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Cong claims SHANTI
Bill pushed for
Trump, Adani



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Jordan says its air force
joined US strikes on Islamic
State in Syria

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U-19 Asia Cup: India looks
to extend dominance
against Pakistan in final



INBRIEF

Dense fog hits
Delhi Airport, 97
flights cancelled
and over 200
delayed

New Delhi: Flight operations at the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) were severely affected on Sunday due to low visibility conditions caused by dense fog, leading to the cancellation of 97 flights and delays to over 200 others. An official said that 48 arriving flights and 49 departures were cancelled at the Delhi airport. As per the latest data available on flight tracking website Flightradar24, more than 200 flights were delayed, with the average departure delay pegged at around 23 minutes. In a post on social media platform X around noon, Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL), which operates IGIA, stated

Two coal workers
trapped as
opencast mine
wall collapses in
Hazaribagh

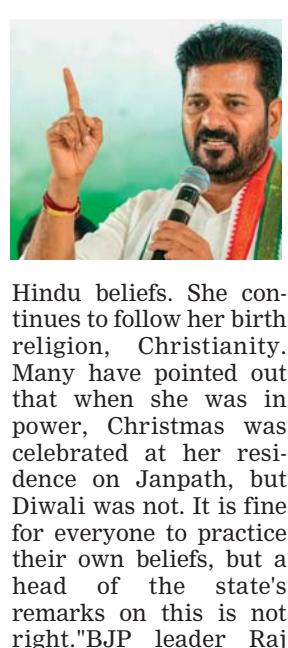
Hazaribagh: Two coal workers were trapped after a wall of an opencast mine collapsed on a coal-laden truck in Jharkhand's Hazaribagh district late Saturday night, police said. The incident occurred around 11 pm in the command area of Central Coalfields Limited (CCL) under the limits of Urimari Police Station, when the highwall of the mine suddenly caved in on the vehicle during coal loading operations, a senior police officer said. A highwall refers to the exposed face of overburden and coal in a mine, and its stability is crucial for the safety of both workers and machinery, mining experts noted. The trapped workers have been identified as Sunil Yadav (30) and Raju Paswan (50), said Barkagaon Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Pawan Kumar. Both were on the truck at the time of the accident.

PM Modi to launch
landmark urea
project in Assam

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to lay the foundation stone for a large-scale urea manufacturing unit at the Namrup Fertiliser Plant in Naharkatia, Assam, on Sunday, in what is being described as one of the most consequential fertiliser sector investments in the Northeast in recent years. The upcoming facility is planned to produce around 1.2 million metric tonnes of urea annually, significantly enhancing domestic fertiliser availability while reinforcing India's agricultural supply network. The project is also expected to act as a catalyst for industrial expansion in Assam, particularly within the Namrup region.

Revanth's Christmas remarks spark political storm

NEW DELHI (TSIT): Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has triggered a political controversy after attributing Christmas celebrations in the state to the "sacrifice" of Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) chairperson Sonia Gandhi, drawing sharp criticism from the BJP.



Addressing a government-hosted Christmas programme at Lal Bahadur Stadium in Hyderabad on Saturday, Revanth Reddy remarked, "If people are celebrating Christmas in Telangana today, it is because of Sonia Gandhi's crucial role and sacrifice behind it."

He further said that December holds special significance for Telangana, referring to both Sonia Gandhi's birthday and the month in which the state was formed. The remarks immediately invited strong reactions from the BJP, which accused the Chief Minister of making inappropriate comparisons and politicising a religious festival. Speaking to IANS, BJP National Spokesperson R.P. Singh said, "Sonia Gandhi has never shown faith in

Hindu beliefs. She continues to follow her birth religion, Christianity. Many have pointed out that when she was in power, Christmas was celebrated at her residence on Janpath, but Diwali was not. It is fine for everyone to practice their own beliefs, but a head of the state's remarks on this is not right." BJP leader Raj Purohit also lashed out at Revanth Reddy, calling his statement "crazy" and irresponsible.

"He is comparing the sacrifices made by Jesus to those of Sonia Gandhi? Honestly, he should not make such remarks. Is marrying into India a sacrifice? She says she gave a son to the country, now the entire country is troubled. Is this the sacrifice? That cannot be called a sacrifice. Therefore, the Chief Minister should speak with restraint and responsibility," Purohit told IANS.

Another BJP leader,

earlier, the BJP's Telangana unit also reacted sharply, branding the Chief Minister's remarks as "sycophancy" and mocking the claim that Christmas celebrations were linked to Sonia Gandhi.

In a post, the party said, "Next, we'll be told the sun rises because of the Gandhi family. When flattery crosses all limits, everything is hijacked for political bootlicking." The ruling party has yet to issue any clarification on the Chief Minister's remarks.

Maharashtra local polls: BJP scores record victory; Opposition alleges EVM tampering, money power

MUMBAI (TSIT): Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday said the BJP has set a record in local body polls with 48 per cent of councillors winning on the party symbol, and its candidates elected as presidents in 129 municipal councils. He attributed the Mahayuti alliance's success in the municipal council and nagar panchayat elections to the BJP organisation and development agenda of the government. Counting of votes for elections to the posts of president and members in 286 municipal councils and nagar panchayats — held in two phases

— began in the morning. Fadnavis said the BJP has once again emerged as the single largest party. "48 per cent councillors have been elected on the BJP symbol, which is a record. The BJP has created another record with 3,300 councillors being elected from the party. BJP candidates have been elected as presidents in 129 municipal councils. In 75 per cent of the local bodies, Mahayuti nominees have been elected as municipal presidents," he said.

Fadnavis emphasised that the BJP's national leadership has put faith in the state leadership for elections.

New Delhi: Air pollution levels in the national capital deteriorated sharply on Sunday, edging dangerously close to the "severe" category as dense smog, plunging temperatures, and thick fog blanketed large swathes of northern India.

The worsening air quality once again raised health concerns for residents, particularly children, the elderly and those with respiratory ailments.

According to data from the Air Quality Early Warning System for Delhi, operated by the Ministry of Earth Sciences, the city's Air Quality Index (AQI) climbed steadily, touch-



ing 410 by 11 pm, officially breaching the "severe" threshold.

Although there was a marginal improvement overnight, pollution levels remained alarmingly high, with the AQI recorded at 396 at around 6.30 a.m. on Sunday, still within the near-severe range. Monitoring data from the

Central Pollution Control Board's Sameer app revealed that several areas across the capital experienced extremely poor air quality during the early morning hours. Among the worst-affected locations were Chandni Chowk (455), Wazirpur (449), Rohini (444), Jahangirpur (444), Anand Vihar (438) and Mundka (436), all of which firmly fell under the "severe" pollution category. The deteriorating air quality coincided with challenging weather conditions. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) warned of dense to very dense fog, further reducing visibility and compounding the impact of pollution.

According to sources, the Police Commissioner clearly said that if there is any apprehension of unrest in Kolkata stemming from the current disturbances in Bangladesh, immediate action must be taken.

The Ministry said in a statement that the Act is anchored in the principles of empowerment, growth, convergence and saturation and seeks to transform rural employment from a standalone welfare intervention into an integrated instrument of development.

It strengthens income security for rural households, modernises governance and accountability, and links wage employment with the creation of durable and productive rural assets, thereby laying the foundation for a prosperous and resilient Rural Bharat, it said.

Enhanced Statutory Employment Guarantee is one of the key salient features of the Act, said the statement.

The Act provides a

statutory guarantee of not less than 125 days of wage employment per rural household in each financial year to households whose adult members volunteer to undertake unskilled manual work (Section 5(1)), it said.

This enhancement over the earlier 100-day entitlement significantly strengthens livelihood security, predictability of work, and income stability for rural households, while also enabling them to contribute more effectively and meaningfully to national development. The Act also carries a

balanced provision for agriculture and rural labour. To facilitate adequate availability of agricultural labour during peak sowing and harvesting seasons, the Act empowers States to notify an aggregated pause period aggregating to 60 days in a financial year (Section 6).

The Ministry said the full 125-day employment guarantee remains intact, to be provided during the remaining period, ensuring a calibrated balance that supports both agricultural productivity and worker security.

Security beefed up across
Kolkata amid Bangladesh unrest



KOLKATA (TSIT): As the situation in neighbouring Bangladesh worsens, security has been tightened in Kolkata with instructions for quick action in case of any apprehension of unrest.

Kolkata Police Commissioner Manoj Verma has instructed that the flames of violence in Bangladesh must not reach Kolkata in any way, said police sources on Sunday.

The Commissioner held the Kolkata Police's monthly crime meeting on Saturday, where the issue of unrest in Bangladesh was also discussed.

According to sources, the Police Commissioner clearly said that if there is any apprehension of unrest in Kolkata stemming from the current disturbances in Bangladesh, immediate action must be taken.

"The commissioner has clearly said that police stations will have to remain vigilant and increase surveillance. Reports of any disturbance must be acted upon immediately.

Prez Droupadi Murmu gives assent to VB – G RAM G Bill, 2025



growth, convergence of development initiatives and saturation-based delivery, thereby strengthening the foundation for a prosperous, resilient and self-reliant Rural Bharat.

Earlier, Parliament passed the Viksit Bharat

Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeeyika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill, 2025, marking a decisive

reform in India's rural

employment and develop-

ment framework.

The Act replaces the

Mahatma Gandhi

National Rural

Employment Guarantee

Act (MGNREGA), 2005,

with a modern statutory framework that enhances livelihood security and is aligned with the national vision of Viksit Bharat @2047.

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Haryana implements revised guidelines to support prisoners unable to pay fines

CHANDIGARH: Haryana Additional Chief Secretary, Home, Dr Sumita Misra on Saturday said the state has issued revised guidelines and standard operating procedures for the 'Support to Poor Prisoners' scheme.

The guidelines aim to provide financial assistance to economically weak prisoners whose freedom is impeded solely due to their inability to pay court-imposed fines or secure bail, she said in an official statement released here.

The revised framework introduces stringent timelines and institutional mechanisms to ensure swift and effective relief to deserving inmates lodged in Haryana jails, she said, adding that the initiative also seeks to reduce overcrowding of prisons.

Under the revised guidelines, district-level empowered committees will be constituted comprising representatives from the district collector's office, district legal services authority (DLSA), police department, prison administration, and the judiciary.

The secretary, DLSA will serve as convener and coordinating incharge of these committees, which will meet regularly on the first and third Monday of each month to review and approve cases.



Additionally, a state-level oversight committee will be established, bringing together the principal secretary (Home/Jail), secretary (law department), secretary of the state legal services authority, DG/IG (Prisons), and the registrar general of the high court to provide supervision and ensure effective implementation across the state.

For undeterred prisoners who are unable to secure bail due to financial constraints, assistance up to Rs 50,000 per case will be provided, with the empowered committee having discretion to approve amounts up to Rs 1 lakh in exceptional circumstances, the statement said.

Cases requiring support exceeding Rs 1 lakh will be referred to the state-level oversight committee for consideration and approval.

For convicted prisoners unable to pay court-imposed fines, assistance up to Rs 25,000 can be sanctioned by the empowered committee, while amounts exceeding this threshold require oversight committee approval, she added.

Misra highlighted the timeline established under the new SOPs. If an undeterred prisoner is not released within seven days of bail being granted, jail authorities must immediately inform the secretary, DLSA.

The entire process, from initial assessment and verification of the prisoner's financial condition to fund release and court deposit, has been structured to be

completed within a clearly defined timeframe.

