

SC issues notice to Centre, CBI, RBI

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi has issued notices to the Union of India, Central Bureau of Investigation, Reserve Bank of India and others on the plea filed by Naresh Malhotra



New Delhi, Jan 25: The Supreme Court has sought responses from the Centre, the CBI and others on a plea filed by a 78-year-old retired banker who was duped of Rs 23 crore after allegedly being put under “digital arrest” for nearly a month.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi has issued notices to the Union of India, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and others on the plea filed by Naresh Malhotra.

The plea has sought directions to the banks involved to deposit the defrauded amount of Rs 22.92 crore in the petitioner's accounts.

Malhotra has made the Kotak Mahindra Bank, HDFC Bank, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, Indus Ind Bank, City Union Bank and Yes Bank parties to the case.

Cyber fraudsters posing as Enforcement Directorate (ED) and CBI officials duped the retired banker from south Delhi's Gulmohar Park area of Rs 23 crore by allegedly putting him under “digital arrest” for

nearly a month.

The accused allegedly told the victim that his Aadhaar card was involved in narcotics trafficking, terror funding and the Pulwama terror attack, and confined him to his flat under the pretext of investigation, an officer said.

“The scammers directed him not to step out of his house and coerced him into transferring his savings to various bank accounts over a span of a month,” police said.

According to police, the victim has stated in his complaint

that the ordeal began August 4 last year, when he received a call from a man claiming to be a Mumbai Police officer. The caller accused him of being linked to a drug-trafficking racket.

Subsequently, fraudsters impersonating ED and CBI officials also contacted him.

“Out of fear, the victim complied with their instructions and kept transferring money from his bank accounts to the accounts specified by the fraudsters. The accused also threatened the victim of dire consequences if he revealed the matter to anyone,” police added.

Realising that he was duped, Malhotra got a complaint lodged on the National Cyber-crime Reporting Portal (NCRP) September 19 last year, following which the matter was transferred to the Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations (IFSO) unit. Police had said an FIR was registered and Rs 12.11 crore of the cheated amount were frozen in various bank accounts.

Unapologetic on Op Sindoor: Tharoor on issues with Cong

Kozhikode (Kerala), Jan 25: Congress MP Shashi Tharoor Saturday said he has never violated the party's stated positions in Parliament, asserting that his only public disagreement in principle was over Operation Sindoor.

Answering questions during a session at the Kerala Literature Festival here, Tharoor said he had taken a strong stand on that issue and remained “unapologetic”.

His statement comes amidst recent reports stating “Tharoor's differences with the party leadership”, with a speculation that he is upset over Congress leader Rahul Gandhi not adequately acknowledging his presence at a recent event in Kochi and over alleged repeated attempts by state leaders to sideline him.

Explaining his position, Tharoor said that, as an observer and writer, he had written a newspaper column after the Pahalgam incident, stating that it should not go unpunished and that there should be a kinetic response.

Earlier, answering questions during a session at the Kerala Literature Festival here, Tharoor said he had taken a strong stand on ‘Operation Sindoor’ and remained “unapologetic,” about it.

Explaining his position, Tharoor said that as an observer, commentator and writer, he had written a newspaper column after the Pahalgam terror attack, stating that it should not go unpunished and that there should be a kinetic response.

He said that while India is focused on development, it should not be dragged into a prolonged conflict with Pakistan, and that any action should be limited to targeting terrorist camps.

Tharoor said that to his surprise, the Indian government did exactly what he had recommended.

“How could I be expected to



criticise it when I myself recommended it. I supported it fully throughout Operation Sindoor and afterwards,” he said.

When the government sent him abroad as part of a multi-party delegation over Operation Sindoor, his party, for some reason, did not like it.

“You can speak to them and find out,” he said. Tharoor said it was Jawaharlal Nehru who posed the famous question: “Who lives if India dies.”

“When India is at stake, when India's security and its place in the world are involved, India comes first,” he said.

He added that political parties may have differences as part of the process of building a better India, but when national interests are involved, India must prevail.

Terrorists had gunned down 26 people, mostly tourists, in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam in April 2025, sending shockwaves across the country. In response, India launched Operation Sindoor, a precision military offensive targeting terror launchpads in Pakistan.

Over 70 fugitives wanted by India located abroad during 2024-25: Report

New Delhi, Jan 25: Over 70 fugitives, wanted by India, were located abroad during 2024-25, according to an official report. As many as 203 fugitives wanted by other countries were detected/located in India during the same period.

A total of 71 “wanted persons/fugitives wanted by India” were located abroad in 2024-25, according to the annual report of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.

The number of such wanted fugitives located abroad is the highest in the over a decade time, officials claimed. A total of 27 fugitives/wanted persons returned to India, from abroad in the last financial year, said the ministry's annual report for 2024-25.

It also gave details on the working of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which acts as the National Central Bureau (NCB) – the nodal point for Interpol in India.

During the period of April, 2024 to March, 2025, 74 Letters Rogatory (LRs) were sent abroad, out of which 54 pertained to CBI cases and 20 of them to state law enforcement and other central agencies, the report said.

It was confirmed by Indian law enforcement agencies including CBI that 47 LR were fully executed during the said period and 29 were disposed of as closed/withdrawn on partial execution.

As March 31, 2025, a total 533 LR were pending with other countries, out of which 276 pertained to CBI cases and 257 to state police and other central law enforcement agencies. As many as 32 LR/treaty based requests were received from various countries requesting to provide assistance in the investigation of criminal matters.

T'gana: 900 strays killed so far, sarpanch booked

Hyderabad, Jan 25: In a fresh incident of alleged stray dogs killing in Telangana, about 300 canines were allegedly killed in Jagtial district, taking the toll to 900, animal rights activists claimed.

The killings are suspected to have been carried out by some elected representatives, including Sarpanchs, allegedly to fulfil promises made to villagers ahead of gram panchayat elections held in December last year, to address the stray dog menace.

The latest incident came to light after a complaint was lodged, alleging that 300 stray dogs were killed in Pegadapally village by administering poison-



ous injections January 22.

Blaming the village Sarpanch and Gram Panchayat secretary for the gruesome act, the complaint alleged that the former hired few individuals to kill the strays.

Based on the complaint, police registered an FIR against the duo under relevant sections of BNS and Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, police said Saturday.

Inspector Ch Kiran said, during the inquest, around 70 to 80 dog carcasses were exhumed from the burial site. The burial appeared to have taken place three to four days ago.

“At this stage, we cannot confirm the involvement of the accused persons in the incident,” he said, adding that post-mortem reports were awaited and further investigation was in progress.

In January alone, several incidents of stray dog killings were reported in the state.

As per the complaint lodged by animal rights activists, 100 dogs were allegedly poisoned to death at Yacharam village near here January 19 though 50 carcasses were found immediately.



The President of the European Council Mr. Antonio Costa and the President of the European Commission Ms. Ursula von der Leyen met the Union Minister of External Affairs Dr. Subrahmanyam met Jaishankar.

CBSE mandates mental health, career counselors in all affiliated schools

New Delhi: In a significant policy reform aimed at strengthening students' mental health and providing them with career guidance, the Central Board of Secondary Education has made the appointment of socio-emotional and career counsellors mandatory in all affiliated schools. For this, the national education board amended Clause 2.4.12 of the CBSE Affiliation Bye-Laws, 2018, following a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed before the Rajasthan High Court in July 2025 by Kota-based advocate Sajeet Swami and some psychology experts. The PIL highlighted rising mental health challenges among students, including academic stress and lack of structured career guidance, and sought mandatory provisions for qualified counsellors and a uniform mental health support framework in schools.

