposition voices and those who look back fondly on the Shah era also paying homage to Beyzai. Prince Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of the last Shah of Iran, described his passing as "a great loss for the art and culture of our country". Although Beyzai's later films were banned in the 1980s by the Islamic regime that toppled the Shah, a number of senior figures in the current government have also paid tribute to his contribution to Iranian culture. Several of the current crop of Iranian filmmakers have acknowledged their debt to him, with Jafar Panahi - whose latest film won the top prize at this year's Cannes Film Festival - saying that he taught them "how to stand up to oblivion". Beyzai avoided direct political references in his work, both as a playwright and a film director, and always said he tried not to

trade in overt messages. But his work over many decades sets historical, even mythic figures in conflict with oppressive religious and political systems. From a family of celebrated poets, Beyzai was imbued in the deepest traditions of Persian culture from birth. He first found fame as a playwright, drawing on Persian legend and ritual.



# POUND-FOR-POUND STAR INOUE CRUISES PAST PICASSO

Japanese superstar Naoya Inoue outpointed Alan David Picasso Romero with a classy display to retain his undisputed super-bantamweight title in Saudi Arabia. Widely regarded as one of boxing's leading pound-for-pound fighters, Inoue, 32, showcased his ring intelligence, fast hands and sharp combinations over 12 dominant rounds. Picasso, 25, was unable to live with Inoue's speed and body shots in Riyadh as the judges scored the contest 119-109, 120-108 and 117-111 in favour of the champion. Despite the one-sided nature of the victory, Inoue - a four-division world champion and undisputed in two weight classes - said he was disappointed with his display. "My performance tonight is not good enough. I should have done better," he said. The win extended Inoue's perfect record to 32 victories, including 27 by knockout, and sets up a potential showdown in 2026



with compatriot Junto Nakatani. Nakatani outpointed Mexico's Sebastian Hernandez Reyes on the undercard in a close contest marred by a controversial scorecard. In a fight where a case could be made for either boxer, two judges scored it 115-113, with the third returning an inexplicable 118-110 card. Following Terence Crawford's retirement, Inoue can be considered among boxing's leading fighters, alongside heavyweight champion Oleksandr

Usyk, who was ringside. After assessing Picasso in the opening rounds, Inoue moved smoothly through the gears. The taller, rangier Picasso enjoyed some single-punch success in the first half, but Inoue appeared largely untroubled by his opponent's power. Former middleweight world champion Gennady Golovkin, now president of World Boxing, watched from close quarters as Inoue upped the

tempo, throwing fluent combinations and pressing forward with confidence. Heavy right hands in the fifth and sixth rounds, coupled with repeated hooks to the body, slowed Picasso, whose movement began to fade as the outcome became increasingly clear. A thudding left hook in the 12th represented a valiant, last-ditch attempt at an unlikely upset, but the bout had long since become a masterclass. Making a fourth defence of his undisputed crown in 2025,

Inoue continues to set the standard for activity at the elite level and places himself firmly in the conversation for fighter of the year. Inoue said in the build-up that his time in the sport is "running out" - but he has options. There has been speculation about a move up to feather-

weight to face Liverpool's WBA world champion Nick Ball, while he has also welcomed the challenge of hard-hitting unified super-flyweight champion Jesse 'Bam' Rodriguez. The bout many fans - and influential Saudi Arabian boxing figure Turki Alalshikh - are most keen to see, however, is against Nakatani. Nakatani, who vacated his WBC and IBF bantamweight titles to move up in weight, was a heavy favourite against Hernandez and controlled the early rounds with sharp uppercuts and effective body work. Hernandez refused to fade, coming on strongly in the second half as he pressed forward relentlessly and landed telling shots. The controversial 118-110 scorecard underlined familiar judging concerns within the sport. Despite the controversy, the unbeaten Nakatani - a three-weight world champion - extended his record to 32 wins, 24 of them by stoppage.