The secretary, DLSA, with assistance from visiting lawyers, paralegal volunteers, or civil society representatives, will verify the prisoner's financial status within five days.

Subsequently, the empowered committee will direct the release of funds within five days of receiving the report, and the amount will be deposited in court within five days of the committee's decision.

The additional chief secretary clarified that while the scheme aims to assist the economically disadvantaged, it includes necessary safeguards to prevent misuse.

The benefit will not be available to persons accused of offenses under the Prevention of Corruption Act, Prevention of Money Laundering Act, Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, or other specified legislation.

Persons involved in heinous crimes such as acts of terrorism, offenses affecting national security, dowry deaths, rape, human trafficking, or offenses under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act will also not be extended the benefit of the scheme.

INDORE: Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Saturday expressed confidence that India will surpass Germany to become the world's third-largest economy by the end of 2027, lauding the policies and institutional reforms ushered in by the Centre under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Scindia was addressing the YEP Bharat Summit 2025 organised by the Young Entrepreneurs Forum Bharat here.

He said, "India was once known as the golden bird. About 2,000 years ago, India's share in the world's gross domestic product (GDP) was 20 per cent. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India will move forward with this vision and emerge as a star on the global stage." India's economy has leapt from the 10th position 12 years ago to fourth, leaving behind Japan, he said.

"By the end of 2027, we will surpass Germany to become the world's third-largest economy," asserted the minister.

In the race for economic



development, India has already surpassed the country that tried to rule it for 200 years, he said without naming Britain.

Scindia stressed that India's perseverance defines the country. "This perseverance has transformed India from a country with a GDP of \$2.3 trillion to a nation with a GDP of \$4.5 trillion," he said.

The Union minister said the country is moving towards becoming a major global manufacturing hub, powered by "the steady policies and deep institutional changes" brought in by the Modi government.

Scindia said, "In every cabinet meeting, the prime minister instructs us ministers to throw colonial laws into the dustbin. He tells us to discuss with all stakeholders and resolve their difficulties to improve the ease of doing business."

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, who also addressed the conference, said that MP has emerged as India's fastest-growing state.

Yadav urged the large number of new entrepreneurs present at the conference to move forward with innovation, clear thinking, and social responsibility.

and to invest more in the state.

The CM said, "The state has a favourable environment, resources, and facilities for industrial investment. The state government will provide all possible support to investors."

For the first time, he said, the state government has given priority to the Industry Department directly at the chief minister's level to ensure faster decision-making and strengthen investor confidence.

Yadav said that a new resolve has been taken in the state with a clear policy to improve lives through industries. "This policy will not only accelerate economic development but also create large-scale employment opportunities for the youth," he said.

The CM also said that at the Global Investors Summit held in Bhopal in February, agreements worth Rs 32 lakh crore were signed, of which the foundation stone for projects involving investments worth Rs 6 lakh crore has already been laid.

BJP again attacks Rahul alleging Soros link, claims he met 'enemies of India' in Germany

NEW DELHI: The BJP on Saturday alleged that Rahul Gandhi had a meeting with "enemies of India" during his visit to Germany and demanded transparency in the engagements of Leader of the Opposition with "global actors abroad".

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters here, party spokesman Gaurav Bhatia showed a purported picture of Gandhi with Berlin-based Heretic school president and professor Cornelia Woll and called it "proof" of the Congress leader meeting "anti-India forces in Germany".

Bhatia claimed that Woll is one of the trustees of the Central European University, which is funded by US-based billionaire investor George Soros's Open Society Foundation, and asked Gandhi as to what kind of "conspiracy" he was hatching against the country by joining



hands with such forces.

There was no immediate reaction from Rahul Gandhi or the Congress.

Last year too, the BJP had alleged that top Congress leaders had links with Soros-funded organisations that were involved in "anti-India" activities.

Raising questions on Gandhi's foreign visits, the BJP spokesperson asked why the Congress leader or his party does not make his itinerary public.

Though it's people's right to know about the Leader of Opposition's

itinerary during his foreign visit, neither the Congress share any information in this regard nor Gandhi on his X timeline, Bhatia charged on Saturday.

"If anyone meets anti-India forces and insults Bharat from foreign soil, it's none other than Rahul," Bhatia alleged, adding, "George Soros and Rahul Gandhi are two bodies but one soul."

The BJP spokesperson asked why Gandhi goes abroad during or ahead of almost every session of Parliament and "meets enemies of India, who are jealous of India and attack its integrity".

"What kind of anti-India agenda is it that the Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi is hatching a conspiracy against Bharat by joining hands with such anti-India forces," he asked.

Bhatia alleged that Gandhi met "anti-India" forces during his previous foreign visits also and had "defamed and insulted In-

dia" with his remarks.

"This is not the first time Rahul Gandhi is indulging in such anti-national activities," he said, adding, "Rahul Gandhi has become Mir Zafar".

Bhatia alleged that Soros makes anti-India statements and also provides funds to create unrest in India and attack the country's integrity and sovereignty.

"George Soros is not an Indian; he is a foreigner. But Rahul Gandhi has taken the oath to protect the Constitution. People gave him the responsibility to stand with India, and he is doing ILU-ILU (I love you) with anti-India forces," he said. "These snakelets within India need to be treated. People of the country are demanding it," Bhatia added.

"It's now clear that Rahul Gandhi is very shrewd. Opposition to India is ingrained in his DNA because of his insatiable desire for power," he alleged.

Bangla Pokkho hold protest march alleging violence against Hindus in Bangladesh

KOLKATA: Bengali nationalist outfit Bangla Pokkho on Saturday held a protest march to the Bangladesh deputy high commission here, alleging attacks on Hindus in the neighbouring country by communal forces.

The police stopped the protesters some distance away from the Bangladesh deputy high commission office in south Kolkata, an official said.

The protesters, holding black flags, chanted slogans against communalism and right-wing forces in Bangladesh, alleging that Hindu Bengalis were being subjected to attacks there.

Various parts of Bangladesh were rocked on Thursday night by attacks and vandalism, including stone-hurling at the Assistant Indian High Commissioner's residence in Chatogram, attacks on offices of leading newspapers, and vandalism at Bangabandhu Memorial Museum, soon after Bangladesh's interim government Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus confirmed prominent youth leader Sharif Osman Hadi's death.

Born on April 6, 1956, at Pattiam in northern Kannur district, he graduated in economics from PRNNS College, Mattannur, before moving to Chennai for film studies at the Film and Television Institute of Tamil Nadu.

Versatile Malayalam actor screenwriter Sreenivasan dies at 69

KOCHI: Sreenivasan, one of the most influential figures in Malayalam cinema as an actor, screenwriter and director, died at a government hospital here on Saturday morning, film industry sources said.

He was 69. He had been facing health issues and had undergone heart surgery in 2022.

Sreenivasan was traveling for dialysis at a private hospital in Kochi when he developed breathing difficulties and was shifted to the Government Taluk Hospital, Tripunithura.

According to hospital authorities, he passed away at around 8.30 am.

Later, the body was shifted from the hospital to his residence at Kandanadu in Tripunithura and then kept at Ernakulam Town Hall for public homage.

Sreenivasan, who hailed from Kannur, had been staying here for the past several years.

Born on April 6, 1956, at Pattiam in northern Kannur district, he graduated in economics from PRNNS College, Mattannur, before moving to Chennai for film studies at the Film and Television Institute of Tamil Nadu.

He made his acting debut in the film 'Manimuzhakkam', directed by P A Bakar, in 1976.

Sreenivasan went on to create several memorable characters, often alongside actors Mohanlal and Mammootty.

Apart from acting, Sreenivasan was widely acclaimed for his screenplay writing, beginning with 'Odaruthamvava Alariyam' in 1984.

He later collaborated extensively with noted directors Priyadarshan and Sathyaraj.

According to his directorial debut with 'Vadakkunkkam' in 1989, which is considered a classic in Malayalam cinema and won the Kerala State Film Award.

He also directed 'Chinthavishtayaya Shyamala' (1998), which won the National Film Award for Best Film on Other Social Issues.

He was the lead character in both films.

'Sandesam' (1991), a political satire written by Sreenivasan and still frequently referenced in political discourse, won the Kerala State Film Award for Best Story.

After settling in Kochi, he was also known for practis-

ing organic farming near his residence.

His two sons, Vineeth Sreenivasan and Dhyani Sreenivasan, are also actors in the Malayalam film industry.

He is survived by his wife Vimala and their two sons.

Meanwhile, condolences poured in from various quarters on the demise of the legendary actor-director.

In a social media post, Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Alekhar expressed sorrow over Sreenivasan's death and said his "iconic performances and timeless contributions", would be remembered forever.

"Condolences to his bereaved family. May his soul attain mukti," he said.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, in a statement, said Sreenivasan's passing is an irreparable loss to Malayalam cinema.

He said a versatile talent who rose to prominence in every sphere of filmmaking has left the industry.

"Very few filmmakers have succeeded like him in bringing the life of the common man to the silver screen and, through humour and thought, leading the audience to levels of awareness he desired.

Repeal of MGNREGA 'high-handedness', 'injustice' to poor: Amrinder Singh Raja



when the state share was 10 per cent under the MGNREGA.

Referring to Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's decision to convene a special session of Punjab Assembly on the issue, Raja said he hoped that Mann would come up with a positive and constructive proposal to counter the Central government.

MGNREGA was a demand-based right where every person could demand 100 days of work as a right, she pointed out, adding that it had transformed the rural economy, helped in reducing rural poverty by 26 per cent and bolstered rural employment.

Meanwhile, Shrikrishna de-

BJP ahead in Arunachal panchayat elections as counting continues, dominates civic polls



with voting held for the remaining 1,947 seats.

Talo added that candidates and their authorised election agents are being allowed inside the counting halls strictly as per laid-down guidelines, and video recording of the counting process is being carried out to ensure transparency.

In the panchayat elections, counting is being held for 186 ZPM seats out of a total of 245, with 59 seats having been elected unopposed.

In the gram panchayat

(GPM) category, 6,227 out of 8,208 seats were elected unopposed, with voting held for the remaining 1,947 seats.

Talo added that candidates and their authorised election agents are being allowed inside the counting halls strictly as per laid-down guidelines, and video recording of the counting process is being carried out to ensure transparency.

The BJP won 58 ZPM seats unopposed, while one seat was won uncontested by a candidate from the National People's Party.

(NPP), he said.

A total of 5,037 BJP candidates were declared elected unopposed in the GPM category, along with 1,190 candidates from other parties, including independents.

The secretary said 13 gram panchayat constituencies received no nominations, while all nominations in 14 gram panchayat constituencies were rejected during scrutiny.

Polling in the Dumba

Singpho gram panchayat seat has been countermanded following the death of a candidate, he added.

Meanwhile, the BJP won 14 of the 20 wards in the Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC) elections. The party also secured uncontested victories in four wards.

In the Pasighat Municipal Council (PMC) elections, PPA candidates registered victories in wards 1 to 5 — Tagom Padung (Ward 1), Mem Tamuk (Ward 2), Oyon Pabin (Ward 3), Kamini Lego (Ward 4) and Rahul Tamuk in Ward 5, respectively.

The BJP could secure only two wards, with Mary Gao winning from Ward 6 and Pema Dolma Moyong clinching Ward 7, the official said, adding that Ward 8 was won by independent candidate Oni Tamuk.

Four women were elected to the PMC. The opposition Congress failed to open its account in both the Itanagar and Pasighat civic bodies.

CM and I are working like brothers: D K Shivakumar

Bengaluru : Dismissing differences with any Congress leader, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said he and the CM are working like brothers.