Techie death: Accident site draws curious crowds

Residents and commuters were seen peering into the area of Noida's Sector 150 and asking security personnel and media persons whether it was the same location where the software engineer was allegedly pleading for help for hours after his car plunged into the ditch

Noida, Jan 25: A grim curiosity surrounds the spot in Noida where a 27-year-old techie drowned last week in a water-filled trench, as passers-by stop to inquire and take pictures of the site, while questioning the role and responsibility of civic authorities.

Residents and commuters were seen peering into the area of Noida's Sector 150 and asking security personnel and media persons whether it was

the same location where the software engineer was allegedly pleading for help for hours after his car plunged into the ditch.

Many paused briefly to take photographs and videos, discussing where the onus falls. Rakesh Chauhan, a retired teacher in his early 60s, slowed his car while passing through the area and asked, “Is this the place where the boy drowned?”

Expressing anguish, he said the tragedy reflected “gross negligence” and lamented that the



victim could have been saved had timely efforts been made.

A car driver, Raman, pointed out that the trench lay only a few metres from the road

safety arrangements were put in place only after the tragedy. “If these steps had been taken earlier, his life could have been saved,” he said before leaving the spot.

A police personnel deployed at the site said many people stop to inquire about the incident, often leading to crowding.

A tea vendor located about 200 metres from the site said there were “several other vulnerable spots” in the area that posed similar risks.

Mithlesh Kasana, a resident of Dadri, said the area has seen frequent visits by police officials, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) and local residents since the incident.

The software engineer died in the early hours of January 17 after his car skidded in dense fog and plunged into

an unbarricaded, water-filled trench in Sector 150 crossing over a drain at a sharp, almost 90-degree turning road. The incident triggered widespread public outrage, leading the Uttar Pradesh government to remove the Noida Authority CEO on January 19 and earlier terminate the services of a junior engineer in connection with the case.

Police, who have lodged cases of negligence, culpable homicide not amounting to murder and for pollution and violations of environment laws, have arrested three builders and launched a probe against real estate developers MZ Wiltown and Lotus Greens, while investigations are continuing to fix accountability for the lapses that allegedly led to the fatal accident.

Editorial

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2025

Rescue units or spectators to tragedy?

The utter incompetence of multiple civic agencies in saving a drowning man in the heart of Greater Noida last week throws light on an effete state that is simply unable to summon up the will to serve its citizens. Yuvraj Mehta's desperate cries for help from atop his sinking car, and the lack of capacity as well as courage among rescue personnel on the shore amid a fog enveloping the dreadful night make for a depressing picture of India under the current dispensation. The man, 27-year-old Yuvraj Mehta, was driving back home under poor visibility conditions at midnight Friday, January 16, when his SUV plunged into a 50-ft flooded construction site that had neither a protective barrier nor warning signage. Mehta survived the initial fall and climbed onto the roof of his sinking car.

For nearly 90 minutes, he desperately signalled for help using his mobile phone's torch and spoke to his father on the phone, who rushed to the site. Rescue personnel from four agencies—the Noida civic authority, the fire brigade, police and the National Disaster Response Force – assembled on the shore but quibbled over the conditions, the equipment, the method and even the temperature of the water as the car went under the water, taking the young man with it.

The case has sparked nationwide outrage after the naked truth of the lack of prowess of our emergency services played out for everyone to see. Supposedly, trained rescue personnel refused to enter the water because the water was cold and feared the presence of iron rods under water. They lacked the thermal gear to operate at 30-foot depth and the fog lights needed to work in darkness. Even in terms of derring-do, they were shown up by a local delivery agent who jumped in to help with a rope tied around his waist. But by then, the vehicle had submerged and Mehta had succumbed to asphyxiation and cardiac arrest. This tragedy highlights failure at multiple levels, a many-headed failure that shows up at every crisis and in every disaster, be it a stampede at a crowded event, an outbreak of fire at an establishment with no safety arrangements, and the all-too-common and annual bouts of urban flooding in multiple cities. In the crisis management aspect, we have been witness to poorly trained and poorly equipped responders, as was glaringly evident in Greater Noida last week. But also, we see all too often contributory failings in the form of derelict safety regulation and administration. It's a shame that basic safety measures such as cautionary signage, working streetlights, and concrete barricading were absent on the street on which Yuvraj Mehta met his death. The fact that these were the conditions in the streets of a much-touted urban area is the least of it. Badly contoured lakesides and open excavation pits are universal conditions in the cities of India. Municipalities ignore them and local people normalise them, converting them into death traps. Yuvraj Mehta's death must jolt civic administrations and rescue agencies to overhaul their training methods, response protocols and equipment.

THE MAN, 27-YEAR-OLD YUVRAJ MEHTA, WAS DRIVING BACK HOME UNDER POOR VISIBILITY CONDITIONS AT MIDNIGHT FRIDAY, JANUARY 16, WHEN HIS SUV PLUNGED INTO A 50-FT FLOODED CONSTRUCTION SITE THAT HAD NEITHER A PROTECTIVE BARRIER NOR WARNING SIGNAGE.



DR. SATYAVAN SAURABH

The Republic of India turns 77 today. The Constitution, which came into effect on January 26, 1950, laid the foundation for a new India, inspired by the sacrifices of the freedom struggle. Since independence, we have progressed in many areas—from literature, sports, agriculture, science and technology, to economic and military capabilities. Strengthening our diverse culture, the nation has established its identity on the global stage. The Chandrayaan missions made us pioneers in space science, the digital revolution of UPI transformed the payment system, while a slew of medals at the Olympics and Asian Games took sports to new heights. Today, the world sees India as the fourth largest economy, where a growth rate of seven to eight percent has contributed to poverty alleviation. But this journey has not been smooth. Internal challenges, cross-border threats, and social inequalities persist. On Republic Day, introspection is necessary: what have we gained, what have we lost, and what resolutions should we take for the future?

77 Years of the Republic: Achievements, Challenges and a Pledge for the Future



India's first and greatest challenge was unity in diversity. This continent-sized country was a blend of over 1.3 billion people, hundreds of languages and dialects, diverse religions and cultures. At the time of independence, there were fears that it would not remain united. The tragedy of Partition reinforced these fears, resulting in the loss of millions of lives. However, the Constitution ensured unity through a federal structure. Article 1 declared India a united state. The reorganization of linguistic states, a unified judiciary, and constitutional institutions integrated regional aspirations into the mainstream. Despite challenges like Naxalism and separatism, we maintained unity. Over the past 25 years, the removal of Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir and the peace process in the Northeast are proof of this. Today, schemes like "One Nation, One Nation" are turning diversity into strength. This achievement is no small feat—most pluralistic countries in the world have disintegrated, but India stands firm.

The second challenge was to enliven democracy. The Constitution provided adult suffrage, fundamental rights, and secularism. A parliamentary system was adopted, inspired by the British model but tailored to Indian needs. Eighteen Lok Sabha elections were held peacefully, continuing a tradition dating back to the Nehruvian era. The judiciary established the rights of the poor through public interest litigation—the Vishakha Guidelines ensured women's safety, and the Right to Education ensured the right to education. Women's reservation revolutionized Panchayati Raj from 33 to 50 percent, a process awaiting national expansion. The

Right to Information increased transparency, while the Goods and Services Tax facilitated economic integration. Challenges persisted—dark chapters like the Emergency—but institutions were revived. Today, the pillars stand strong: the Election Commission is impartial, and the Reserve Bank of India is a guardian of economic stability. The world's largest democracy proved that democracy can flourish despite poverty and illiteracy.