## Shubman Gill's T20 World Cup 2026 Snub Causing Disarray In Team India? Report's Big Claim

The decision by the BCCI selectors to drop star batter Shubman Gill from the squad for the 2026 T20 World Cup has left many fans and experts stunned. Gill, currently India's Test and ODI captain, was also the T20I vice-captain. However, with his recent struggles in the shortest format, he has been left out of the World Cup squad. According to a PTI report, the move has sparked uncertainty among players regarding their place in the side under Gautam Gambhir's coaching. The report claimed that the decision to drop Gill from the squad "had Gambhir's

footprints written all over it." It further stated that the decision has created unease among several players, who now believe that "if Indian cricket's next poster boy could be dumped by the wayside, the next omission could have anyone's name written on it." Gautam Gambhir's record as India's white-ball coach has been impressive, with an ICC and ACC trophy in each of the two formats. However, with 10 Test defeats against SENA countries, the same cannot be said for his performance in Test cricket. According to PTI, right after India's abject surren-

der against South Africa in the two-Test series at home last month, someone influential in the cricket board informally approached V V S Laxman to check if he would be interested in coaching the red-ball team.



## Rohit Sharma Reunites With Ex-Mumbai Indians Teammate During Vijay Hazare Trophy

The Vijay Hazare Trophy 2025-26 turned out to be a grand spectacle for fans as India stalwarts Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli featured in two matches. While Rohit represented Mumbai.

Kohli strengthened Delhi's playing XI with his presence. Interestingly, both batters scored centuries in their respective opening games (Rohit against Sikkim and



Kohli against Andhra Pradesh). Apart from the fans, it was also a special moment for former India pacer Dhawal Kulkarni, who reunited with his old Mumbai teammate Rohit. In a video going viral on social media, Rohit was seen meeting Kulkarni in the dressing room, where

the latter requested an autograph on his glove. Rohit obliged and signed the glove, leaving fans touched and emotional. Notably, both Rohit and Kulkarni played several domestic games for Mumbai together. Later, they were also teammates for Mumbai Indians in the

## FREEMAN STARS AS NORTHAMPTON BEAT BATH TO GO TOP



Tommy Freeman scored a hat-trick of tries as Northampton leapfrogged Bath to go top of the Prem with a stellar 41-21 victory in an enthralling clash at the Recreation Ground. Freeman's England teammate Henry Pollock scored two more of Saints' tries, with Archie MacParland getting another, as the visitors ended a run of 11 consecutive wins at home for the reigning Prem champions. Saints, who saw two more potential tries chalked off by the television match official as they dominated in almost every area on the field, scored 27 unopposed points during the second-half. Bath, whose tries came via props Thomas du Toit (two) and Tom Dunn, drop to second in the table with their second loss this season. Both sides made 10 changes to their starting line-ups but Bath were at full strength while Saints had players such as Fin Smith, George Furbank and Alex Mitchell among those missing. Bath have not lost at the Rec in the Prem since 5 October 2024 but were on the back foot imme-

dately as Freeman cut a fine diagonal line to open the scoring in the third minute. Edoardo Todaro thought he had Northampton's second shortly after, only for it to be pulled back before he touched the ball down for an earlier knock-on. Du Toit rolled over the line for Bath's first score and when Northampton saw Ed Prowse sent to the sin bin for head contact in a tackle, Dunn made it 14-7 to the hosts as Bath's maul powered him forward. McParland drew Saints level, slipping through a gap in the line to run over, before Todaro was denied again try by an excellent covering Sam Underhill tackle, as he cantered clear when Pollock intercepted. Callum Chick then had a try chalked off as Bath prop Beno Obano was judged to have been held in an earlier ruck during a TMO check, allowing the gap to open which led to the initial Saints line break, while a long ball out the back from Pollock went wide late in the first-half as another Saints opportunity went begging.

## Magnus Carlsen Pushes Cameraman After Losing FIDE World Rapid Championship Match



World No. 1 and five-time World Rapid Champion Magnus Carlsen made headlines after suffering a shocking defeat against Russian Grandmaster Vladislav Artemiev in the FIDE World Rapid Championship on Saturday. In Round 7, Artemiev outplayed Carlsen in a game where the world's top-rated player committed a grave mistake on move 15, which proved costly. This victory propelled Artemiev to 6.5 points, a full point ahead of the field. Following the loss, Carlsen was visibly upset and stormed out of the playing hall. A video going viral on social media shows Carlsen being chased by a cameraman as he exited the venue. In a fit of rage, the Norwegian pushed the cameraperson away, expressing his frustration. After a strong start with 4.5/5 on Day 1, Carlsen's performance dipped on Day 2. In Round 6, he

played the Sicilian against Maxime Vachier-Lagrave but soon found himself saddled with tripled pawns on the e-file, spending considerable time searching for the right moves. After testing Carlsen for a few moves, Vachier-Lagrave agreed to split the