Speaking to reporters at his Sadashivanagar residence, he said, "Aren't CM I not working like brothers? I don't have any differences with any Congress leader." Asked about his meeting with people close to CM, referring to his meeting with former minister K N Rajanna, he said, "Is CM close to him? He is close to me too, who isn't he close to? I am a Congressman, I made Rajanna the President of Apex Bank during S M Krishna's time. You can check with him."

Asked if he met K N Rajanna to garner his support, he said, "We are colleagues and he has worked with me. Have I had any difference with the CM since he came to the party 16 years ago? It is all a creation of the media and Opposition parties."

"All Congress leaders are working together. We are all friends and colleagues. I haven't spoken against anyone. I have only commented on the Opposition members. Rajanna is an MLA of our party and was a minister. It was a courtesy call. I could not talk to him properly."



Asked about Delhi visit, he said, "I am going to Delhi for a meeting on river linking project. I will also demand for 50% grants for metro and other infrastructure projects in Bengaluru. A grant of 12-13% won't be enough. We are taking up double decker project and need to discuss Hoskote and Bidadi lines too."

I have to hold discussions with Union Environment minister on Mahadayi and Yettinahole. We have completed a lot of work in Yettinahole, people won't spare us if we don't get water till Tumakuru. We are also preparing for a revised DPR on Mekedatu," he added.

Asked about Bengaluru's development, he said, "We are focused on Bengaluru's development. Our priority is potholes and traffic."

Talks with Union minister

Asked about V R Sudarshan's letter to Mallikarjun Kharge on clearing all confusion in the party, he said, "There is no confusion in the party according to me. It is all a creation of BJP and the media. BJP is trying to cover up its own internal mess." Asked about Parameshwar's statement on clearing the confusion in the party, he said, "He is a senior leader and I am not his spokesperson."

Asked if a date has been fixed for his meeting with the High command, he said, "You always come back to politics. You raised pothole issue, now the potholes are all filled up. But you are not giving it coverage."

Asked about Bengaluru's development, he said, "We are focused on Bengaluru's development. Our priority is potholes and traffic."

High command told they will call me & CM at appropriate time:
Karnataka Dy CM Shivakumar

Bengaluru, Dec 20 : Amid the leadership tussle in Karnataka, Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar on Saturday said that the party high command has told him that it will call both him and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah at an appropriate time. Interacting with reporters here, Shivakumar, asked whether he was supposed to meet the high command after the Assembly session, said the high command had informed both him and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah about when it would call them. "They have conveyed this to us over the phone. We will go," he said.

On whether both leaders would go together, Shivakumar replied that both of them would have to go. "Is it possible not to go there?" he asked. "I will inform the media about it. Without informing you, I will not stealthily go and meet them," he quipped.

Shivakumar further stated that he would be travelling to Delhi on Tuesday as the Union Ministry of Water Resources had called a meeting on inter-linking of rivers. "I will attend that meeting and raise issues related to the Mahadayi project, the Krishna water award, the Mekedatu project, and the Upper Bhadra project," he said. "I am going to meet the Union Minister for Water Resources. We have also sought an appointment with the Union Forest Minister.

94.9% children vaccinated under Pulse Polio drive: Rajendra Cholan



Bengaluru : Bengaluru Central City Corporation Commissioner Rajendra Cholan on Sunday said that 1.76 lakh children, accounting for 94.90 per cent of the target population, have been administered polio drops under the National Pulse Polio Programme within the Central City Corporation limits.

The Pulse Polio drive is being conducted from December 21 to 24, 2025, across 28 Urban Primary Health Centres and 45 Namma Clinics, maternity hospitals, and referral hospitals. The campaign

was officially inaugurated by Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Bengaluru Urban Development D K Shivakumar, who administered polio drops to children.

dren were vaccinated on the first day. The drive covers 200 slum areas, 13 migrant habitations, and is supported by 557 booths, including static, transit, and mobile teams. Over 3,500 vaccination workers and 169 supervisors have been deployed to ensure effective coverage. Additional Commissioner (Development) Daljit Kumar inspected vaccination activities at major transit points such as railway stations, bus stands, metro stations, and health centres, and personally administered vaccines to children.

Mark pre-release event held grandly in Hubballi



Bengaluru : A grand pre-release event of A b h i n a y a Chakravarthy Kiccha Sudeep's much-anticipated film Mark was held in Hubballi on Saturday, drawing huge attention from fans and cinema lovers. The event featured energetic singing and dance performances based on songs from the film, creating an electrifying atmosphere.

Kiccha Sudeep attended the event along with the film's star cast, including

Naveen Chandra, Gopalakrishna Deshpande, Pratap Narayan, Archana Kottige, Roshini Prakash, Maltesh, Ashwin Haasan, and Gurusom Sundar.

Adding to the excitement, CCL players paid tribute to Sudeep with a special dance performance.

Addressing the gathering, Sudeep expressed his gratitude

to the people of Hubballi for their unwavering love and support. Recalling his earlier visit in 2003, he said the city has always held a special place in his heart. He noted that Hubballi gives him the strength to connect with the entire Karnataka audience with intensity and confidence.

Making a powerful statement, Sudeep said, "I made a promise on July 5, and on December 25 we are knocking on the door loudly.

Future Innovators Science Fair 2025 Ignites Young Minds in Rural Raichur Amid Educational Challenges



Raichur : The Future Innovators Inter-School Science Fair 2025, an inspiring initiative aimed at nurturing scientific curiosity among rural schoolchildren, was successfully held on Saturday at the Government High School in Shivangi village, Devadurga taluk, Raichur district.

Organised by Child Rights and You (CRY) in partnership with local education authorities, the event featured 42 innovative science models presented by student teams from 21 government high schools across Raichur, Devadurga, Sirwar, and Lingasugur taluks. Over 120 young innovators participated enthusiastically in the fair.

The event brought together students, educators, and community leaders, offering interactive displays of science projects on themes ranging from environmental sustainability to basic concepts in physics and biology.

Addressing the gathering, K. D. Badiger, Deputy Director, Department of School Education and Literacy, Raichur, emphasised the role of such initiatives in bridging education gaps.

"Science is everywhere. We use science in our daily lives. In regions like Raichur, events like this empower children to take charge of their learning and inspire systemic change. I am very happy

and thank CRY for organising this science exhibition," he said. The fair gains added significance against the backdrop of acute teacher shortages across Raichur district. Recent data indicates that higher primary schools face a 56% teacher vacancy rate (211 out of 377 sanctioned posts), with heavy reliance on 161 guest teachers, including only 7 science and 5 mathematics specialists.

Lower primary schools report an even more alarm-

ing 76% vacancy rate (35 out of 46 posts), severely impacting foundational literacy and numeracy. Devadurga and Sirwar taluks are the most affected, with science (37%) and mathematics (30%) vacancies in higher primary schools posing serious risks to learning outcomes. Additionally, Sirwar taluk has only one PUC (Higher Secondary) college, which offers Arts alone, forcing students to travel more than 50 kilometres pursue science education.

Speaking at the event, John Roberts, Regional Director - South, CRY, said, "We work on education and child protection issues across 52 villages in four blocks — Lingasugur, Sirwar, Raichur, and Devadurga. In these areas, teacher vacancies are as high as 76%, with very few permanent teachers. Our focus is to ensure quality education in the schools where we work."

Coastal village Bengre remains 'alcohol-free' for three decades

Mangaluru, Dec 21 : Nestled between the Arabian Sea and the Phalguni River, the picturesque coastal village of Bengre in Mangaluru has remained alcohol-free for over three decades. The village has no liquor shops or bars, and residents have collectively enforced a self-imposed ban on alcohol sales for the past 30 years. The movement was initiated in 1994 by Dhananjaya Putran Bengre, former president of the Bengre Mahajana Sabha and a senior member of the fishing community, who took a pledge against liquor sales in the village. He told The New Indian Express that five government-licensed liquor shops and illegal distilleries in the area were successfully shut down.



UNDER THE NATIONAL PULSE POLIO MISSION PULSE POLIO DROPS GIVEN TO CHILDREN IN ANJANAGAR GOVERNMENT SCHOOL SANATANAYA.

Health is Wealth – Healthy Children are the Nation's Greatest Asset



2025 Action Plan
1. Total population – 2,455,245
2. Total households – 589,507
3. Children aged 0-5 years – 270,297

- Number of slum areas – 1,127
- Children aged 0-5 years in slum areas – 123,536
- Migrant population areas – 779
- Migrant population – 34,490
- Migrant children aged 0-5 years – 2,785
- Number of booths – 932
- Fixed booths – 726
- Transit teams – 101
- Mobile teams – 105
- Total vaccination personnel – 3,728
- Total supervisors – 186

Within the Bengaluru North City Corporation limits, Pulse Polio vaccination is being carried out in all wards through fixed booths set up at Urban Primary Health Centres, Namma Clinics, dispensaries, Anganwadi centres, and schools. In addition, mobile and transit teams have been deployed at bus stands, railway stations, government hospitals, malls, private nursing homes, medical colleges, major markets, slum areas, and other high-footfall locations. For effective monitoring and implementation of the programme, Health Officers, Deputy Health Officers, and Medical Officers of Health have been appointed as nodal officers by the Bengaluru North

City Corporation.

To create widespread public awareness, the Greater Bengaluru Authority has arranged extensive publicity through newspapers, banners, hoardings, audio announcements, social media platforms, door-to-door campaigns, and official GBA digital platforms.

Parents can easily locate the nearest Pulse Polio booth using the QR code (location-based system) provided by the Greater Bengaluru Authority.

As in previous years, organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International, UNICEF, UNDP, Lions Club, and other non-governmental organisations have extended their cooperation and support to ensure the successful implementation of this programme.

The public is requested to note that *even if children have previously received polio drops, all children below five years of age must be brought to the booths on the specified dates and administered two drops of polio vaccine*, to help sustain a polio-free world. The Bengaluru North City Corporation appeals to all citizens to extend their wholehearted cooperation.

Hate speech law meant to suppress opposition, farmers: Basavaraj Bommai

Gadag: Former Chief Minister and MP Basavaraj Bommai on Sunday strongly criticised the state government, alleging that it has failed on all fronts and that corruption has increased across every department.

Speaking to the media in Gadag, he accused the Congress government of introducing an unconstitutional hate speech control law with the sole intention of suppressing the opposition, farmers, and the general public, and curbing individual freedom.

Bommai said no department was functioning effectively and claimed the state was being pushed towards financial ruin. He argued that adequate provisions to deal with hate speech already exist under the BNS law and accused Congress leaders themselves of indulging in hate speech. Despite this, he said, the government brought a new law that goes against the Constitution to silence dissent and prevent people from speaking against corruption.

On Congress opposing the G. Ram G. Bill, Bommai said the legislation was debated extensively in Parliament and that amendments were necessary as rural conditions had changed over the past 15-20 years. He said the bill aims to prevent misuse, plug leakages, and promote asset creation, noting that neither registration nor employment days were reduced, but instead 25 additional days were added. Calling the bill progressive, he accused the opposition of opposing it purely for political reasons. Responding to claims that the bill undermines Gandhiji's ideology, Bommai said Mahatma Gandhi and the idea of Ram are inseparable, asserting that separating Ram from Gandhiji is an insult to Gandhiji himself.