The third challenge was development. In 1947, the GDP was 230,000 crore rupees, today it is over 400 lakh crore rupees. The Green Revolution filled the food reserves, and the White Revolution set a world record in milk production. ISRO's 100-plus satellite missions and the Covishield vaccine demonstrated self-reliance. Digital India added over 100 million Aadhaar cards, while Startup India spawned over 100,000 startups. On the social front, the National Food Security Act provided affordable food grains to 800 million people, and Swachh Bharat built 120 million toilets. Ayushman Bharat provided health insurance to 500 million poor people. But inequality persisted—the top 10 percent owned 57 percent of the wealth, while the bottom 50 percent owned only 3 percent. The rural-urban divide and farmer suicides are worrying. Nevertheless, 250 million people emerged above the poverty line—a matter of pride.

The achievements of the Republic are a reason for pride, but a lot was also lost. Corruption took root - scams like 2G, coal allocation looted billions. Questions on electoral bonds, black money return after demonetization failed. Women's insecurity at its peak - from Nirbhaya to Hathras, rape incidents are not

stopping. Caste violence, Dalit atrocities continue. Farmers' crisis deepens: Demand for minimum support price, loan waiver is insufficient. Youth unemployment is at three percent, violence is erupting due to dissatisfaction. Pollution is fatal, the poison of provincialism persists. Abuse of freedom of expression. Naxalism, terrorism have become a headache. These wounds are staining Mother India with blood.

It may be lost, but a solution is possible. Direct benefit transfer on corruption has stopped leakage. Fast-track court for women's safety, increase the use of Nirbhaya Fund. Prime Minister Kisan Samman Nidhi for farmers, strengthen farmer producer organizations. Skill India for employment, self-reliance, creation of three to ten crore jobs is possible. Run Constitution awareness campaign for social harmony. Electric vehicle policy on pollution, speed up Namami Gange. Empower Panchayati Raj - local governance strengthened with women's representation. Include youth in the mainstream. Spread of hatred can be stopped with Artificial Intelligence-Big Data. Unite to realize the dream of developed India by 2047.

Republic Day is not just a parade and flag hoisting, it is an opportunity for introspection. We gained unity, democracy, and development; we lost corruption and inequality. But youth power is our weapon. Be optimistic—adopt the Indian model. Follow the principles of Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, and Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution. Let us extricate the Republic from the thorny bushes and build a bright future. Jai Hind, Jai Bharat!

(The Writer, is a poet and social thinker.) PhD (Political Science)

How to feed 10 billion people

With the world struggling to feed 8 billion people today, how will we feed 10 billion by 2050? Meeting the nutritional needs of a growing population requires not just a radical increase in food production — almost all of it plant-based — but also a more equitable distribution to ensure that no one is food-insecure.

That is a tall order. The current food system is already buckling. About 673 million people go to bed hungry every night and, in 2025, we witnessed two famines (in Gaza and Sudan), each driven by conflict, climate shocks and soaring food prices. At the same time, 1.66 billion hectares — 60 percent of which is agricultural land — have been degraded by the very practices we rely on to feed the world.

Global hunger stems not from a lack of capacity to produce enough food, but partly from our failure to produce it efficiently and distribute it evenly. Conflict and insecurity remain the dominant causes of hunger across 20 countries and territories, leaving nearly 140 million people facing acute food insecurity. Disasters have inflicted an estimated \$3.26 trillion in agricultural losses worldwide over the past 33 years — an average of \$99 billion annually, or roughly 4 percent of global agricultural output; and recent supply-driven food price spikes have pushed tens of millions of people into hunger almost overnight. Worse, these are not one-off shocks. They represent the new normal.

We already have the knowledge and the tools to optimize what we use and diversify what we grow. For



decades, the agriculture sector has responded well to rising demand by developing higher-yielding crops and using more of everything: more fertilizer, more pesticides and more water. Yet this trend has produced unnecessary waste, polluted rivers, degraded the soil and released evermore greenhouse gases. We need to find a better path — and science can show us the way. We already have the knowledge and the tools to optimize what we use and diversify what we grow. One priority is to improve

efficiency. Between 1990 and 2020, fertilizer use rose 46 percent and pesticide use doubled. But only 30 percent to 60 percent of fertilizer nutrients and 20 percent to 70 percent of pesticides are effectively absorbed; the rest washes into rivers, degrades soil or releases greenhouse gases. Fortunately, research shows that optimizing nitrogen use can boost yields by up to 19 percent and slash fertilizer use by 15 percent to 19 percent. Improved pesticide management — through precision spraying,

biopesticides and residue monitoring — reduces chemical waste while safeguarding biodiversity. Agroecological practices, such as intercropping, crop rotation and integrating trees into farm systems, further enhance soil health, lower input dependence and strengthen long-term resilience.

The next priority is to diversify the food system. Decades of productivity gains have fostered a dangerous dependency on just three crops. Wheat, rice and maize now provide

most of the world's calories. Such reliance on monocultures creates profound vulnerability to pests, diseases and climate change.

The solution lies in the crops we have marginalized. Traditional and underused species — hardy millets, nutrient-dense legumes, indigenous fruits, robust yams — offer ample nutrition alongside other benefits such as climate resilience. UN Food and Agriculture Organization initiatives like "Future Smart Food" (in Asia) and "100 Crops for Africa" demonstrate how these "forgotten" crops can simultaneously expand diets, boost farm incomes and restore degraded soils.

The objective is clear: agriculture must produce more with less every season, everywhere.

Finally, we must scale up effective technologies. Data analytics and precision agriculture tools are already reshaping farming. Drones can plant seeds and deliver inputs with pinpoint accuracy. Artificial intelligence platforms can use satellite imagery to provide tailored, real-time recommendations. Robots can detect weeds for targeted spraying, avoiding the need for blanket herbicide applications. Digital soil tests and weather stations can guide day-to-day decisions and blockchain systems can link smallholders to transparent and traceable markets.

Scaling these tools will require substantial investments in agricultural extension services (to promote best practices), major science-based policy shifts and knowledge-sharing platforms to help farmers optimize inputs. Likewise, ongoing

innovation must be incorporated into local practices, which calls for greater collaboration among governments, investors, the private sector and farmers. The objective is clear: agriculture must produce more with less — more crop per drop, more calories per kilogram of fertilizer and more nutrition per hectare — every season, everywhere. That requires replacing one-size-fits-all industrial packages with resilient, context-specific systems finely tuned to local soils, water regimes, crops and climates. Publicly funded research must lead where markets fall short to ensure equitable access to precision agriculture, while private innovation continues to scale up what works. Knowledge is no longer the bottleneck; political will and aligned incentives are.

Even in the face of recurring conflict, drought and market chaos, stable production and affordable prices are possible. Resilient soils, diversified cropping and precision management hold the key. A world where nearly everyone eats well, farmers prosper, soils regenerate, waters run clean, biodiversity recovers and agrifood systems emit minimal greenhouse gases is not utopian. It is the realistic reward for embracing a different agricultural model before the old one collapses. The only question is whether we use the knowledge, science and proven tools already in hand. Future generations will not ask whether the solutions existed; they will ask what took us so long to implement them. The choice is ours and it starts with turning science into real-world practice.



Mcap of 9 of top-10 most valued firms plunges by Rs 2.51 lakh cr

New Delhi: The combined market valuation of nine of the top-10 most valued firms slumped by Rs 2.51 lakh crore last week, with Reliance Industries taking the biggest hit, in line with a weak trend in equities. Last week, the BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 2,032.65 points or 2.43 per cent.