point. Carlsen bounced back in Round 8 with a win against Armenian GM Shant Sargsyan, and in the final round of the day, he held an advantage on time against US GM Ray Robson. With two straight victories, Carlsen joined a group of four players on seven points. < Meanwhile, reigning champion Koneru Humpy displayed her trademark composure and tenacity to remain in joint lead in the women's section, while Indian stars D. Gukesh and Arjun Erigaisi stayed in contention in the Open category on Day 2. With three more rounds to go in the women's section on Sunday, Humpy shared the lead with China's Zhu Jiner on 6.5 points out of a possible eight. The duo was closely followed by as many as 10 players on six points, including India's Dronavalli Harika.

## MCG Pitch Curator Breaks Silence After 4th Ashes Test Ends Within 2 Days



The Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) chief curator Matt Page was left in a "state of shock" after the fourth Ashes Test between Australia and England ended within two days. Twenty wickets fell on Day 1, and a total of 36 wickets fell in the match, which lasted just two days. Following England's win, several former cricketers expressed their displeasure with the pace-friendly wicket that produced no fifties from the batters. "I was in a state of shock after the first day to see everything that happened," Page told SEN Cricket. "Twenty wickets in a day - I have never been involved in a Test match like it, and hopefully never will be again," he added. "It was a roller-coaster ride for two days

to see everything unfold. But we will learn from it, we will grow from it, we will get better at it, just like we have over the past years. I have no doubt we will come back bigger, better, and stronger than we have done," he further said. While Page was dis-

appointed that the Test ended within just two days, he explained the reason behind producing a bowler-friendly pitch. "This year, we have produced a pitch that has favoured the bowlers more than the batters. We had a lot of hot weather leading

## SMALL HALLS IN CRISIS - BOXING'S LIFELOOD IS STRUGGLING TO BREATHE



"I think it is an illness." Steve Wood, one of the country's most prominent small-hall promoters, has pondered why he stays involved in the sport when it is struggling to stay alive at the level he operates in. "You get involved and you can't get out," he added. Small-hall boxing is not in rude health. Ticket sales are down, the number of events is dropping, money is being lost and some fighters who fill these cards with dreams of bigger stages are retiring because of the lack of opportunities to earn enough. Many of the promoters who run what is considered the sport's grassroots are wondering why they continue to do it. What many consider the lifeblood of the sport is struggling to keep breathing. Small-hall boxing shows are the events without TV backing and big-name promoters which take place around the country in lesser-sized venues. They offer entertainment for punters but, more importantly,

## Smriti Mandhana Breaks Mithali Raj's World Record During 4th T20I vs Sri Lanka



India batter Smriti Mandhana on Sunday achieved a massive world record during the 4th T20I against Sri Lanka in Thiruvananthapuram. The 29-year-old registered 10,000 runs in international women's cricket, becoming the fastest woman to achieve the milestone. She went past former India captain Mithali Raj on the elite list, reaching the milestone in just 280 innings. Mithali, on the other hand, took 291 innings to do so. Prior to this contest, Mandhana had scored 9,973 runs in international cricket. Fastest to 10,000 Women International runs (By Innings) 281 - Smriti Mandhana\* 291 - Mithali Raj 308 - Charlotte Edwards 314 - Suzie Bates On Sunday, Mandhana slammed a half-century after India were put into bat by Sri Lanka. During the 1st T20I, Mandhana scripted history as she became the first Indian to hit 4000 runs in Women's T20I cricket. Mandhana, who scored 25 runs during

the opening T20I of the five-match series, also became the second woman to reach the landmark of 4000 runs in T20Is after New Zealand's Suzie Bates (4716 runs). Additionally, Mandhana was also the quickest to do so in terms of balls taken (3227) than Bates, who took 3675 balls to reach the 4000 runs milestone. India came into the contest with an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match series.

## Prabhas Hails Maruthi's Climax, Wishes The Raja Saab a Sankranti Blockbuster

We made the film 'The Raja Saab' to give good entertainment to Darling's fans. After watching this movie's climax, I became a fan of Maruthi's writing. Along with all the other Sankranti releases, I want 'TJR Raja Saab' also to become a blockbuster" – Rebel Star Prabhas at the pre-release event

Rebel Star Prabhas is starring in the prestigious movie "Raja Saab". Director Maruthi is making this film in such a way that it stands as an evergreen movie in the horror-comedy genre. Producers TG Vishwa Prasad and Krithi Prasad are producing "Raja Saab" on a grand scale with uncompromising production values. Malavika Mohanan, Nidhi Agarwal, and Riddhi Kumar are playing the female leads. To double the Sankranti festivities, "Raja Saab" is getting ready for a worldwide grand theatrical release on January 9. Today, the pre-release event of "Raja Saab" was held grandly in Hyderabad. At this event.