Editorial

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2025

Foreign policy:
America courts its
civilizational suicide

Earlier this month, the Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov offered a succinct description of the Trump administration's new National Security Strategy (NSS), calling it "largely consistent with our vision." He's right. The NSS offers not even a hint of criticism of Russia, neither for its increasingly authoritarian domestic policies, nor for its blatant military aggression against Ukraine. Instead, it singles out Europe – America's long-standing democratic friend and ally – for special abuse. True, when the first Trump administration issued its NSS in 2017, there was plenty of talk about national sovereignty trumping everything else. But that document still recognized the value of America's allies, stating that "the United States and Europe will work together to counter Russian subversion and aggression." Moreover, this effort fit into a broader strategy of "great power competition," wherein China loomed large. Since then, Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and China has loomed only larger. But the second Trump administration is bowing to Russia, criticizing the Europeans, and describing the threat from China only in economic terms. Apparently, great-power competition has given way to great-power camaraderie. The US now says it is more interested in "stability," which supposedly can be achieved by working with Russian President Vladimir Putin and through a "G2" with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The implicit message is that great powers think alike. Each wants its own sphere of influence and prizes power over principle. As many commentators have noted, the NSS represents a radical departure from past US policies and doctrines. It envisions a pivot back to the Western Hemisphere and signals that profits will come before principles on just about every issue. The Middle East, for example, is primarily seen as an investment destination. Politics is complicated, but commercial dealmaking is easy.

Still, the vociferous denunciation of Europe stands out, not least for the flaws in the underlying argument. The NSS claims that "within a few decades at the latest, certain NATO members will become majority non-European," and that Europe, doomed to "civilizational erasure" (language many see as the handiwork of Vice President JD Vance), cannot be a reliable ally. But this is just false. There is not a single European country where "non-Europeans" will constitute a majority at any point in the foreseeable future. That includes the country with the largest share of Muslims: Russia.

Such vile rhetoric comes directly from European extremists. It is simply astonishing that it will form the basis for how America will treat its strongest and closest allies. The Trump administration is now prepared to interfere in European countries' domestic policies and policies to promote "patriotic" forces – meaning those peddling the same racist garbage. Not even Russia has been so blatantly open about its intention to interfere in European democratic processes.



PRIYANKA SAURABH

The recent news of the sudden death of a 10-year-old child is not just a tragic incident, but a reflection of one of the gravest social ironies of our times. The possible causes suggested by doctors—lack of sleep, going to school without breakfast, heavy school bags, the mental pressure of homework and performance, and the lack of timely and nutritious meals—point to a system in which childhood is being constantly crushed. This incident forces us to consider whether, in our attempt to provide children with a better future, we are robbing them of their present.

Today's society is caught in a blind race for achievement. Parents, teachers, and institutions—all, in one form or another, have embraced competition as the fundamental principle of life. The most vulnerable victims of this competition are children, who are still at an age for play, learning, and natural development. At four or five years old, when a child is just beginning to understand the world, they are expected to wake up on time, complete a prescribed curriculum, ace exams, and decide their future direction right away. This thinking is not only unscientific but also inhuman. Child psychology clearly states that a child's brain is most malleable and sensitive during their early years. Pressure exerted during this period has long-term effects on their personality, self-confidence, and health. Lack of sleep, stress, and fear disrupt the learning process. Yet, we wake children up in the mornings, send them to school without breakfast, and expect them to remain active and focused throughout the day. This expectation is far from reality.

Heavy school bags have been a topic of discussion for years. Despite government guidelines and court orders, young children are still seen carrying loads exceeding their own weight on their shoulders. This isn't just a physical problem; it also sends a psychological message that education is a burden, not a joy. When education becomes a burden, a child's natural curiosity for learning gradually fades.



Homework and exam pressure exacerbate this problem. The purpose of homework should be to reinforce class learning and reinforce understanding, not to intimidate the child. However, in practice, homework often becomes a form of punishment. Incomplete reprimands, punishments, and comparisons—all of which undermine a child's self-esteem. Instead of learning, they become afraid of mistakes, and this fear ultimately leads to stress, anxiety, and depression.

Food and daily routine also play a crucial role in children's health. Not getting timely and nutritious meals at school, being forced to eat cold lunches, and the pressure to bathe and study without rest as soon as they return home—all of this ignores a child's natural body needs. The body and mind need rest. Constant activity without rest exhausts a child's resilience. Equally important is the question of what we truly want from our children. Do we want them to be happy, healthy, and sensitive human beings, or merely machines for scoring marks and titles? When parents compare their children to others—"So and so's child is doing this, why can't you?"—they inadvertently instill a sense of inferiority in them. This comparison breeds social competition, in which everyone strives to get ahead, even if it costs the child their childhood. The education system must also introspect in this regard. Schools are not merely factories for completing curriculum; they are laboratories for building society. If schools lack adequate space for play, art, communication, and creative activities, education is incomplete. Teachers are not only imparters of knowledge to children, but also guides and mentors. Creating an atmosphere of fear in the name of discipline is contrary to the fundamental purpose of education.

The role of the government and administration at the policy level is also crucial. Clear and strict guidelines are needed on school bag weight, school hours, the amount of homework, and the examination system in early grades. Effective monitoring mechanisms must also be in place to ensure adherence to these rules. Regular health checkups, counseling services, and nutrition programs should become integral to children's education. The biggest question for parents is one of self-reflection. It's important to remember our own educational journey—when we started school, how we learned, how much space was given to play and friendship. Were we truly more capable than today's children, or did we simply have more time and freedom to learn? If we struggled and progressed, it's not necessary to assume our children will follow the same path. Every generation has different challenges and needs.

It's also important to understand that success isn't just about a high position or a high salary. Success also includes becoming a balanced, sensitive, and responsible citizen. If a child isn't mentally healthy, their achievements are meaningless. Society must recognize that not every child is the same—their interests, abilities, and pace vary. The goal of education should be to respect these differences, not to suppress them. The role of media and social discourse is no less important. When we only talk about toppers, ranks, and records, it indirectly creates an atmosphere of pressure. We must also highlight stories where children have given meaning to life through sports, art, service, and human values. This will balance society's perspective. Ultimately, the question before us is—are we truly shaping our children's futures, or are we burdening them with our own egos and insecurities? If the price of an achievement is a child's health, smile, and life, then it's not an achievement, it's a failure. Children don't need pity, they need rights—to rest, to play, to make mistakes, and to grow at their own pace. Now's the time to choose compassion over competition. Free education from fear, protect childhood, not burden it. Because a healthy childhood is the foundation of a healthy society, and if the foundation is weak, the building of the future, no matter how tall, will not stand.

Raising the Legal Age of Marriage: Law, Maturity, and Social Responsibility



Of India's contemporary crises, water is the most discussed, yet also the least understood. Drought, floods, depleting groundwater, polluted rivers—we see them all as separate events, whereas they are different chapters of a single story. This story is not one of natural disaster, but of human forgetfulness. We have considered water merely a resource and abandoned the memory, culture, and empathy associated with it.

The idea of impounding water above ground by building dams is one of the greatest fallacies of modern development. This system is built against the very nature of nature. Water's nature is not to stagnate, but to flow—to absorb the earth's womb, and from there to nourish life. Ponds, tanks, wells, and stepwells were expressions of this nature. They didn't impound water, they conserved it. That's why they were time-tested and self-evident systems that supported human civilization for millions of years. Today, we consider dams a symbol of development, while ponds a sign of backwardness. This is a loss of vision. At one time, more



than 17,000 ponds were mentioned in Punjab. They were not just water sources, but centers of community life—living spaces connecting animals, fields, birds, and humans. Today, the situation is such that, let alone ponds, even proper records of Shamlat lands are not available in Punjab. When memory is erased, crisis becomes inevitable. Our ancestors knew that floods were not destruction, but opportunities. They knew that if floodwaters spread and flowed into ponds, tanks, and plains, they would revitalize the earth. Therefore, there were traditions of dredging ponds—some called it voluntary labor, others a social duty. Ponds were deep, their beds wide, and they absorbed maximum rainfall. This was a system that relied on understanding, not technology.

The irony is that the same hands that filled ponds, filled tanks, and clogged wells with garbage are now looking to the sky for water. When those who killed the ponds themselves begin to die, the blame is placed on nature, climate change, or our ancestors. The courage to self-criticize is becoming rare.

This crisis isn't just about water; it's also about education. I often wonder what it means to be properly educated. Is it just degrees, statistics, and technical jargon? No. To be properly educated means to be a Samavedi—to be one with the entire ecosystem provided by God. When humans begin to consider themselves separate from nature, their knowledge becomes cleverness, and cleverness ultimately

leads to destruction. Everything else is just a refined form of nonsense. The state of water management in the country can be gauged from the fact that, to date, no comprehensive, reliable, and comprehensive survey has been conducted to determine India's actual water reserves. We formulate plans, approve budgets, and make announcements—without knowing the basis. This is not policy, but conjecture; and development based on conjecture is bound to collapse sooner or later.

The picture of groundwater exploitation is even more horrifying. Nearly 1750,000 submersibles in Punjab and nearly 900,000 in Haryana are pumping water from the earth's womb. It's as if the earth is lying on a bed of arrows for submersibles. Without the boon of voluntary death, we are killing it a little bit every day. This is a silent tragedy, wrought at the expense of greenery, and one that will only worsen in the future. At the expense of the environment, it is like sitting on the very branch we are cutting. This sit-

uation is reminiscent of Kalidasa's fable—where foolishness is cloaked in wisdom. Wide roads, tall buildings, and shiny projects give us the illusion of progress, while the ground is drying up underneath. This is not development, but staged destruction. Cities are the most glaring example of this failure. Modern academic institutions and policymakers still lack a comprehensive vision, a national framework for drainage, water conservation, waste reduction, and waste utilization in Indian cities. Cities flood during the rainy season, and in the summer, they groan with thirst. This contradiction is evidence of a failure not of the system, but of the vision.

The state of rivers is the most poignant chapter of this story. The list of polluted rivers has become so long that reading it feels like looking at a list of the dead. Rivers that gave birth to civilizations are now victims of our negligence. We call them mothers, yet behave as if they are eternally tolerant. This cultural hypocrisy has reached its limits. Just a few decades ago, India's cities, villages, pastures, fields, forests, ponds, wells, and stepwells teemed with life. This is not an idealized past, but a fact of social memory. At that time, resources were limited, but understanding was broad. There was community, participation, and a sense of symbiosis with nature. Government development programs shattered this social character. Planning grew, but society shrank. Today, the need is to not leave water management solely to engineers and planners. This question is more ethical and cultural than technical. The revival of ponds, the restoration of johads, rainwater harvesting, and the protection of community lands—these are not discoveries of the future, but memories of the past. We need to remember, not go back. Water is not a commodity, but a relationship—between humans and nature. When this connection is broken, disasters arise. There is still time, but the warning is clear. If we don't mend our relationship with water, history will remember us as the generation that killed our planet with thirst.