“Markets witnessed a sharp sell-off during the week, with bears firmly in control. Weak global cues, persistent FII outflows, a depreciating rupee, and subdued corporate earnings kept pressure elevated throughout the week,” Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. The combined market valuation of nine of the top-10



most valued firms, including Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and Bharti Airtel, plunged by Rs 2,51,711.6 crore. The market valuation of Reliance Industries tumbled Rs 96,960.17 crore to Rs 18,75,533.04 crore. ICICI Bank’s valuation eroded by Rs 48,644.99

crore to Rs 9,60,825.29 crore. The valuation of HDFC Bank tanked Rs 22,923.02 crore to Rs 14,09,611.89 crore and that of Bharti Airtel diminished by Rs 17,533.97 crore to Rs 11,32,010.46 crore. Market capitalisation (mcap) of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) dropped by

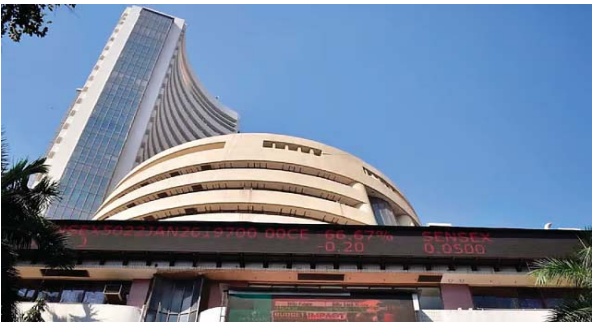
Rs 16,588.93 crore to Rs 11,43,623.19 crore and that of Larsen & Toubro tanked Rs 15,248.32 crore to Rs 5,15,161.91 crore. Mcap of Bajaj Finance declined by Rs 14,093.93 crore to Rs 5,77,353.23 crore and that of State Bank of India edged lower by Rs 11,907.5 crore to Rs 9,50,199.77 crore.

Market valuation of Infosys dived Rs 7,810.77 crore to Rs 6,94,078.82 crore. However, mcap of Hindustan Unilever climbed Rs 12,311.86 crore to Rs 5,66,733.16 crore. Reliance Industries remained the most valued firm, followed by HDFC Bank, TCS, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Infosys, Bajaj Finance, Hindustan Unilever and Larsen & Toubro. “The correction was fuelled by a confluence of factors: escalating geopolitical tensions, aggressive FII selling, and panic regarding the Rupee’s weakness,” Santosh Meena, Head of Research at Swastika Investmart Ltd, said on markets sell-off last week.

Why stock markets often trade lower ahead of Union Budgets

NEW DELHI: As the government prepares to present the Union Budget 2026-27, data from 2010-2022 shows that markets often trade lower ahead of the event due to fear of policy surprises, though post-budget rebounds are common — with an average 1.36 per cent gain in the following week, according to market watchers. This pre-budget weakness is attributed to elevated volatility, as seen in the average 2.65 per cent intra-day trading range on budget day itself, they said.

Over the past 15 years, the average return for Nifty one week before the budget has been negative at -0.52 per cent, with the index closing higher only on 8 occasions. This pattern aligns with broader trends, where Nifty posted negative returns in the month preceding the



budget in four out of the last five years, including a drop in January 2025.

“For the Union Budget 2026, expectations centre on balancing fiscal prudence with growth stimulus amid global headwinds like US tariffs under President Donald Trump,” said Rahul Sharma, Director, Head - Technical and Derivative Research, JM Financial Services Ltd. Key anticipations include increased capital expenditure on

Infrastructure, Defence, and Railways to shield the economy from external shocks, with a hike in defence allocation. Industry bodies seek boosts for MSMEs, manufacturing, green energy, AI and exports through incentives like faster GST refunds and investments in logistics. “Fiscal deficit is projected at 4.4 per cent of GDP, with emphasis on job creation, rural demand, and sustainable development to propel India toward a \$5 trillion economy.

RBI may cut rates further if India-US trade deal is delayed: Goldman Sachs



MUMBAI: India’s strong economic fundamentals continue to support a healthy growth outlook, but prolonged uncertainty over the India-US trade deal could push the Reserve Bank of India to step in with further rate cuts.

According to Goldman Sachs, if trade-related headwinds persist beyond the first quarter of FY27 and start weighing on growth, the RBI may use its remaining policy space to support the economy through additional monetary easing. The brokerage said India’s mass consumption story, especially in rural areas and among lower-income households in cities, is still in the early stages of recovery.

This recovery is being supported by a good crop cycle, higher state-level transfer payments to women in lower-income families and GST cuts that benefited the bottom end of the consumption ladder.

Goldman Sachs believes these factors are helping demand gradually pick up, even though broader global uncertainties remain.

In an interaction with NDTV Profit, Santanu Sengupta, Chief

In such a situation, the government and the Reserve Bank of India may need to use their policy space to support the economy.

Sengupta explained that while India’s overall consumption outlook remains positive, the picture is mixed across income groups.

The affluent segment of consumers, which includes the middle and top income groups, saw strong growth after the Covid-19 pandemic but is now showing signs of slowing. He added that the middle-income segment faces challenges due to concerns around job creation and the increasing use of artificial intelligence.

On the policy front, the central government moderated its fiscal consolidation in FY26 and shifted focus towards supporting con-

The brokerage said India’s mass consumption story, especially in rural areas and among lower-income households in cities, is still in the early stages of recovery.

India Economist at Goldman Sachs, said the India-US trade deal is expected to be finalised by the first quarter of FY27.

However, he warned that if the agreement is pushed beyond this period and into the second half of the next financial year, it could create growth headwinds.

sumption through income tax and consumption tax cuts. This helped India record a strong real GDP growth of 7.6 per cent year-on-year in calendar year 2025. However, nominal GDP growth fell to a six-year low, excluding the pandemic period, mainly because of very low inflation.

MAHE Bengaluru’s MAHETHON 2026 Makes Spectacular Debut, Inspiring a Healthier, Greener Tomorrow

Bengaluru, January 25, 2026: The inaugural edition of MAHETHON 2026, organized by MAHE Bengaluru Campus of Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE), Institution of Eminence Deemed-to-be University, was a spectacular success. MAHE Bangalore campus, brought together over 10,000 runners across multiple categories, spanning all fitness levels and age groups. The marathon featured an AIMS-certified route, with the race commencing and concluding at the MAHE Bengaluru Campus, Yelahanka. Powered by AXIS Bank, MAHETHON united students, professional athletes, corporate teams, armed and police forces, families, and children, all sharing a commitment to health, community well-being, and the environment. MAHETHON 2026, Bengaluru’s Biggest Running Festival, was officially flagged off by Shri S. R. Vishwanath, Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), Yelahanka. The Senior leadership from MAHE, including Dr. Madhu Veeraraghavan, Pro Vice-Chancellor of MAHE Bengaluru Campus and MLHS, MAHE Manipal, Dr. Sharath Rao Pro Vice-Chancellor, Health Sciences, MAHE, Chief Operating Officer Dr. Anand Venugopal, MAHE, and Dr. Raghavendra Prabhu P, Additional Registrar, MAHE Bengaluru joined him. The event was also attended by members of the civil society, governing body, academic leaders, corporate partners, and



senior administrators, who actively encouraged and motivated participants across all race categories.

Addressing the gathering, Shri S. R. Vishwanath, MLA remarked, I sincerely appreciate the Manipal Group of Institutions for bringing quality healthcare and education institutions closer to the people. It is heartening to see participants travel all the way from Bengaluru and other places, which reflects the trust and confidence people have in Manipal institutions. The work being done by MAHE Bangalore campus is truly commendable. Such programmes open new opportunities for our region, and I am very happy that this initiative was conducted locally for the benefit of our people... I have ensured that the state of the roads in Yelahanka has been addressed; however, some areas still require repair and attention. I assure everyone that by MAHETHON 2027, all roads in Yelahanka will be

well-maintained and in good condition.

Reflecting on the spirit of the event, Dr. Madhu Veeraraghavan noted: "Today, as we witness the energy and enthusiasm of every participant at MAHETHON, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to each runner who chose to be part of this journey, and my sincere gratitude to our sponsors whose support has made this event possible. Together, we've created something truly remarkable for our MAHE community.