Director Maruthi said, "The reason I am standing on this stage today is because of the



support you have given me. Two people stood strongly behind 'The Raja Saab': Prabhas garu and Vishwa Prasad garu. Vishwa Prasad garu and the entire People Media team put their lives into this film. When Prabhas garu was acting as Rama in 'Adipurush', I went to him with the 'Raja Saab' story. After listening to it, Prabhas garu laughed a lot. He did not need to do this

film. After 'Baahubali', Prabhas garu gained worldwide recognition. While we were shooting in a small town in South Africa, even the locals recognized Prabhas garu, which surprised us. The pan-India effort made by Rajamouli garu is benefiting all of us today. Directors like Sukumar, Sandeep Vanga, and I are doing pan-India films now. Many of our stars

have reached pan-India status. With Prabhas garu, we did not just make a film; we made a large-scale movie. This genre has great potential, and we are taking it to another level. Many people worked hard for 'The Raja Saab'. I have made 11 films, and Prabhas garu gave me an opportunity at Rebel University, saying that I should become a director of a bigger range. I wrote and

directed this film, but the effort Prabhas garu put into it, his involvement, and the support he gave us cannot be expressed in words. Even though many films are coming this Sankranti, Vishwa Prasad garu is bravely bringing 'Raja Saab'. The success 'The Raja Saab' will achieve in all languages will not be ordinary. I watch my films like an audience member.

## Eesha completes breakeven mark: Enters Profit Zone

The horror thriller Eesha has turned into a solid Christmas blockbuster despite facing stiff competition at the box office with multiple releases. The victorious duo Bunny Vas and Vamsi Nandipati have scored yet another blockbuster with this gripping horror thriller. With a unique twist, a strong story, and impressive performances, the film is creating a sensation in cinema halls. Every bone-chilling scene delivers goosebumps, instilling both fear and excitement among the audience. What began as a modest release quickly turned into a major sensation, fueled by heavy advance bookings and strong audience turnout in theaters, ultimately achieving blockbuster status. Eesha collected an impressive ₹4.8 crores gross within just three days, including premiere shows, marking a huge success for a small film. With consistently good occupancy, the film entered the profit zone within three days and comfortably crossed its breakeven point. This



success also gave Bunny Vas and Vamsi Nandipati a hatrick of hits, following Little Hearts and Raju Weds Rambai. These collections and the strong occupancy clearly reflect the success of this small film. The movie features Thirugan and Hebah Patel in lead roles, with Akhil Raj and Siri Hanmant playing significant roles, earning the success they truly deserve. This small film is making a big impact everywhere, backed by solid reviews from both audiences and critics. Amid multiple releases slated for December 25th, this horror thriller truly stands out.

## Due to objections raised by the censor board, the film originally titled Vanara has been renamed VanaVeera; gearing up for a grand worldwide theatrical release on January 1st



VanaVeera introduces Avinash Thiruveedhula as both hero and director. Simran Choudhary plays the female lead, while Nandu appears as the antagonist. The film is presented by Shanthanu Pathi and produced under the Silver Screen Cinemas banner by Avinash Buyani, Alapati Raja, and C. Ankit Reddy. Dialogues by Sai Madhav Burra and music by Vivek Sagar are major highlights. Made as a mythological rural drama, Vanaveera is ready to hit theatres worldwide on January 1 as a New Year release. The trailer launch event of the film was held grandly in Hyderabad today. Speaking at the event, actor Harsha said, "Like everyone else, we worked extremely hard for our film Vanaveera. You can understand what this film is all about just by watching the trailer. This is essentially a story about a son's struggle for his father. I request

everyone to watch our film in theatres on January 1 and support us." Actor Bobby said, "I really like the title Vanaveera. With this film, we are hoping to reach the audience about ten days ahead of the Sankranti season. This movie has all the elements required to satisfy family audiences as well as youth." DOP Chota K. Prasad said, "We worked on this film with great effort for two years. Earlier, the audi-