DIGITAL SPEED, HUMAN DELAY

WHY ARTISTS AND SCHOLARS DESERVE TIMELY HONORARIUMS

GOLDEN DAYS VS. DIGITAL DAZE

POKKULURU SUBBA RAO,

Elders often reminisce about the "golden days," when life was slower but more humane. Today, dazzled by the immediacy of digital technology, many of us dismiss their nostalgia. After all, Aadhaar cards, PAN cards, e-certificates, and online applications arrive at lightning speed. Digitalization has indeed revolutionized access and efficiency. But beneath this sheen lies a troubling paradox: while documents and services are delivered instantly, the human touch in financial dealings—especially honorariums for artists and scholars—has eroded. The Old Practice: Instant Gratification, Human Respect. In earlier times, institutions like All India Radio (AIR) and Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) upheld a dignified practice. Orators, artists, and scholars were handed cheques immediately after their programmes. This gesture was not just financial—it was symbolic of respect, recognition, and empathy. For many from middle and lower-middle classes, this immediate payment ensured stability and dignity. The satisfaction of walking away with a tangible honorarium was a morale booster, affirming the value of their contribution. The Digital Shift: Speed Without Soul. Post-digitalization, the system has changed drastically: Honorariums are now deposited directly into bank accounts. Payments are often delayed for weeks or months. Artists and scholars are left in uncertainty, facing financial hardships. Ironically, the very technology that promises speed has introduced bureaucratic bottlenecks and emotional disconnect. The human touch—the handshake, the immediate recognition—has vanished. Personal Testimony: A Stark Reality. As someone who has delivered programmes both in the pre-digital and post-digital eras, I have lived this contrast. Earlier, the cheque in hand was a source of joy and relief. Today, digital transfers arrive late, leaving contributors anxious and financially strained. This indifference disproportionately affects those who rely on honorariums for sustenance—teachers, researchers, cultural performers, and spiritual speakers. What was once a system of empathy has become one of neglect. The Larger Problem: A Common Cry. This is not just my personal grievance—it is a collective problem. Across India, countless artists, scholars, and cultural workers face similar delays. Many depend on these honorariums for daily expenses. Delays erode trust in institutions that are otherwise revered. The absence of accountability undermines the dignity of contributors. Digitalization should not mean dehumanization. A Call for Reform: Restoring Empathy in Digital Systems.

GNTO eyes 10 lakh overnight stays by Indian tourists in Germany in 2026

German National Tourist Office (GNTO) India, the official representative office of the German National Tourist Board, expects to close 2025 with 9.6 lakh overnights into Germany by Indian tourists, GNTO Director of Marketing & Sales Office - India, Romit Theophilus.

NEW DELHI: Germany is targeting 10 lakh overnight stays by Indian tourists in the country in 2026, after narrowly missing the goal this year, according to a German National Tourist Office India official. German National Tourist Office (GNTO) India, the official representative office of the German National Tourist Board, expects to close 2025 with 9.6 lakh overnights into Germany by Indian tourists, GNTO Director of Marketing & Sales Office - India, Romit Theophilus.

"We want a growth of 10 per cent year on year. That's our growth projection till 2030 at least. Our goal is now to first reach the 1 million (overnights) and then double that to 2 million," he said when asked how Germany is looking at Indian tourist arrivals in the country going forward.

GNTO India was hoping to cross the 10 lakh milestone in 2025, but it did not happen due to a variety of factors, including visa issues and tourists choosing to travel to other countries. Asked if the target could be achieved in 2026, Theophilus said, "We will definitely cross 1 million... We are hoping to do (Indian) weddings (as well) in Germany in 2026." Already 60,000 stu-



dents are visiting Germany. Their families will also go visit them, and a lot more will happen on this front of "visiting friends and relatives", he said, adding, "So we know that we will hit this target quite closely next year." As for 2025, he said, "I see us at about 9.6 lakh, which is good, because it's still better than 2019. It is still showing a growth every year of about 5 to 7 per cent." In 2029, the number was at its peak with 9.5 lakh overnights before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

He said 9.5 lakh overnights into Germany represent about 3 lakh to 3.5 lakh people, and in 2024, 1.1 billion euros were spent by Indian tourists in Germany. Indian tourists are spending more time in Germany with the average length of stay exceeding nine nights. In the January-October period 2025, there have been

Wholesale volumes of 2-wheelers in India jump 19 pc at 1.8 million in Nov

NEW DELHI: Wholesale volumes of domestic two-wheelers grew by 19 per cent (year-over-year) in the month of November, reaching 1.8 million units, a report said on Friday.

The report from ICRA attributed the rise to Goods and Services Tax (GST) cuts and original equipment manufacturer-dealer offers that sustained showroom footfalls after the festive season, prompting dealers to replenish inventory and support wholesale dispatches.

The ratings firm forecasted two-wheeler volume growth of 6-9 per cent for FY26, supported by improved replacement demand following GST rate cuts, an expected recovery in urban consumption and healthy rural incomes driven by a normal monsoon.

Retail sales in November, however, eased by 3.1 per cent year-on-year, largely due to an early festive season that shifted demand into October's record-breaking sales period. Dealers continue to report steady customer footfall, buoyed by positive GST sentiment and strong demand from the ongoing wedding season, it added. Electric two-wheeler retail volumes dipped marginally by 1.4 per cent YoY, with electric two-wheeler retail volumes reaching 1.17,335 units in November. Monthly electric two-wheeler penetration within the overall



two-wheeler segment remained stable at 6-7 per cent through the first eight months of FY26, reflecting gradual adoption, it said. Export volumes continued to grow in double digits, rising 27.9 per cent year-on-year, while industry volumes were up 23.6 per cent during the April-November period, supported by a relatively low base in the corresponding period of FY25.

Inventory levels improved to 44-46 days by November 2025 from 60 days at the end of September, according to the Federation of Automobile Dealers Association (FADA) data, aided by stronger retail offtake, according to another recent report. Utility vehicles held a 67 per cent share of passenger vehicle volumes in November, down from 69 per cent in October, while mini, compact and super-compact segments revived after GST cuts. Continued supportive policy reforms and improved market sentiments would drive this growth trajectory well into 2026.

UltraTech Cement faces Rs 390 crore GST demand

Mumbai, Dec 21 : UltraTech Cement Limited has received a tax demand order from the Joint Commissioner of Central Goods and Services Tax and Central Excise, Patna, asking the company to pay alleged dues of about Rs 390 crore. Along with this, the company has also been asked to pay a penalty of a similar amount and interest of around Rs 28 lakh.

In a regulatory filing, UltraTech Cement Ltd said the demand relates to alleged short payment of Goods and Services Tax, improper use of input tax credit and other related issues.

"The Company has received an Order from the Joint Commissioner, Central Goods and



Services Tax & Central Excise, Patna," it said in its filing. The case covers the period from the financial year 2018-19 to 2022-23. The total penalty and interest together account

for nearly two-thirds of the company's profit of Rs 1,232 crore reported for the second quarter ended September 2025.

During the same quarter, the country's largest cement maker reported a strong performance, with revenue rising 20.3 per cent year-on-year to Rs 19,607 crore.

"Order in Original passed upholding tax liability of Rs 3,90,95,58,194 plus applicable interest on tax demand; additional interest Rs 27,68,289 and penalty of Rs 39,05,58,194," the company added.

However, the company said it is considering all legal options and plans to

challenge the order. UltraTech added that it does not expect the tax demand to have any impact on its operations or financial position.

The company is scheduled to announce its earnings for the ongoing third quarter on January 24, 2026.

"The Company is reviewing the Order, considering all legal options, and accordingly would be contesting the demand, and does not expect the said Order to have any operational/financial impact on the Company," it added.

Meanwhile, UltraTech Cement shares have remained largely flat so far this year. On the latest trading day, the stock closed at Rs 11,497, up Rs 36 or 0.31 per cent.

Business

KOCHI
MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2025

5

IIP data, rupee movement and global cues likely to drive Sensex, Nifty next week



MUMBAI: Indian equity markets ended Friday's session on a strong note, snapping a four-day losing streak, but investors are likely to shift their attention to key domestic data, currency movements and global developments that could set the tone for trading in the coming week. On December 19, both benchmark indices closed with solid gains, supported by a steady rupee, positive global cues and a Bank of Japan policy decision that was in line with market expectations.

The Sensex climbed 448 points, or 0.53 per cent, to close at 84,929.36, while the Nifty rose 151 points, or 0.58 per cent, to settle at 25,966.40.

Commenting on Nifty outlook, experts said that "on the upside, immediate resistance is placed at 26,000, followed by 26,200 and 26,400."

They added that on the down-

side, support is seen at 25,900 and then 25,800, with a break below 25,700 likely to attract additional selling pressure.

"Given the current market structure, a buy-on-dips strategy remains appropriate, though traders should maintain strict stop-losses due to prevailing volatility," market watchers stated. Broader markets outper-

formed the benchmarks, with the BSE Midcap index rising 1.26 per cent and the Smallcap index gaining 1.25 per cent.

Looking ahead, investors will be closely tracking India's industrial output data. The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) for November 2025 is scheduled to be released on December 29 by the Ministry of

Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Policy developments and trade-related news will also remain in focus. The government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, pushed through major reforms in the recent winter session of Parliament to strengthen the economy amid rising global trade pressures.

Key legislative changes include allowing private sector participation in the nuclear industry, permitting 100 per cent foreign ownership in insurance companies, and proposing a single consolidated code for securities market regulations. These steps are aimed at improving the investment climate and could influence market sentiment in the days ahead. The movement of the Indian rupee is another important factor for the market.

India-China trade deficit to breach \$106 bn this year



NEW DELHI (TSIT): India's trade deficit with China is expected to reach \$106 billion in 2025 as imports are rising faster than the country's exports to the neighbouring country, think tank GTRI said on Friday. It said the country's exports to China fell from \$23 billion in 2021 to \$15.2 billion in 2022, stayed low at \$14.5 billion in 2023, and then edged up to \$15.1 billion in 2024.

In 2025, exports are estimated to improve to \$17.5 billion, still well below earlier levels, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said in its report.

"This has pushed India's trade deficit (difference between imports and exports) with China from \$64.7 billion in 2021 to \$94.5 billion in 2024, and an expected \$106 billion in 2025," GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said.

On December 16, in a written reply to the Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasada has said the deficit is mainly due to imports of raw materials, intermediate goods and capital goods, like auto components, electronic parts and assemblies, mobile phone parts, machinery and its parts, Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients, which are

used for making finished products which are also exported out of India.

"An Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) has been constituted to consider the trends with respect to imports and exports and recommend corrective action wherever required," he has said. According to the GTRI, nearly 80 per cent of India's imports from China are concentrated in just four product groups - electronics, machinery, organic chemicals and plastics.

Plastics imports during the period stood at \$6.3 billion, including \$871 million of PVC resin, while steel and steel products amounted to \$4.6 billion and medical and scientific equipment added \$2.5 billion.

"Together, these figures show India's import bill from China is anchored in electronics, machinery, chemicals and materials that are difficult to substitute quickly, explaining the persistence of a large bilateral trade deficit despite efforts to diversify supply chains," he added.

In November, India's exports to China rose by 90 per cent to \$2.2 billion. During April-November, the exports were up 33 per cent to \$12.2 billion.

Elon Musk's net worth soars to nearly \$750 billion



NEW DELHI: Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk's net worth rose to nearly \$750 billion after a US court reinstated Tesla stock options worth \$139 billion. According to Forbes' billionaires index, this development has taken Musk closer to become the world's first trillionaire.

Earlier, the Delaware Supreme Court in the US restored Musk's 2018 pay package from Tesla, overturning a lower-court decision that had struck it down as "unfathomable". The ruling reverses a 2024 decision that rescinded the package and found that total rescission "leaves Musk uncompensated for his time and efforts over a period of six years," the 49-page ruling said, according to reports.

The 2018 package was worth about \$139 billion based on Tesla's closing stock price on Friday, and if Musk exercises all stock options from the pay package, his stake would rise from about 12.4 per cent to 18.1 per cent of an expanded share base.

The 2018 pay deal provided Musk options to buy about 304 million shares at a discounted price if Tesla met specific milestones. Tesla's board had warned that Musk, the world's richest person, leading the SpaceX rocket venture, could

leave the electric car company if his pay was disrupted.