The marathon featured multiple race categories, including the Half Marathon (21.1K), 10K, 5K, and 3K Fun Run, promoting broad participation and inclusivity. A defining feature of MAHETHON 2026 was the dedicated participation of armed forces personnel and persons with disabilities, reflecting the event's commitment to inclusivity and community engagement. The fastest runners in each category were celebrated for their outstanding performanc-

es, with a total prize money pool of 13.75 lakh.

Held under the theme “Run Green, Breathe Free” with the tagline “Bengaluru Runs for Earth,” the event seamlessly combined fitness with environmental stewardship. As part of the celebrations, a tree-planting drive was organised, highlighting MAHE Bengaluru’s commitment to eco-friendly practices, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable mobility, while promoting healthy lifestyles and community well-being.

The event was conducted ahead of India’s 77th Republic Day, celebrating national pride, unity, and community participation. Dr. Raghavendra Prabhu, Additional Registrar, MAHE Bengaluru, observed that MAHETHON will now be held annually on the fourth Sunday of January, establishing it as a flagship event that promotes fitness, environmental awareness, and MAHE’s ongoing commitment to the community.

The success of MAHETHON 2026 underscores MAHE’s dedication to health, sustainability, and social engagement. Alongside the Manipal Marathon hosted at Manipal, MAHETHON strengthens MAHE’s pan-India presence in community-driven sporting initiatives. By combining fitness, inclusivity, and environmental responsibility, the event has set a benchmark for future editions, inspiring communities to come together in celebration of well-being, sustainability, and civic pride.

Future-ready lineup available immediately; consumers set to save up to Rs.19,000 with enhanced energy efficiency.

NEW DELHI, January 2026 — Ahead of the peak summer season, LG Electronics, India Limited (LGEIL), Most Trusted Brand (in Electronics segment)* has announced its emergence as among the first brands to introduce its comprehensive range of Air Conditioners fully compliant with the new 2026 Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) Star Rating norms. LGEIL proactive rollout ensures that Indian consumers have immediate access to the most advanced, energy-efficient cooling technology available today.

The updated BEE norms represent a significant leap in energy benchmarks, raising the bar for the entire industry to align India with global energy performance standards. LGEIL has upgraded its portfolio well in advance, reinforcing its commitment to sustainability and responsible product development.



Key Highlights of the 2026 Lineup: Enhanced Energy Savings: The new norms are designed to drastically reduce power consumption for households. Industry estimates indicate that upgrading to a new 5-star AC under the 2026 norms can help consumers save approximately 19,000 over a 10-year period, depending on usage and tariff rates.

Understanding the New Ratings: Under the stricter 2026 framework, the efficiency threshold has been raised; for instance, a model previously rated as 5-star may now be classified

as 4-star. This reclassification reflects a higher standard of efficiency rather than a drop in performance, encouraging the adoption of superior, low-power technology. Immediate Availability: LGEIL future-ready line-up has been available in the market since early January – making it among the first brands to offer its 2026 BEE compliant residential air-conditioners. This ensures that customers purchasing early for the summer are not buying outdated technology.

Key features: This year our focus on empowering customers with features

like Precool and Energy Manager+. Pre cool, An innovative feature designed to ensure your home is perfectly cool and comfortable the moment you step in. Precool feature uses Geo fencing technology to locate user and ThinQ operates Air conditioner basis Automation applied by user once you enter the pre-defined distance range. Energy Manager+ analyses your AC usages History and recommends realistic operating hours and consumption. Users can set Periodic Budget target as required basis recommendation. Sanjay Chitkara, Co-Chief Sales & Marketing Officer, LG Electronics India Limited

Commented on the launch: "As India moves towards stricter energy efficiency norms, LG Electronics India Limited remains committed to supporting this transition through early compliance

and future-ready product innovation. With our portfolio already aligned to the new BEE standards, LGEIL enters the new season well-prepared to offer reliable, energy-efficient air conditioning solutions that help our consumers save money while enjoying superior cooling."

To ensure a smooth transition for consumers, LGEIL is launching a comprehensive awareness campaign across print, digital, and retail channels to explain the benefits of the new star ratings. Furthermore, LGEIL manufacturing and supply chain operations have fully aligned with the new guidelines. While the new 2026-compliant models are the focus, air conditioners manufactured under the previous standards will remain available until existing stocks are liquidated, offering consumers flexibility in their purchasing decisions.

Egypt aims to double trade with India to \$12 billion

NEW DELHI: Egypt has set a strong goal to nearly double its trade with India, aiming to reach \$12 billion in the coming years. Currently, trade between the two countries stands at around \$5 billion, which Egypt believes is far below the real potential of the partnership.

Speaking at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia here, Egypt's Ambassador to India, Kamel Zayed Galal, said both nations have many opportunities to grow together, especially in sectors like energy, manufacturing, agriculture and connectivity.

He also shared that Indian investments in Egypt, which are now around \$3.7 billion, are expected to cross \$10 billion in the future. The Ambassador encouraged Indian companies to see Egypt as a long-term strategic partner rather than just

a short-term business destination. Energy cooperation is becoming a major focus, especially in renewable energy and green hydrogen.

Galal explained that Egypt has strong solar and wind resources, along with growing infrastructure and easy access to major global shipping routes. These advantages could help Egypt become an important hub for green energy production and exports. He also pointed to fertilisers, agriculture and industrial manufacturing as areas where closer supply chain links could quickly increase trade. The Ambassador highlighted Egypt's industrial zones and its free trade agreements with African and European countries as major benefits for Indian businesses. He said Egypt is not just a market to sell products but also a base for production and exports to wider regions.

Egypt's ports on the Red Sea and Mediterranean Sea, along with the Suez Canal – which handles about 12 per cent of global trade – make it a key global trade gateway. India and Egypt upgraded their relationship to a Strategic Partnership in 2023 after meetings between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. According to Galal, the focus has now moved from building ties on paper to delivering real economic results. Talking about Egypt's foreign policy, the Ambassador said the country supports strategic independence, cooperation among many nations and respect for national sovereignty. It avoids strict political blocs and believes this approach closely matches India's views, especially on the need to reform global bodies like the United Nations.

Sainyam and Gaurav win 10m Air Pistol Trial 2 Finals

NEW DELHI: Sainyam of Chandigarh and Gaurav Kumar of Uttar Pradesh came on top in the women's and men's 10m Air Pistol Trail 2 finals respectively as the National Selection Trials 1 & 2 concluded here Sunday.

World Cup Final silver medalist Sainyam continued her good run of form, finishing on top in the finals with a dominant final score of 243.1, 5.4 points more than Rhythm Sangwan (237.7).

Meenu Pathak once again finished in the top three in the finals, finishing with a score of 218.5. Earlier in qualification, Suruchi Singh finished on top with an impressive 587-31x, but could only finish in eighth place in the finals. Palak shot 579-16x to finish second in qualification and shot 178.2 in the finals to finish fifth. The experienced Shwetha Singh took the third



spot in qualification with a score of 578-18x and came back in the finals to finish on sixth place. Meenu Pathak shot 577-12x in qualification while Priya Muralidhar hit 576-16x. Rhythm Sangwan and Sainyam scored 576-15x and 576-13x while Divya T.S completed the top eight with a score of 575-19x.

Gaurav improved on his second-place finish in Trial 1, finishing on top in T2 in a tightly contested final. Gaurav, who qualified third for the finals with a score of 584-21x, shot 245.5 in the finals to take the top spot ahead of Yogesh Kumar who finished second with a final score of 244.6. Harsh Swami of Uttar Pradesh took the third spot with a final score of 221.9 after qualifying for the finals in second place with a score of 585-26x.

