

OM NAMO VENKATESAYA

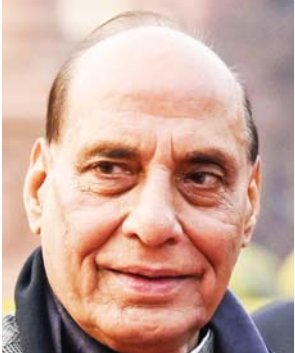
03-01-2026

Total pilgrims: 88,662
Tonsures: 24,417
Hundi kanukalu: 5.05Cr
Waiting Compartments: Outside
Lines adding at Silathoranam.

Approx. Darsan Time for Sarvadarshanam (with-out SSD Tokens) :15H

TO BOOK YOUR ADS CALL

99484 80279, 73307 78889



NATION | NEWS

Rajnath to commission ICG ship Samudra Pratap in Goa on Jan 5



WORLD | NEWS

Trump says US will 'run' Venezuela and 'FIX OIL INFRASTRUCTURE'

SPORTS | NEWS

BCCI Sent Big 'Ruturaj Gaikwad' Message Over New Zealand ODIs Squad, Asked To Drop This Star



INBRIEF

Cong expresses 'grave concern' over US action in Venezuela



New Delhi (TSIT): The Congress on Sunday expressed "grave concern" over the US action in Venezuela and the "capturing" of President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, calling the entire operation a violation of international law.Jairam Ramesh, General Secretary in-charge Communications, Congress, in a post on X, said, "The INC expresses very grave concern on US actions relating to Venezuela in the past 24 hours. Settled principles of international law cannot be violated unilaterally."The Congress reaction to the international development coincided with a protest by Left parties on Sunday at New Delhi's Jantar Mantar. The CPI(M) leadership condemned the US for what they described as an "imperialist military aggression" against Venezuela, calling for worldwide condemnation and urging the Centre to take a clear and firm stand against the action. Another 24 lakh cases involve six or more voters being linked to a single father.

IAF commemorates 25th anniversary of Tejas LCA's first flight

New Delhi (TSIT) : The Indian Air Force on Sunday commemorated the 25th anniversary of home grown Tejas Light Combat Aircraft's (LCA) historic first flight. "On the 25th anniversary of Tejas LCA's historic first flight, #IAF reflects on enduring partnership in building this fighter. Congratulations to ADA's innovative scientists, HAL's skilled engineers, brave IAF & IN test pilots/engineers, and all IAF personnel who've championed self-reliance. Sky is the limit!" said the IAF in a post on social media. The historic first flight of Tejas occurred on January 4, 2001, with Wing Commander Rajiv Kothiyal piloting the Technology Demonstrator (TD-1) from Bengaluru's HAL Airport. This flight initiated the flight testing phase for the aircraft, eventually



leading to its induction into the Indian Air Force and the development of advanced variants like the Tejas Mk1A. The government had established the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) programme in 1983 with the initial goal of developing a new light combat aircraft to replace the ageing fleet of the IAF. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) recently secured a major order for 97 additional LCA Tejas Mk-1A fighters in a deal worth over Rs 62,370 crore, finalised in late 2025.

Telangana steps up legal efforts to stall AP's Polavaram Nallamala Sagar project



Hyderabad (TSIT): Telangana government has intensified its legal battle to halt Andhra Pradesh's proposed Polavaram Nallamala Sagar (Banakacherla link) project, which it alleges is being taken up without statutory approvals and in violation of established guidelines.

Ahead of the hearing of the State's writ petition in the Supreme Court of India scheduled for Monday, Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy and Irrigation Minister N. Uttam Kumar Reddy on Sunday held a detailed meeting in Mumbai with senior Supreme Court advocate Abhishek Singhvi. During

Telangana has moved the Supreme Court seeking an immediate stay on Andhra Pradesh's Polavaram-Banakacherla (Nallamala Sagar) link project, alleging it is being executed without mandatory approvals and in violation of statutory and CWC guidelines.

the meeting, the Chief Minister and the Irrigation Minister instructed the legal team to present a strong and comprehensive case on behalf of Telangana. They also directed irrigation department officials to keep

all technical data, documents, and supporting evidence ready to effectively substantiate the State's objections before the court.