Earlier this week, the Tesla CEO became the first person ever to surpass \$600 billion in net worth over reports that SpaceX was likely to go public. With his company SpaceX reportedly launching a tender offer, valuing the firm at \$800 billion, Musk's net worth has surged by \$168 billion to an estimated \$677 billion. SpaceX is aiming for an initial public offering (IPO) next year that may value the firm at around \$1.5 trillion. Also, Musk's 12 per cent stake in electric vehicle maker Tesla is worth \$197 billion, excluding stock options. Moreover, Musk's xAI Holdings is reportedly in talks to raise new funding at around \$230 billion valuation. Musk owns a 53 per cent stake in xAI Holdings, worth \$60 billion.

Railway fares to go up from Dec 26, to yield Rs 600 crore extra revenue



New Delhi, Dec 21 : Indian Railways on Sunday announced a revision in fares with effect from December 26 this year, aimed at a Rs 600 crore increase in revenue.

Under the new ticket pricing structure, passengers will pay an extra 1 paisa per km on journeys beyond 215 km in Ordinary Class, and 2 paisa per km for Mail and Express non-AC and AC classes. Passengers on a 500 km non-AC journey will pay an additional Rs 10 for their journey. There is no increase in ticket prices for passengers travelling on routes shorter than 215 km.

Fares have also not been raised for suburban and monthly season tickets to ensure travel remains affordable for low and middle-income families.

"Over the past decade, the Indian Railways has significantly expanded its network and operations, reaching even the remotest corners of the country. To support this higher level of operations and

along with a small amount of rationalisation of passenger fares.

"Due to these efforts on safety and improved operations, railways have been able to improve safety substantially. India has become the second-largest cargo-carrying railway in the world," the statement added.

The freight rates have not been revised since 2018 despite an increase in input costs over the years, with the railways relying on an increase in cargo movement to raise earnings. The recent successful mobilisation of more than 12,000 trains during the festival season is also an example of improved operational efficiency, the statement added. The ministry also noted that construction works on the flagship high-speed bullet train project have gathered momentum in Maharashtra, with 100 per cent land acquisition already completed.

Indian visa application centre suspended indefinitely in Bangladesh's Chattogram

DHAKA: India on Sunday suspended visa operations at its mission in Bangladeshi port city of Chattogram until further notice, according to media reports.

The move comes in the wake of a fresh wave of unrest witnessed in the country following the death of prominent youth leader Sharif Osman Hadi. His death triggered attacks and vandalism across Bangladesh, including stone-hurling at the Assistant Indian High Commissioner's residence in Chattogram on Thursday.

Hadi, a prominent leader of the student-led protests last year that led to the ouster of the prime minister Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government, was a candidate for the scheduled February 12 general elections. He was shot in the head on December 12 by masked gunmen at an election campaign in central Dhaka's Bijoynagar area and died while undergoing treatment in Singapore on December 18. "Due to the recent security incident at Assistant High



Commission of India (AHCI) Chittagong, Indian visa operations at IVAC Chittagong (Chattogram) will remain suspended from 21/12/2025 until further notice," the Indian Visa Application Centre (IVAC) said in a brief statement.

The announcement for reopening the visa centre will be made after reviewing the situation, the statement added. The decision came into effect on Sunday. There are five IVAC facilities across Bangladesh at Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, Chattogram and Sylhet. An IVAC official told PTI that the other four offices have remained operational as of Sunday.

India on Thursday

resumed operations at its visa application centre in Dhaka, a day after closing it over escalated security concerns, but closed for a brief period two other identical facilities in Rajshahi and Khulna as anti-India protesters tried to march towards the Indian missions there. On Saturday, security was strengthened at the Indian Assistant High Commission office and the visa application centre in Bangladesh's Sylhet city.

The enhanced security measures were put in place to ensure that "no third party can exploit the situation," Additional Deputy Commissioner (Media) of the Sylhet Metropolitan Police Saiful Islam was quoted as saying by The Dhaka

Tribune newspaper on Saturday. Hadi, 32, was laid to rest on Saturday amid extra-tight security beside the grave of National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam near the Dhaka University mosque. Tens of thousands of people attended the funeral prayers, and ahead of the ritual, chanted anti-India slogans like "Delhi or Dhaka - Dhaka, Dhaka" and "brother Hadi's blood will not be allowed to go in vain."

Earlier on December 17, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) summoned Bangladesh envoy Riaz Hamidullah and conveyed its strong concern over certain extremist elements announcing plans to create a security situation around the Indian mission in Dhaka. "We expect the interim government to ensure the safety of Missions and Posts in Bangladesh in keeping with its diplomatic obligations," it said. The envoy was apprised of India's strong concerns about the deteriorating security environment in Bangladesh, it added.

9 killed, 10 wounded in South African pub shooting

JOHANNESBURG: Nine people have died, and at least 10 others were wounded after a group of gunmen carried out a shooting at a South African pub during the early hours of Sunday, authorities said. The incident occurred just before 1 am in the township of Bekkersdal, which is located 46 kilometres (28 miles) west of Johannesburg. It is the second mass shooting to happen in South Africa in three weeks. About 12 unknown suspects in a white mini-bus and a silver sedan opened fire at pub patrons at KwaNoxolo tavern, in the Tambo section of Bekkersdal and continued to shoot randomly as they fled the scene, according to police. "Some victims were randomly shot in the streets by unknown gunmen," the police said of the incident that left nine people dead and 10 hospitalised. Provincial police commissioner Maj. Gen. Fred Kekana told SABC television that one of the deceased was a driver from an online car-hailing service who had been outside the pub. A manhunt for the suspects in the multiple gunshot event has been initiated by Gauteng Serious and Violent Crime Investigations in collaboration with the Crime Detection Tracing Unit. There have been several mass shootings at bars — sometimes called shebeens or taverns in South Africa — in recent years, including a mass shooting carried out by multiple suspects in an unlicensed bar near the South African capital that left at least 12 people dead and 13 injured earlier this month.

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan urged his supporters to gear up for nationwide protests following a 17-year jail term handed to him and wife Bushra Bibi in a corruption case. Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi were sentenced to 17 years in jail each by a court on Saturday in the Toshakhana 2 corruption case.

Khan, 73, who has been in jail since August 2023, faces multiple cases launched against him since his ouster from power in April 2022. The Toshakhana 2 case involves alleged fraud in state gifts that the former first couple received from the Saudi government in 2021.

In a conversation with his lawyers in Adiala Jail after the "military-style trial decision" Khan urged his supporters to stand up in protest after the decision, according to a midnight statement posted on Khan's X account.

It was not known who posted his conversation on his personal account as Khan has no access to his social media handles in jail. "I have sent a message to (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister) Sohail Afridi to prepare for the street movement. The entire nation will have to rise for its rights," he said, and added: "Struggle is worship, and I am even ready to embrace martyrdom for the true freedom of Pakistan!"

He argued that the latest sentence did not come as a surprise and asked his legal team to move the high court against the decision.

"Like the baseless decisions and sentences of the last three years, the Toshakhana-II decision is also nothing new to me. This decision was given in haste by the judge without any evidence and without fulfilling the legal requirements," he said, adding that his legal team was "not even heard". He also said that it was inevitable for the Insaf Lawyers Forum, a group of lawyers to his Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, and the legal community to come forward for justice. "For the



Imran Khan calls for nationwide protests after 17-year jail sentence

struggle to establish the supremacy of law and restore the Constitution, it is essential for the Justice Lawyers Forum and the lawyers' front to come to the forefront. Only the system of justice can protect the people. Without it, neither economic progress nor moral development is possible," he said. He also targeted the army's leadership for his detention, but in the same vein said that the "army is mine", showing his effort to win its support while attacking the top leadership of the armed forces.

Khan also alleged that he and wife were being "continuously subjected to mental torture by keeping us in solitary confinement".

"There is a ban on our books, TV, and meetings. Every prisoner in jail can watch TV, but even watching TV has been banned for me and Bushra," he alleged.

Khan has been incarcerated since August 2023 in case launched after he was removed from office though a no-trust vote in April 2022.

The Toshakhana is a department under the Cabinet Division that stores gifts given to rulers and government officials by heads of other governments and foreign dignitaries. Once deposited, the gifts can be bought back following proper rules and procedures. In October 2024, Bushra was granted bail by the Islamabad High Court in this case, and a month later, Khan was also granted bail in the same case. They were indicted in December last year.

Jordan says its air force joined US strikes on Islamic State in Syria

DAMASCUS: Jordan confirmed Saturday that its air force took part in strikes launched by the United States on Islamic State group targets in Syria in retaliation for the killing of three US citizens earlier this month.

The US launched military strikes Friday on multiple sites in Syria to "eliminate" Islamic State group fighters and weapons in retaliation for an attack by a Syrian gunman that killed two US



troops and an American civilian interpreter almost a week earlier. The Jordanian military said in a statement that its air force "participated in precise airstrikes...

targeting several ISIS positions in southern Syria," using a different abbreviation for the Islamic State group. Jordan is one of 90 countries making up the

global coalition against IS, which Syria recently joined.

The US military did not say how many had been killed in Friday's strikes. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based war monitor, reported that at least five people were killed, including the leader and members of an IS cell.

The Jordanian statement said the operation aimed "to prevent extremist groups from exploiting these areas as launching pads to threaten

the security of Syria's neighbors and the wider region, especially after ISIS regrouped and rebuilt its capabilities in southern Syria."

US Central Command, which oversees the region, said in a statement that its forces "struck more than 70 targets at multiple locations across central Syria with fighter jets, attack helicopters, and artillery," with the Jordanian air force supporting with fighter aircraft.

Instability is the sign of an emerging nonpolar world

There has been a tendency to look at international relations through the prism of polarity. For hundreds of years, polarity has provided observers of international affairs with a valuable tool for understanding the interactions among states and other international actors by mapping the distribution of power within the system relative to the most powerful. A polar-based world is one that, objectively or subjectively, provides foreign policy decision-makers with a sense of direction on whether to collaborate with it or oppose it.

Scholars have identified three main types of polar-based systems that have existed in history: unipolarity, bipolarity, and multipolarity. All these systems emerged at different points in the past two centuries. However, despite their differences, they all assume that the basic building block of international relations is the nation-state, one of whose main characteristics is sovereignty complemented by that of independence.

Sovereignty meant that the source of power within the state to govern and legislate originates from within the country, and that no external force has the legitimate right to interfere. Yet, throughout the centuries, the world has "shrunk" in terms of accessibility, the intensity and speed of interactions, and the rise of crucial issues that transcend political borders, such as global trade, cyberspace, global climate change, crime, and human trafficking. Increasingly, countries have

become interconnected to ensure both their security and prosperity, securing, for instance, energy security and other natural resources, as well as access to markets, technology, and knowledge.

The tension between maintaining sovereignty and independence in a world of interdependency has increased, as much of what affects us does not necessarily occur within the political borders of where we reside and must therefore be regulated through diplomacy and international law.