GRATEFUL TO ICC FOR T20WC INVITE, PREPARING TO ARRIVE IN INDIA IMMEDIATELY: CRICKET SCOTLAND CEO



NEW DELHI: Cricket Scotland's chief executive Trudy Lindblade on Saturday expressed gratitude towards the International Cricket Council for inviting his country to next month's T20 World Cup in place of Bangladesh, adding that they are "preparing to arrive in India immediately".

Scotland were on Saturday confirmed as replacement of Bangladesh who pulled out of the 20-team tournament citing security concerns despite the ICC insisting that there was no threats in to their assessment.

"Earlier today I received correspondence from the ICC asking if our men's team would play at the Men's T20 World Cup, and we have accepted," Lindblade said on Cricket Scotland's website.

"We are grateful to the ICC for extending this invite. This is an exciting opportunity for Scotland's players to compete on the global stage in front of millions of supporters. We also acknowledge this opportunity has arisen out of challenging and unique circumstances. "Our squad have been training for some weeks in preparation for upcoming tours and are now preparing to arrive in India

imminently to acclimatise to local conditions, ready to play and contribute to what should be a fantastic ICC Men's T20 World Cup," she added.

Scotland, however, will need some time to announce their 15-member squad for the tournament which begins on February 7.

"The ICC has confirmed Scotland will replace Bangladesh in Group C, after Bangladesh withdrew from the competition. Details around squad selection for the tournament will be shared in the coming days," Cricket Scotland said. Cricket Scotland chairman Wilf Walsh said he received a call from ICC chairman Jay Shah on confirming Scotland's participation.

"I welcomed a call from ICC Chair Jay Shah earlier today confirming that Scotland will receive an invitation to play at the ICC Men's T20 World Cup. I was pleased to accept on behalf of our team, who are willing and ready to go," he said. "We thank the ICC for this opportunity and look forward to competing with some of the best sides in the world in India in the coming weeks," Walsh added.

Haaland dropped as Guardiola rejigs Manchester City squad

MANCHESTER: In a turn of events few expected even in the brutally result-oriented world of the English Premier League, Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola left out Erling Haaland from the starting lineup for the league game against Wolverhampton amid a slump in form.

The Norwegian striker, one of the most prolific strikers in the EPL and also in top-tier leagues around the world, was



named on the bench after a rare poor run in the recent matches, with only one goal in his last eight games in all competitions, which came off a penalty against Brighton.

Brighton. Guardiola made the big call after two straight losses — to Manchester United in the league and Bodø/Glimt in the Champions League. The Norwegian striker, one of the most prolific strikers in the EPL and also in top-tier leagues around the world, was named on the bench after a rare poor run in the recent matches, with only one goal in his last eight games in all competitions, which came off a penalty against Brighton.

Inexplicable blunder causes Gukesh's loss

WIJK AAN JEE: World champion D Gukesh was himself to blame as he fell into a blindspot and made an unimaginable blunder to go down to Nodirbek Abdusatorov of Uzbekistan in a sixth round match of the Tata Steel chess tournament here on Saturday.

Top seeded Indian Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi, meanwhile, benefitted from a similar oversight by Matthias Bluebaum of Germany to salvage half a point. On a day filled with drama,

Indian GM Gukesh blundered almost with a blind-eye and had to resign immediately in a position he would have survived with a possible draw. It's very clear to what is referred as a blind-spot in chess when at a given moment the player is not able to recognize for a few seconds what's happening. While this was the first instance for Gukesh to go through this after becoming a Grandmaster, his fans and followers would hope that it was also the last time.

Babar, Afridi return; Rauf dropped as Pakistan name T20 WC squad

LAHORE: Pakistan on Sunday announced the Salman Agha-led squad for the ICC T20 World Cup, which will be played in India and Sri Lanka from February 7, with the veteran duo Babar Azam and pace spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi making a return.

Having recently become the all-time leading run-getter in Men's T20Is, Babar Azam adds rich experience to the Pakistan batting lineup, while pacer Haris Rauf, who has performed well in the ongoing Big Bash League, having taken 20 wickets in just 11 matches, has been omitted from the 15-man squad. Skipper

Agha, Faheem Ashraf, Khawaja Mohammad Nafay, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Sahibzada Farhan and Usman Tariq have received their maiden mega-event call-ups to the Pakistan squad. Meanwhile, Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman, Mohammad Nawaz, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan and Usman Khan have played in at least one or more editions of the tournament since 2021.

Pakistan boasts a strong batting lineup, which includes the likes of Fakhar Zaman, Saim

Ayub, and Sahibzada Farhan. In the absence of Rauf, Pakistan have relied on Afridi and Naseem Shah in their pace unit.

There is also a strong presence of all-rounders in the squad, with the likes of Faheem Ashraf, Shadab Khan and Mohammad Nawaz providing multiple options with the bat and ball.

The 2009 winner are slotted in Group A alongside co-hosts and defending champions India, the Netherlands, the USA and Namibia. They will kickstart their campaign against the Netherlands on February 7 in Colombo at the Sinhalese Sports

Club (SSC) Ground. Pakistan's squad announcement comes just a day after the PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi said a final decision on their T20 World Cup participation would be made after talking to government.

Pakistan squad: Salman Ali Agha (captain), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Mohammad Nafay (wk), Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan (wk), Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan (wk) Usman Tariq.

Aryna Sabalenka beats 19-year-old Mboko, faces 18-year-old Jovic in Australian Open quarterfinals

MELBOURNE: TikTok influencer and top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka is having to work her way through some rising teenager stars in her bid for a third Australian Open title in four years.

Sabalenka held off 19-year-old Vicky Mboko 6-1, 7-6 (1) at Rod Laver Arena on Sunday to advance to a quarterfinal match against 18-year-old Iva Jovic. The 29-seeded Jovic overwhelmed Yulia Putintseva 6-0, 6-1 in 53 minutes at John Cain Arena, the so-called People's Court, and she secured a spot in the last eight of a Grand Slam for the first time.



Coco Gauff, who was still a teenager when she won her first major title in 2023, is back into the quarterfinals in Australia for the third straight year after a 6-1, 3-6, 6-3 win over No. 19 Karolina Muchova. In a good omen for Gauff, her four previous wins over Muchova have been during runs to the title, including in the semifinals at the 2023 U.S. Open. In the opening men's match Sunday, No. 1-ranked Carlos Alcaraz continued his bid for a career Grand Slam at age 22 with a 7-6 (6), 6-4, 7-5 win over No. 19-seeded Tommy Paul to reach the quarterfinals for the third consecutive year in Australia. He's never gone past the last eight at Melbourne Park, the only one of the four Grand Slam venues where he hasn't won the title. That's a statistic he's determined to rectify, to the point where he's reworking his serve to a look a little bit more in style like 10-time Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic.

Djokovic's influence has been getting some good advice from Djokovic, a 24-time major winner, during the tournament. He said he's been happy to help an up-and-coming star with Serbian heritage. Jovic made

it clear last year that she wanted a chance to play the World No. 1. Now she'll get the chance. Sabalenka, who has joked about waiting for a formal invitation to partner Djokovic in mixed doubles at a major, breezed through the first set in 31 minutes against Mboko but had some difficulty in the second. Mboko saved match points and played well enough to beat many players, but not the two-time Australian Open champion.

"What an incredible player for such a young age," Sabalenka said of Mboko. "It's incredible to see these kids coming up on Tour. I can't believe I say that. I feel like I'm a kid! "She pushed me so much, and I'm happy to be through," Sabalenka added in her on-court TV interview. Sabalenka led the second set 4-1, and then failed to convert three match points while leading 5-4. Mboko slowly took momentum and forced a tiebreaker only for Sabalenka to dominate.