The Telangana government has recently filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court seeking an immediate stay on the expansion works being undertaken by the Andhra Pradesh government to link Polavaram with Banakacherla or Nallamala Sagar, allegedly without obtaining mandatory approvals. In its petition, Telangana has urged the court to direct the Polavaram Project Authority to stop these works forthwith.

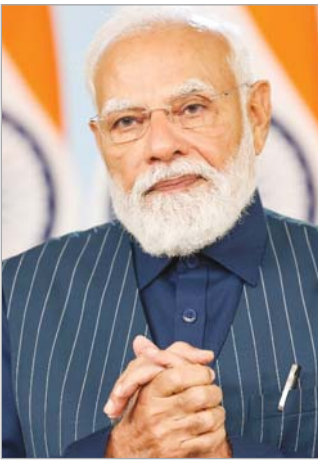
The State has maintained that the Polavaram project must strictly adhere to the scope originally approved, and that any expansion or linking works are illegal and untenable. It has objected to the Centre's consideration of pre-feasibility reports for the Nallamala Sagar project without addressing Telangana's concerns, terming the process arbitrary.

India making strong efforts to host 2036 Olympics: PM Modi

Varanasi (TSIT) : Underlining India's growing sporting ambitions, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the country is making strong and sustained efforts to host the 2036 Olympic Games. Addressing the inaugural ceremony of the 72nd National Volleyball Championship virtually via video conferencing, PM Modi highlighted India's recent experience and capability in successfully hosting major global sporting events.

"In the past decade, more than 20 major international events have been held in various cities, including the U-17 FIFA World Cup, the Hockey World Cup, and major chess tournaments," PM Modi said.

The Prime Minister also spoke about the 2030 Commonwealth Games, which will be held in the country, and said that the nation is leaving no stone unturned in securing the hosting rights for the 2036 Olympic Games.



The 2030 Commonwealth Games will be held in India. India is preparing with full strength to host the 2036 Olympics said PM Modi.

PM Narendra Modi also spoke about the greatness of the volleyball game and how it connects players through a match-winning spirit. The Prime Minister underlined

that volleyball is not an ordinary sport, as it is a game of balance and cooperation, where determination is reflected in the effort to keep the ball always lifted.

He highlighted that volleyball connects players with team spirit, with every player guided by the mantra, 'Team First'. He emphasised that while each player may possess different skills, all play for the victory of their team.

The 72nd National Volleyball Tournament, being held from January 4 to 11, will witness participation from across India, with over 1,000 players competing as part of 58 teams representing various states and institutions. The tournament is expected to showcase high standards of competition, sportsmanship, and talent in Indian volleyball. It further enhances the city's profile as a hub for major national events, aligning with its expanding role in hosting significant cultural and sporting initiatives.

Congress leaders deserve to be 'hanged' for injustice to Telangana: KTR

Hyderabad (TSIT) : Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) Working President K.T. Rama Rao (KTR) said on Sunday that the Congress leaders would have to be hanged for betraying Telangana over the river water sharing issue, adding that that the current state government led by Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy has failed over governance in the state. He also added: "If executions are to be carried out, I don't



know how many times Congress leaders would have to be hanged."

He was reacting to Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's remark that the former Chief

Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR) and former State Irrigation Minister T. Harish Rao deserved to be hanged for injustice to the state in river water sharing. The BRS leader hit out at Revanth Reddy for using abusive words for him and Harish Rao while speaking in the State Assembly on Saturday night.