In this web of interactions, the notion of polarity focuses on the main sources of international power at any given historical period, with most states either gravitating toward or opposing them. The underlying assumption of viewing international politics in terms of polarity is that each system is distinguished by the number of major powers that dominate international politics at the time, which affects stability and discord. To begin with, it was the 19th century's "balance of power" system, which was a precursor to the later multipolar system, where major European powers dominated international affairs through canceling out each other and thus preventing a single power or a combination of powers from achieving hegemony. When this system collapsed, the result was the First World War, which, until the second instalment of collective madness that ended with the Second World War, the world was more characterized by disorder and anarchy than by any clear sources of power able to establish and main-

tain stability. Consequently, the breakout of the worst, to date, world war between 1939 and 1945 was inevitable. In the aftermath of the Second World War, an international system emerged that paradoxically aimed to suggest an alternative to the one that had led to that cataclysm, prevent future such occurrences through cooperation, and by establishing the UN and its agencies, and by codifying the conduct of international behaviour that enshrines adhering to values of finding peaceful solutions. But diametrically opposite to this very much welcomed evolution also emerged an adversarial bipolar system which was characterized by two rigid blocs, one led by the



It looks as though the post-Second World War system is breaking down institutionally.

US and the other by the Soviet Union, with the threat of nuclear annihilation.

It looks as though the post-Second World War system is breaking down institutionally.

The divide was typified by two diametrically opposing ideologies, capitalism and communism, to which members of the bloc had to sympathize with, if not completely adhere to. It was surprisingly stable, where the main protagonists, the US and the Soviet Union, never confronted each other directly. When this system came to an end with the collapse of the Soviet

Union, it was replaced by a unipolar system dominated by the US, backed up by its military and economic might, that cultivated the idea that the world had entered an era dominated by the liberal-democratic model with war confined either to history, or to the periphery of world affairs. This false assumption did not last for long, and major powers remained very much involved in conflict, such as the first Gulf War in 1991, the conflict in Bosnia in the following year and the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Moreover, other centers of power were quickly on the rise, such as China, the EU, the BRICS, along with Russia's attempts to reassert itself.

Moreover, in a world in which economically sustainable development requires the free movement of people, goods, and finance, and in which the internet revolution is transforming the idea of physical borders, the attitude toward them needs to be redefined entirely, with the traditional concept of polarity challenged as well.

In an increasingly anarchic, and arguably chaotic state of global international affairs in which oneupmanship has taken over cooperation, where trade wars are becoming prevalent, where the UN is failing to fulfil its task of preventing wars or at least bringing them to a quick halt, and the major powers advance their interests first without taking into account how it might affect their allies, does polarity mean anything anymore?

It increasingly looks as though the post-Second

World War system is breaking down institutionally, and its liberal peace and rights values and principles are under severe strain. A major cause is that many interactions within the current international system are ad hoc. This takes the notion of realpolitik to the extreme, ignoring ideological and moral considerations, while modern economies and militaries rely heavily on technology sharing and sustaining alliances that subscribe to a similar worldview and objectives; in other words, sharing a "polar" position is crucial.

In the idealistic vision of the founders of the UN, it was this encompassing organization that would be the pole that the entire web of international affairs should gravitate toward, subscribing to a universal code of behaviour that eliminated wars and other forms of political violence, and thereby ensuring the sovereignty of all countries and the rights of individuals within them. But now this vision lies in tatters. Instead, a world with no clear poles has emerged, the outcome of which is not necessarily more equitable power for medium and small countries, but one in which alliances and enmities are based mainly on utility and hence tend to be limited in time and scope. This, in turn, produces more uncertainty, insecurity, and instability. This emerging nonpolar world heralds a period in which the danger of conflict is heightened, and domestic upheaval is also on the rise, which is where the current international system finds itself.



U-19 Asia Cup: India looks to extend dominance against Pakistan in final

DUBAI: Eyeing a record-extending 12th title, a dominant India will look to underline its supremacy over arch-rival Pakistan when they clash in the Under-19 Asia Cup final at the ICC Academy, here on Sunday.

With the bat, India has been nothing short of spectacular, posting two 400-plus totals. The 50-over tournament has seen the rise of exciting young talents, such as 17-year-old wicketkeeper-batter Abhigyan Kundu.

If teenage prodigy Vaibhav Suryavanshi set the tone in the opener against UAE with a breathtaking 95-ball 171 as India piled up 433/6, Kundu etched his name into the record books against



The Ayush Mhatre-led Indian colts have been a class apart, winning all their Group A matches to finish on top ahead of Pakistan, which suffered its only group-stage defeat against India, a 90-run loss last Sunday.

India carried that momentum into the semifinals on Friday, brushing aside Sri Lanka by eight wickets. Pakistan, on the other hand, reached the final by knocking

Malaysia. The left-hander smashed an unbeaten 125-ball 209, becoming the first Indian to score a double century in Youth ODIs. The duo will look for yet another good

show against a disciplined Pakistan bowling attack.

Even when the top-order has faltered, India's middle-order has risen to the occasion. Hyderabad's Aaron George has been the glue, registering three successive half-centuries, often batting through the critical middle overs while maintaining a strike rate of 100-plus.

He has been ably supported by Vihann Malhotra, who offers a left-handed option and is fresh from a 61 not out against Sri Lanka. Adding depth is all-rounder Kanishk Chouhan, who has reimagined the finisher's role with a strike rate of over 127, while making timely breaks

throughs with the ball.

Chouhan has picked up six wickets in four matches, including a telling 3/33 against Pakistan in the group stage. With the ball, India was led by pacer Deepesh Devendran, the joint-highest wicket-taker in the tournament with 11 scalps, alongside Pakistan's Abdul Subhan. Deepesh has thrived by bowling probing lines at 130 kmph-plus with the new ball. His standout spell of 5/22 against Malaysia showcased his threat, while against Pakistan he dismantled the top-order, removing three batters in successive overs, including tournament top-scorer Sameer Minhas.

India overpowered by Minhas' big hundred and pacers as Pakistan clinch U19 Asia Cup



DUBAI: India faltered against the big-hitting Sameer Minhas and the extra zip of pacers, suffering a massive 191-run defeat against Pakistan in a one-sided 50-over Under-19 Asia Cup final, here Sunday. Pakistan lifted their second U19 Asia Cup, and as it is the norm now, there was no formal greetings between the players of two teams.

Once Pakistan posted a mammoth 347 for eight, riding on Minhas' 172 (113b, 17x4, 9x6) they needed a lion-hearted chase to clinch a ninth title in the tournament. But the tall Pakistan pace troika — Ali Reza (4/42), Mohammad Sayyam (2/38) and Abdul Subhan (2/29) — hurried their top-order with consistent hard-lengths as India folded for 156 in 26.2 overs. However, India's chase began on an explosive note despite losing Ayush Mhatre early. Vaibhav Suryavanshi hammered Raza for two sixes and a four to take

49 for three in the space of two balls, and it was just the beginning. Vedant Trivedi and Kanishk Chouhan too fell to snorters as Pakistan pacers made the flat ICC Academy pitch look like the Road of Bones.

India's last hope — even if feeble — was the presence of Abhigyan Kundu, and a drop on 12 off Subhan hinted at a possible shifting of fortune.

But all such hopes were trampled when Kundu's upper cut two balls later after his reprieve found Niqab Shafiq at third man. Earlier, Pakistan opener Minhas struck a brilliant century as Pakistan motored to a humongous total.

Minhas, the younger brother of Pakistan T20 player Arifat, went after every Indian bowler but was especially harsh on new-ball bowlers Kishan Singh and Deepesh Devendran.

Minhas brought up his century off 71 balls with a four in the 29th over off Devendran. This was Minhas' second hundred in the competition having cracked an unbeaten 177 against Malaysia in the opening group match. Minhas' six in the 28th over, where he used his feet to launch a Mhatre delivery high up in the air to deep mid-wicket, had class written all over it. The 19-year-old looked set for a double century but he was tricked by a slower delivery from Devendran (3/83) to be caught at mid-on. It was smooth sailing for Pakistan after Hamza Zahoor (18) departed early.

21 runs in the first over. Aaron George too began brightly, caressing Sayyam for three fours in a row in the fourth over as India raced off the block at 10 runs an over.

But the game's course changed in the last ball of the fourth over. George was jostled into a pull by Sayyam, and all he could do was to sky the short-pitched ball to Mohammad Shayan inside the circle.

In the first ball of the fifth over, India suffered a body blow with the dismissal of Suryavanshi. The left-hander went for a full-blooded pick-up shot off Raza, but the good-length ball, which had extra bounce on it, took the edge of the opener's bat and nestled in the gloves of stumper Zahoor Hamza. Raza and Pakistan fielders celebrated wildly, and a few words were exchanged before Suryavanshi trudged off dejected. India slipped from 49 for 1 to



LALIGA: Mbappe equals Ronaldo record as Madrid beat Sevilla 2-0

MADRID (TSIT): Kylian Mbappe marked his 27th birthday by equaling a Real Madrid club record, scoring his 59th goal of the calendar year as the Spanish giants beat 10-man Sevilla 2-0 on Saturday in its final match of 2025.

The France forward converted a late penalty to seal the win and match the tally set by Cristiano Ronaldo in 2013, ensuring the milestone did not slip away after threatening to do so

for much of the contest. Mbappe calmly dispatched the spot kick with four minutes remaining after Juanlu Sanchez fouled Rodrygo inside the area.

celebrated with a restrained version of

Ronaldo's iconic leap-and-thrust celebration before blowing a kiss towards the television cameras. The former Paris Saint-Germain striker has now scored 29 goals this season for Madrid, including a league-leading 18 in La

Liga. "It's incredible, in my first full year, to do what Cristiano did," Mbappe said. "He's my idol and the best player in the history of Real Madrid. My celebration was for him."

Jude Bellingham had earlier given Madrid the lead with a header in the 38th minute, while Sevilla's task was made harder when defender Marca was sent off for a second booking with 20 minutes to play. Sevilla coach Matias Almeyda was

also dismissed during the interval after protesting to officials. the numerical advantage, Madrid were far from comfortable. Sevilla created several clear chances, particularly in the second half, with veteran forward Alexis Sanchez and right-back Juanlu among their standout performers. Thibaut Courtois was forced into a series of key saves to deny Sanchez, Isaac Romero and Alfonso Gonzalez as the visitors threatened an equaliser.

ASHES:

Nathan Lyon ruled out of remainder of Adelaide Test with hamstring injury



Adelaide, Dec 21 : Australia spinner Nathan Lyon has been ruled out of the remainder of the third Ashes Test due to hamstring injury. The injury also puts him in doubt in the remainder of the series.

Lyon, 38, grabbed his right hamstring after diving to save a ball at fine leg, but he came up cautiously and signaled to the dressing room almost after.

After a quick conversation with Marnus Labuschagne,

who gave him a pat on the back, he left the field of play at fine leg and limped to the changing rooms. Before the lunch break on the fifth day, he was observed on crutches to leave Adelaide Oval for an

injury scan.

He would no longer participate in the game, according to a Cricket Australia representative. This is the not the first time Lyon has suffered injury like this. While chasing a ball on the field at Lord's in the second Test of the 2023 Ashes, Lyon sustained a right calf injury that ended the series for him.

Lyon had taken five crucial wickets during the third Test, including three in the second innings. There will be an intriguing selection debate regarding Australia's specialist spinner if Lyon is unable to play in the fourth Test in Melbourne.

Australia's No. 2 Test spinner, left-arm spinner Matthew Kuhnemann is on the team's contract list and has travelled to the West Indies. However, in spin-friendly conditions abroad, he serves as Lyon's complementary second spinner. In recent years, offspin has outperformed left-arm orthodox in Australian conditions. Due to injuries and Australia's white-ball duty, Kuhnemann has only participated in two Sheffield Shield games this season, taking four wickets at 36. Veteran off spinner, Todd Murphy who has played seven Test including three Ashes is also in line to replace Lyon.