ence took the title Vanara forward, and now you need to take VanaVeera to the people as well. I am very happy that our hero Kiran Abbavaram released the trailer. I sincerely request your support for Vanaveera, which is releasing on January 1." Actress Simran Choudhary said, "VanaVeera is a very good family entertainer. This film has fun, mystery, thrilling moments, and romance -

everything audiences look for. We are going to start the coming year with a bang through this movie. Telugu audiences always support good films, and we have complete faith in them. I hope all of you will encourage and support Vanaveera." Producer Shanthanu Pathi said, "Since the censor board did not approve our original title, we had to change it to Vanaveera. We registered the title with all proper permissions and spent a lot on promotions under that name. Now, media friends need to help us take the title Vanaveera to the audience. Our film is a complete family entertainer with all the elements audiences expect. When you watch it on screen, it will feel like a big film, not a small-budget one. I thank Kiran Abbavaram garu for releasing our trailer and producer Rajesh Danda garu for attending today's

## Huma Qureshi Stuns as Elizabeth in Yash–Geetu Mohandas' Toxic



"I was bowled over by the sheer audacity and magnitude of what we were going to attempt," Huma Qureshi on collaborating with Geetu Mohandas and Yash on Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups. The makers of Rocking Star Yash's Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups have unveiled the first look of Huma Qureshi as Elizabeth, adding to the growing buzz around one of the most awaited films of 2026. Known for choosing unconventional roles, Huma's entry into the world of Toxic hints at a character with mystery and intensity. In the first look, Huma is seen standing in a graveyard setting, surrounded by weathered tombstones and stone angels. She is positioned beside a vintage black car and dressed in an off-shoulder black outfit with dramatic sleeves, bringing in old-world elegance. The dark, gothic backdrop adds a foreboding tone,

offering a glimpse into the film's intense world. Sharing her thoughts on casting Huma, director

Geetu Mohandas took to Instagram and wrote, "Casting for this role was perhaps the trickiest.



## O Andala Rakshasi Arriving on January 2 promises Compelling Content: Hero & Director Sheraz Mehdi at Pre-Release Event



Sheraz Mehdi has been winning appreciation as a director, actor, music composer, and storyteller. He is now set to once again entertain as both hero and director with his upcoming film O Andala Rakshasi. The film stars Vihanshi Hegde and Kriti Verma as the female leads. Produced by Surinder Kaur under the Sky Is the Limit banner, O Andala Rakshasi is scheduled for a grand release on January 2. Ahead of the release, the film's team held a pre-release event. Speaking at the event, Sheraz Mehdi said: "We are releasing O Andala Rakshasi on January 2 on a large scale. Once in a year, a truly good film comes along and our O Andala Rakshasi is one such film. Vihanshi Hegde, Kriti Verma, Neha Deshpande, Akhila, Geetha Reddy, Sneha, Priya Deshpande, Suman garu, Thammareddy Bharadwaj garu, and many others have delivered wonderful performances in

remarkable roles. This is a good film backed by excellent content. The audience won't feel bored even for a minute. It is entertaining while also carrying a strong message. The twists are outstanding, and it will especially appeal to women." Story and dialogue writer Bhashya Sree said: "I wrote the story and dialogues for O Andala Rakshasi. Audiences will walk out of the theatre with a very positive feeling. We made this

## Priyanka Chopra shares cozy snowtime glimpses of Malti Marie

U.S. Taking a short break from her work commitments, she is spending time with daughter Malti Marie Chopra Jonas and husband Nick Jonas. In her latest post, PeeCee was seen capturing her little bundle of joy enjoying the snow season. Priyanka uploaded a video on her Instagram handle, where she and Malti were seen taking a stroll around the snow-clad city. Dressed in a white coat and pants, the little munchkin looked adorable as she twinned with her mom, who looked as stylish as ever in a beanie. Seeing snow, Malti was unable to contain her excitement and was seen running on the snow-covered path while holding her mother's hand. "0 visibility but...joy at a 100% (sic)," Priyanka captioned the

post. PeeCee dropped another post sharing a couple of happy moments with Malti and her mother, Madiha Chopra. From posing

with her mom, to going on a drive in the snow, to little Malti sitting next to the fire to tackle the cold, Priyanka's post gave out wholesome holiday vibes. PeeCee further dropped a clip of Malti getting delighted