It was the 20th straight tiebreak victory for Sabalenka. "I try to not to think this is a tiebreak and play point by point," said Sabalenka, who won back-to-back titles in Australia in 2023 and 24 before losing last year's final to Madison Keys. "I guess that's the key to consistency." Sabalenka said playing the morning match at Melbourne Park came with some challenges, including shadows and

bright sun. "Don't get me wrong, I like to play the first match, but the tricky part, at some point the sun goes right into your serve point. It's kind of like tricky. You can break the serve," she said. "That's what actually happened. Two breaks that she got, it was on the side when I was facing the sun. Yeah, I didn't deal that good with the serve. She did an incredible job serving on that side." Jovic and Mboko were scheduled to play doubles together later Sunday on Kia Arena against fourth-seeded Elise Mertens and Zhang Shuai. After her singles win when she broke Putintseva's serve six times and led 6-0, 4-0 before she dropped serve herself Jovic said she'd just concentrate on her own game when she faced Sabalenka.

She saved two break points in the opening game of the match against Putintseva and was dominant throughout. She had her 31-year-old rival chastising herself during the changeovers and practicing shots trying to work out ways to get back into the match. When Jovic hit a crosscourt forehand winner to convert another break in the second set, Putintseva tossed her racket toward the ball, trying to make a connection. As for taking on Sabalenka, Jovic said, "Obviously, she's No. 1 for a reason and had so much success at this tournament.

Novak Djokovic advances to Australian Open quarterfinals on a walkover after Jakub Mensik withdraws



MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic has had a walkover into the Australian Open quarterfinals after Jakub Mensik withdrew 24 hours ahead of their scheduled fourth-round match with an abdominal injury. The tournament confirmed Mensik's withdrawal late Sunday. The match had been scheduled for Rod Laver Arena on Monday night.

"After last couple of matches, I started to feel worse, and actually the problem is my abdominal muscle on the left side," Mensik said in comments published by the tournament. "Like I said, last few matches it got significantly

worse, and I think if I would step on the court tomorrow, it would be such a big risk for me for my next weeks, for my next tournaments, and actually for my health."

No. 16-seeded Mensik beat Ethan Quinn in straight sets on Saturday.

Novak Djokovic has won the Australian Open a record 10 times. The 24-time major winner became the first player to reach 400 wins in Grand Slam singles when he beat Botic van de Zandschulp 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (4) on Saturday night in the third round of the Australian Open.

Bangladesh's exit from T20 World Cup "sad moment": Global players' body

LONDON: The World Cricket Association (WCA) on Sunday expressed concern over Bangladesh's exit from the upcoming T20 World Cup, saying it was "a sad moment" that requires "deep reflection".

The ICC on Saturday confirmed that Scotland has replaced Bangladesh in the T20 World Cup beginning February 7, saying the "difficult decision" was taken since it was not feasible to meet Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) request to shift their matches to Sri Lanka so close to the tournament.

"The withdrawal of Bangladesh from the T20 World Cup, and resulting absence of a valued cricketing nation from cricket's pinnacle international T20 event, is a sad moment for our sport, the Bangladesh players and fans, and one that requires deep reflection," WCA CEO Tom Moffat said in a statement.

The BCB refused to let its team travel to India citing security concerns in the wake of Mustafizur Rahman's ouster from

the IPL. The ICC, however, maintained that there was no verifiable security threat to the Bangladesh national team, officials or supporters in India and it was not appropriate to amend the published event schedule.

"Cricket is at its strongest when every team and every player is treated with respect, supported appropriately and consistently, and able to participate on fair terms. The game is at its best when all participants are genuine contributors to its success."

WCA is a global body for professional cricketers with membership of players from several countries. But, Indian cricketers are not members of the WCA.

"In recent times, the WCA has become increasingly concerned by broader trends in the sport, including agreements not being honoured, rights being eroded, and a lack of meaningful consultation with players and their representatives — all of this amounts to a careless

West Bengal to confer Governor’s Award of Excellence on legendary Telugu actor Mohan Babu

In a moment of historic significance for Telugu cinema and the Telugu-speaking community across the globe, legendary actor Shri Mohan Babu will be conferred with the Governor’s Award of Excellence by the Government of West Bengal. The award will be presented at a ceremonial function at Lok Bhavan, Kolkata, on Republic Day, January 26, 2026, in the august presence of the Hon’ble Governor of West Bengal and other distinguished guests.

The ceremony will be followed by the traditional At Home reception. This recognition marks a historic first, as it is the first time the state of West Bengal has conferred an Award of Excellence on a Telugu actor, reflecting the growing national appreciation of Telugu cinema’s cultural and artistic contributions to Indian cinema. The honour coincides with a significant milestone in Shri Mohan Babu’s illustrious career—50 years of exceptional contribution to Indian cinema. From humble beginnings to becoming one of the most respected figures in the film industry, his journey is widely regarded as a testament to discipline, perseverance and artistic integrity.

Over five decades, Shri Mohan Babu has made an indelible mark through a diverse body of work spanning multiple genres and languages. Apart from his achievements as an actor and producer, his role as an educationist and his contributions to social upliftment have earned him admiration beyond the world of cinema.

The award is seen not only as a personal honour for Shri Mohan Babu but also as a moment of pride for Telugu



people everywhere, reaffirming the national stature of Telugu cinema and its rich cultural legacy.

The conferment by West Bengal, a state renowned for its own artistic and cinematic heritage, symbolises India’s unity in diversity and the idea that artistic excellence transcends language and regional boundaries.

As the nation celebrates Republic Day, this recognition stands as a powerful reminder that contributions to art and culture belong to the country as a whole, enriching India’s shared cinematic and cultural heritage.

Hindi films have lost their roots, are fake and money-driven: Prakash Raj



Unlike Malayalam and Tamil cinema, which he hailed for their strong, content-driven storytelling, actor Prakash Raj said mainstream Hindi cinema has lost its roots, becoming increasingly “fake” and “money-oriented.” Speaking at the ongoing ninth edition of the Kerala Literature Festival (KLF) on Saturday, January 24, the award-winning actor criticised Hindi films for their artificiality, saying they have become like a “Madame Tussauds museum” where everything seems beautiful with no substance. “In the present context, I feel Malayalam and Tamil cinema are making very strong films... Hindi cinema, on the other hand, has lost its roots. Everything looks beautiful, wonderful, like plastic, as you see in the Madame Tussauds museum. “We (the South) still have stories to

tell, the new young directors of Tamil are talking about Dalit issues. And that gives so much of hope,” said Raj, renowned for his work across Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Kannada, and Malayalam cinema, in a session titled “The Artist I Became.” The 60-year-old filmmaker-actor further analysed what ails Hindi cinema, tracing its decline to the post-multiplex era, when it began catering primarily to urban audiences. Raj, known for his performances in hit films such as “Singham” and “Wanted”, argued that the industry’s focus on glamour and surface-level aesthetics has weakened its emotional connection with viewers. “After multiplexes, the Bombay film industry started making films only for multiplexes. Very cute films and things like that. Because they were running well. They went into that Page 3 culture, and with that lost the touch with rural Rajasthan and Bihar,” he explained. This shift, he argued, also led to the decline of the nation-building narratives that once defined post-independence Hindi cinema. To buttress his point, Raj cited the 1977 blockbuster “Amar Akbar Anthony”, and its famous scene of three men from different religions donating blood to save one person, reflecting shared values, social harmony and collective aspirations. “Now, it’s not like that anymore. Today, it’s all about money and appearances — reels, page 3 coverage, and loud self-promotion. In the process, I feel the industry has lost its connection with the audience,” he concluded. The four-day literary extravaganza is hosting over 400 speakers, including Nobel Laureates Abdulrazak Gurnah and Abhijit Banerjee, astronaut Sunita Williams, author Kiran Desai, essayist Pico Iyer, Jnanpith winner Pratibha Ray, sports icons Rohan Bopanna and Ben Johnson, and Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales. KLF 2026, now in its ninth edition, will come to a close on January 25.