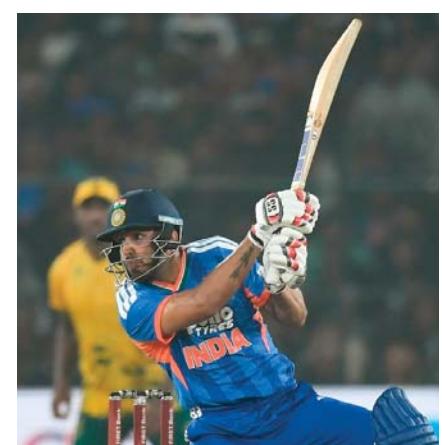
T20 WC 2026: 'Dropping Gill and Jitesh Sharma, I didn't see it coming', says Dinesh Karthik

New Delhi, Dec 20 : Former India cricketer Dinesh Karthik was shocked after the exclusion of India's Test and ODI captain Shubman Gill from the T20 World Cup 2026 and the New Zealand T20I series. Along with Gill, Karthik also expressed his disappointment at the removal of Jitesh Sharma from the squad.

The squad was announced by BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia, captain Suryakumar Yadav and chief selector Ajit Agarkar on Saturday, and Axar Patel was named as the vice-captain. Ishan Kishan makes a remarkable comeback after showcasing explosive form while leading Jharkhand to victory in the recent Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. Rinku Singh also returns to the T20I squad after missing out on the 3-1 series win in South Africa.

Karthik admitted surprise at Shubman Gill's exclusion and expressed disappointment over Jitesh Sharma missing out, terming both as shocking omissions from the squad.

"The big news of the day: India World Cup T20 squad is announced and guess what? Shubman Gill, the current vice captain of the T20 team, incumbent opener has been dropped. Not just from the XI but from the squad. They wanted to bring in an extra opener and they brought in Ishan Kishan and dropped Jitesh Sharma as well. And instead of Jitesh Sharma, it's gonna be Rinku Singh. That is huge news. Dropping Shubman Gill and Jitesh Sharma. I didn't see it coming. Just tells you there's a little bit of clarity lacking. They have backed Shubman Gill for so long and come the day they pick the squad, they have let him go," Karthik said on Instagram. Karthik believes India head into the upcoming T20 World Cup with a formidable squad on paper, built around match-winners across all skillsets. Karthik said India possess the best opener in Abhishek Sharma, the best spinner in Varun Chakaravarthy, the world's premier allrounder in Hardik Pandya and arguably the best fast bowler ever in Jasprit Bumrah, which ensures a strong playing XI even before final combinations are decided. However, he pointed out a couple of potential vulnerabilities, highlighting that for the first time India will go into a T20 World Cup without the experience of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, while also flagging concerns over Suryakumar Yadav's recent form, though he backed him to turn it into a strength once he regains touch.



"The big news of the day: India World Cup T20 squad is announced and guess what? Shubman Gill, the current vice captain of the T20 team, incumbent opener has been dropped. Not just from the XI but from the squad. They wanted to bring in an extra opener and they brought in Ishan Kishan and dropped Jitesh Sharma as well. And instead of Jitesh Sharma, it's gonna be Rinku Singh. That is huge news. Dropping Shubman Gill and Jitesh Sharma. I didn't see it coming. Just tells you there's a little bit of clarity lacking. They have backed Shubman Gill for so

Natural Star Nani unveils gripping mystical trailer of Aadi Shambhala

Aadi Saikumar's mystical thriller Shambhala: A Mystical World, directed by Ugandhar Muni and produced by Rajasekhar Annabhimoju and Mahidhar Reddy under the Shining Pictures banner, is gearing up for a grand theatrical release on December 25th, perfectly timed for Christmas. With every promotional asset- including the teaser, trailer, and songs- creating a strong buzz, expectations around the film have steadily soared. Adding further excitement, Natural Star Nani today unveiled the brand-new Aadi Shambhala Mystical Trailer.

After launching the trailer, Nani said,

Congratulations to Team Shambhala. I just watched the trailer, and this is exactly the kind of film audiences have been waiting for. Choosing an English song for this kind of genre was a very great move. I've known Aadi for a long time - he's a terrific actor and dancer. I think Shambhala is the film that will take Aadi to stardom. Shambhala's success should be father's success, son's success, and entire team's success. The trailer looks very promising."

The trailer opens on a striking visual of a comet crashing into Earth near a deeply religious village, resulting in a massive explosion. From this extraordinary impact emerges a mysterious stone said to possess



control over the five natural elements. Enter a geo-scientist, a firm non-believer in divine forces, who arrives to investigate the inexplicable

events unfolding in the village. What follows is an intriguing and intense clash between science and Shastra, faith and logic, setting the stage for a gripping narrative. This newly released trailer is distinctly different from the earlier one, offering a fresh and

immersive experience through its storytelling and presentation. Director Ugandhar Muni showcases impressive command over the narrative, skillfully blending devotional and mystical elements while maintaining suspense and intrigue throughout.

Aadi Saikumar delivers one of his finest performances to date. Sporting a striking makeover, the promising actor completely immerses himself in the role, bringing depth and conviction to his character. Archana Iyer plays the female lead opposite Aadi, while Swasika, Ravi Varma, Madhunandan, and Siva Karthik lend solid support in key roles. Art director JK Murthy deserves special

appreciation for authentically creating the mystical world of Shambhala, while cinematographer Praveen K Bangari elevates the film with stunning visuals. However, it is Sricharan Pakala's powerful background score that truly amplifies the narrative. His unique and pulsating music enhances the suspense, making the trailer both gripping and atmospheric. The film's production values are visibly rich and robust, reflecting the makers' strong commitment to quality. Overall, the mystical trailer has significantly raised the bar and heightened anticipation, positioning Shambhala: A Mystical World as one of the most intriguing releases of the season.

Natural Star Nani unveils mystical trailer of Aadi Shambhala



Natural Star Nani has unveiled the gripping new mystical trailer of Aadi Shambhala, creating strong buzz among movie lovers and fans. The trailer offers a glimpse into a visually rich and spiritually charged world, blending mysticism, mythology, and intense drama. With striking visuals and a

powerful background score, the promo hints at a narrative rooted in ancient beliefs and unexplored dimensions. The trailer launch by Nani has added to the film's visibility, with audiences praising its unique concept and atmospheric presentation. Aadi Shambhala appears to promise an immersive cinematic experience,

focusing on mystery, faith, and inner transformation. The makers have carefully revealed just enough to spark curiosity while keeping the core storyline under wraps. Early reactions on social media suggest that the trailer has successfully connected with viewers, who are intrigued by its symbolism and tone. The film is expected to appeal to audiences looking for content-driven cinema with a mystical edge. With growing anticipation following the trailer release, Aadi Shambhala is now keenly awaited as one of the upcoming films exploring spiritual and mystical themes on a grand scale.

MLA Naveen Yadav launches Apni Haddse title song

Jubilee Hills MLA Naveen Yadav officially launched the melodious title song video Apni Haddse at Prasad Labs in Hyderabad. The event was held in the presence of film celebrities, political leaders, and members of the film's crew, adding glamour and significance to the occasion. Speaking as the chief guest, MLA Naveen Yadav expressed his happiness in encouraging young talent and appreciated the effort of producing a Hindi song and film project in the South. He described it as a positive development for the industry and extended his best wishes to the team for the success of both the movie and the music video. The music video stars Mohammed Nazeer in the lead role alongside Rifat Razur, whose on-screen chemistry has emerged as a key highlight. Renowned Bollywood playback singer Abhay Jodhpurkar, known for popular songs like Priyathama from Majili, has lent his soulful voice to the track, enhancing its emotional appeal. The song is backed by rich visuals and high production values. Lead actor Mohammed Nazeer

thanked MLA Naveen Yadav and all the guests for their support, stating that it was a proud moment to have Abhay

Jodhpurkar sing for Apni Haddse. He expressed confidence that the audience would warmly receive the song.



Eesha will be a new kind of horror thriller: Bunny Vaas, Vamsi Nandipati

Producers Bunny Vaas and Vamsi Nandipati have expressed strong confidence in their upcoming horror thriller Eesha, stating that the film will meet audience expectations and offer a fresh experience in the genre. Backed by Vamsi Nandipati Entertainments and Bunny Vaas Works, Eesha is set for a theatrical release on December 25. Starring Akhil Raj and Trigun in lead roles, with Hebah Patel as the female lead, the film also features Siri Hanumanthu, Babloo, and Prithviraj in key roles. Produced by Hem Venkateswara Rao under HVR Productions and presented by K. L. Damodar Prasad, the film is directed by

Srinivas Manne. The recently released trailer has received an unexpectedly strong and positive response. Interacting with the media, Bunny Vaas said the project was taken up purely due to belief in its content and not out of obligation. Vamsi Nandipati described Eesha as a gripping horror-thriller that hooks viewers within the first ten minutes, with a unique and impactful final act. The producers emphasized that Eesha is not a routine horror film and will appeal to all sections of the audience, delivering a strong message in the climax. Confident about the theatrical experience, they assured that the film will not disappoint and promised premiere shows ahead of release.



'Champion' promises powerful action and deep human emotions: Roshan

Swarna Cinemas' upcoming action drama Champion has generated strong buzz with its striking promotional content. Starring Roshan and Anaswara Rajan in the lead roles, the film is directed by Pradeep Advaitham and presented by Zee Studios in association with Anandi Art Creations and Concept Films.

With chartbuster songs composed by Mickey J. Meyer, Champion is slated for a worldwide theatrical release on December 25. Speaking at a press conference, hero Roshan expressed confidence that the film's emotional core would resonate strongly with audiences. "The action drama and war backdrop in Champion will be amazing. But more than that, the human emotions in the story will connect with everyone," he said.

Roshan revealed that the film is set in 1948, during the period after

India's Independence and before Hyderabad's integration. Inspired by historical events in the Byron Pally region, the film blends real incidents with a fictional character named Michael. He added that extensive research and workshops were con-

ducted to authentically portray the era, including language, lifestyle, and emotions. The actor spoke about dedicating three years to the project, calling it a conscious and necessary phase of growth. "Acting requires maturity and understanding of human emotions.

These three years taught me a lot and made me more patient as an actor," he said. Roshan also highlighted the intense action sequences designed by action director Peter, admitting to sustaining minor injuries during filming. Praising co-star Anaswara Rajan, Roshan said her experienced and layered performance adds depth to the narrative. He also appreciated the grand scale of the film, noting that every character and even objects like vehicles and props carry narrative importance. Describing Champion as a complete cinematic experience, Roshan said the village emotions, action, drama, and music come together seamlessly. "After watching this film, people will feel the three-year gap was worth it," he said, adding that announcements about his upcoming projects will be made soon.

Samantha Ruth Prabhu to Siddhant Chaturvedi: Wishes pour in as Tamannaah Bhatia turns 36



Bollywood actress Tamannaah Bhatia is celebrating her 36th birthday on Sunday. In order to mark her special day, several members from the entertainment industry used social media to pen lovely wishes for the Baahubali actress. Taking to the Stories section of her Instagram, Samantha Ruth Prabhu wrote, "Happy birthday to a woman who continues to

redefine herself at every stage. You inspire through all that you do and in the way you show up for everyone around you. God bless (red heart emoji). May this be your best year yet. @tamannaahspeaks. (sic)" Rasha Thadani also shared a photo with Tamannaah from their Holi party on her Instagram Stories and penned, "Happy birthday, thank you for being my person."