"Revanth can abuse in one language, if I want I can abuse him back in three languages

but I will not do that. He is hiding his fears of incapability and insecurity that is why he has abused us in the State Assembly," KTR said.

"Is this not unparliamentary, the Assembly Speaker did not intervene but was a mute spectator," the BRS leader added. On the Chief Minister's remarks that KCR and Harish Rao deserved to be hanged, the BRS leader said if any leader was to be hanged, it is Rahul Gandhi.

New milestone for aviation, says CM Chandrababu Naidu

Amaravati (TSIT): Amaravati: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday hailed the successful validation flight at Bhogapuram Greenfield International Airport as a major milestone for the state's aviation sector.

He said the project would strengthen regional connectivity and provide a significant boost to the development of Uttaraandhra. The Chief Minister thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for



his vision and leadership, noting that the airport was planned and initiated during the NDA government's ten-

ure between 2014 and 2019. The first commercial validation flight, operated by Air India from New Delhi, landed safely at the Bhogapuram Airport in Vizianagaram district, around 50 km from Visakhapatnam. Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu, Vizianagaram MP Kaliseti Appala Naidu and senior officials travelled on the test flight, which touched down on the 3.8-km-long runway, the longest in the country.

DGCA bans use of power banks for charging devices during flights

New Delhi (TSIT): The Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Sunday clarified that passengers are not allowed to use power banks to charge mobile phones or any other electronic devices during flights, citing serious safety concerns linked to lithium batteries. In a statement, the aviation regulator said power banks cannot be used for charging gadgets at any time during a flight, including through aircraft seat power outlets.

Bangladesh will not travel to India for T20 WC: Govt advisor Asif Nazrul

New Delhi (TSIT): Bangladesh will not travel to India to play in the T20 World Cup, said Asif Nazrul, an advisor to Bangladesh who also oversees the country's youth and sports ministry.

After ongoing tensions between India and Bangladesh led to the removal of pacer Mustafizur Rahman from the Kolkata Knight Riders' squad for the upcoming IPL, the country's cricket board called an emergency meeting of BCB officials and concerned authorities to determine the next course of action follow-



ing Mustafizur's release from the IPL. In a Facebook post, Nazrul said that during the meeting, the BCB decided against travelling to India for

Bangladesh will not go to India to play the World Cup. The Bangladesh Cricket Board has taken this decision today, which has been taken in the context of the aggressive communal policies of the Indian Cricket Board," he said.

the T20 World Cup. Rahman, who became the most expensive Bangladeshi player ever after KKR secured his services for Rs 9.20 crore at last month's mini-auction, was

released from the IPL squad following instructions from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

With the BCCI not allowing Rahman to play in India following a demand by some people due to the killing of Hindus by mobs in Bangladesh, Nazrul expressed apprehension about the safety of its players in India and therefore sought a change of venue. "I have instructed the Cricket Control Board to submit a written explanation of the entire matter to the ICC.

CM Stalin honours best weavers, exporters of Tamil Nadu

CHENNAI (TSIT): Chief Minister MK Stalin on Saturday presented State-level awards to the best handloom weavers for silk and cotton, besides best handloom exporters for the year 2024-25. The first prize for the best handloom weaver award for silk was awarded to MR Gopinathan of Arani Silk Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society. The second prize was given to members of Thirubuvanam and Kanchipuram Anna Silk Handloom Weavers



The CM gave away cheques for Rs 20 lac & certificates of appreciation to 5 awardees.

Cooperative Society, represented by V Rajalakshmi and P Gowri. The third prize went to members of Thirubuvanam and Tirupur Silk Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society.

Indian army chief begins official visit to UAE to boost defence ties

New Delhi, Jan 4 : India's Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi on Sunday departed for an official two-day visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in a key step in strengthening bilateral military and strategic cooperation.

The trip underscores growing defence collaboration under the broader India-UAE strategic partnership, which has been deepening in recent years through high-level engagements and joint initiatives across security and defence sectors.