Rajinikanth gifts gold chain to Madurai fan who sells parottas at Rs 5 a piece

Superstar Rajinikanth, who recently met an ardent fan of his from Madurai who runs an eatery in which he sells parottas at an economical price of Rs five a piece for the sake of the poor, has now gifted the fan a gold chain in appreciation of his honourable efforts. Sources close to the actor shared pictures of the actor meeting his ardent fan, Rajini Sekar from Madurai along his family members. They also shared a picture of the actor gifting the fan a gold chain. The pictures have now gone viral on the Internet.

On the work front, Rajinikanth is currently work-

On the work front, Rajinikanth is currently working on director Nelson's 'Jailer 2'.

ing on director Nelson's 'Jailer 2'. The actor had only recently confirmed that he would be



THE FEEL-GOOD ROMANTIC ENTERTAINER SKY TRAILER OUT NOW; Gearing up for a grand theatrical release on Feb 6

The upcoming film Sky stars Murali Krishnam raju, Shruti Shetty, and Anand in the lead roles. The film is produced under the banner of Valour Entertainment Studios by Nagireddy Guntaka, Srilakshmi Guntaka, Murali Krishnam raju, and Prithvi Pericherla. The movie is directed by Prudhvi Pericherla. With this film, a new music director, Shiva Prasad, is being introduced to the industry. Sky is all set for a grand theatrical release on February 6. The trailer of Sky was released today. It opens with fun and lively moments shared between friends. The



journey of friendship turning into love between the hero and heroine is beautifully portrayed, with emotions that feel natural and engaging. The trailer clearly shows that the heroine’s character has been designed with strength and depth. The hero’s personal life flashback is touching and emotional. Due to certain misunderstandings, conflicts arise in the love story between the lead pair. How the couple reunites, and what tragic incident from the hero’s past involving his father shaped his life, can only be experienced on the big screen.

GOVINDA’S SON YASHVARDHAN AHUJA TO MAKE BOLLYWOOD DEBUT: REPORT

Filmmaker Sajid Khan has returned to direction after a long break. He has started shooting for his upcoming horror film titled Hundred. According to reports, the film went on floors on January 23 at Mumbai’s Film City. The makers chose Basant Panchmi as the special day to begin filming. This project marks Sajid Khan’s comeback to filmmaking and also signals a major shift from his usual comedy genre to horror. Hundred will introduce Yashvardhan Ahuja to Bollywood. He is the son of veteran actor Govinda and Sunita Ahuja. The film also stars Nitanshi Goel, who recently gained popularity for her role in Laapataa Ladies (2024). The film is being produced by



Amar Butala’s Guilty By Association Media along with Balaji Telefilms, headed by Ekta Kapoor and Shobha Kapoor. Producer Amar Butala has worked on several successful films in the past. He produced Mission Majnu (2023) and co-produced hit films such as Mission Mangal, Kesari, Total Dhamaal, Tubelight, and Bajrangi Bhaijaan.

Nayanthara's character poster from Mammooty, Mohanlal-starrer 'Patriot' released

The makers of director Mahesh Narayanan’s eagerly-awaited thriller ‘Patriot’, featuring both superstars of Malayalam cinema – Mammooty and Mohanlal in the lead, on Sunday released the character poster of actress Nayanthara in the film, much to the delight of fans and film buffs. The makers, through the film’s official instagram handle, shared the poster and wrote, “Presenting #Nayanthara in #Patriot. Dissent is patriotic. In a world full of traitors, be a Patriot!”

Interestingly, the film poster released by the unit had a bit of morse code on it. Fans were quick to decipher the morse code and claimed that it read “April 23rd release”. It may be recalled that IANS had reported earlier that sources had hinted at the possibility of the film releasing on April 23 this year.

Although there has been no official announcement on the release date of the film, sources in the industry had said that the film was likely to hit screens on April 23 this year. It may be recalled that on January 4 this year, the makers of the



film had announced that the unit had wrapped up the film’s shooting. They wrote, “That’s a wrap. Blood, sweat, belief. #PATRIOT marches on. See you on the Big screen.” They also shared a BTS video of all the stars on the sets on the occasion. The film, which has triggered huge expectations ever since it was announced, also features acclaimed actors Fahadh Faasil, Kunchacko Boban, Nayanthara, and Revathy in addition to the two Malayalam superstars.

A teaser which the makers released last year went on to amplify the expectations of fans and film buffs.

The teaser begins with a voiceover which says, “I remember there was a time when this nation was controlled by the two

of them. Together. Over these years, what they earned wasn’t just followers. Faith. Trust.”

We then see a series of intriguing but intense scenes and hear Mammooty’s voice say, “They are going to bring social score to people.” We next hear Mohanlal, who appears to play an army general in the film, say, “There are three of us. Do you think you can stop us?”

The teaser then gives us an idea that there is a program called Periscope and that Kunchacko Boban plays a character called Daniel.

Nayanthara is heard asking, “This program which is part of the student laptop scheme. Is that similar to Periscope?” We also hear another voice, asking, “Is this program watching them secretly?” The teaser ends with Mammooty asking someone to complete the sentence, “Great Indian traitor... or Patriot.” Overall, the teaser gives the impression that the film will revolve around a group of socially responsible individuals trying to thwart an illegal attempt by the government to monitor its citizens.

Nikhil, Bharat Krishnamachari, Pixel Studio's ambitious pan India project Swayambhu to have a grand release in theaters worldwide on April 10th

Nikhil, who received nationwide acclaim with the pan-India blockbuster Karthikeya 2, is now set to entertain the audience with his ambitious 20th film ‘Swayambhu’. This historical action epic, produced on a grand scale, is directed by Bharat Krishnamachari. Samyukta and Nabha Natesh are the heroines. Produced by Bhuvan and Sreekar under the banner of Pixel Studios. Presented by Tagore Madhu. With top-class production values and a powerful pan-India vision, Swayambhu Nikhil stands out as one of the most ambitious ventures. Swayambhu is set to have a grand release in theaters worldwide on April 10th. This is the perfect date for a summer release.

The VFX is going to be amazing. Top VFX companies in India are working on this film. The makers are working with full commitment to deliver a world-class output, taking the necessary time to bring the visual wonder to the audience. Swayambhu is the highest budget film in Nikhil’s career. After Karthikeya 2, it is the film that has huge buzz at the pan India level. Nikhil underwent a complete physical transformation and intense training for his role in this. The promotional content released so far has raised huge expectations for the film.



beginning work on director Cibi Chakravarthy’s film in April this year. Rajinikanth, who met his fans outside his residence on the festival day of Pongal earlier this month, was asked about his eagerly-awaited upcoming film with director Cibi Chakravarthy, which is being produced by actor Kamal Haasan’s production house Raaj Kamal Films International. Responding to the question, Rajinikanth had said, “Shooting is to begin in April this year. It will be a proper commercial entertainer.” The film has triggered excitement ever since actor, producer and politician Kamal Haasan announced that his production house,

Raaj Kamal Films International (RKFI), would be producing the film, tentatively being referred to as #Thalaivar173. It may be recalled that one of Tamil cinema’s most successful directors, Sundar C, was to originally direct this film, which Kamal Haasan had said would be a magnum opus. However, to everybody’s surprise, director Sundar C later opted out of the project. Soon after Sundar C’s exit, the makers, in the new year, announced that director Cibi Chakravarthy would be directing the film. Music for the film, which has the tag line ‘Every family has a hero’ is to be scored by Anirudh.