"#GeneralUpendraDwivedi, #COAS, proceeded on an official visit to the United Arab Emirates #UAE today. The visit underscores a shared commitment to deepening mutual understanding, enhancing cooperation in areas of



common interest and advancing bilateral #DefenceCooperation between the two nations", the India Army's Additional Directorate General, Public Information (ADG-PI) posted on X. General Dwivedi's trip reflects India's

focus on strengthening military diplomacy with strategic partners in the Gulf, a region pivotal for security, economic, and geopolitical interests.

India and the UAE maintain a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, with defence cooperation emerging as a core pillar alongside trade, energy and cultural exchange. Previous military engagements between the two nations, including reciprocal visits by senior commanders and joint discussions on capability building and defence industry collaboration, highlight the sustained momentum of this bilateral relationship. The Indian Army chief's visit is expected to involve meetings with senior UAE military officials to explore further cooperation in defence innovation, joint exercises and strategic dialogues.

Late last month, an Indian Army contingent reached the Gulf nation to participate in the second edition of the joint military Exercise 'Desert Cyclone-II', to be conducted at Abu Dhabi, from December 18 to 30.

"The aim of the exercise is to enhance interoperability and foster defence cooperation between the Indian Army and the UAE Land Forces through joint training in an urban environment, with a focus on sub-conventional operations under a United Nations mandate, enabling both forces to operate together in peacekeeping, counter-terrorism and stability operations," the Defence Ministry said in a statement.

Ram Rahim granted 40-day parole again, critics raise questions

Rohtak, Jan 4: Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, who is serving a 20-year prison sentence for raping two of his disciples, has been granted a 40-day parole once again, sources said on Sunday. Singh is currently lodged at Sunaria jail in Haryana's Rohtak district. This is the latest in a series of paroles and furloughs granted to the self-styled godman since his conviction in 2017. He was earlier given a 40-day parole in August last year. In addition, he was grant-



ed a 21-day furlough in April and a 30-day parole in January ahead of the February 5 Delhi assembly elections. He was also allowed a 20-day parole in October 2024, days before the Haryana assembly polls, and a 21-day furlough in August 2024.

Singh was sentenced in 2017 to 20 years' imprisonment for raping two of his disciples. In 2019, he and three others were also convicted in the murder of a journalist more than 16 years ago. Prior to the latest parole, Singh had been out of jail on parole or furlough 14 times since his conviction, a fact that has repeatedly drawn criticism from Sikh organisations, including the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. On several occasions in the past, Singh reportedly stayed at the Dera Sacha Sauda ashram in Uttar Pradesh's Baghpat district while out of prison. The Sirsa-based sect has a significant number of followers across Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and other states, with a strong presence in districts such as Sirsa, Fatehabad, Kurukshetra, Kaithal and Hisar.

Octogenarian loses Rs 7 crore in 'digital arrest' fraud in Hyderabad

HYDERABAD: An 81-year-old man here was duped of Rs 7.12 crore in a "digital arrest" scam after fraudsters posing as Mumbai Police officers threatened him of involvement in a drug trafficking racket and extorted the amount on the pretext of "verification", police said on Sunday.

The cyber fraudsters called the victim on October 27 last year claiming to be from a courier company and informed that a parcel was sent on his name from Mumbai to Thailand in which MDMA narcotic drug, passports and some debit and credit cards were found.

They further told him that they intercepted the parcel and forwarded the case to Mumbai police.



Later, another caller called him impersonating as an official from Mumbai police and told him that he is involved in a big racket of drug trafficking, money laundering and terrorist activities, a police official said. On the pretext of verification of his

bank account details and investments, the caller then demanded him to transfer amount in the accounts provided by them in order to "come out of the case" and that the money will be returned if the old man was found to be innocent. The vic-

tim was instructed not to inform anyone about the matter.

The octogenarian transferred Rs 7.12 crore over a period of two months. The offenders then demanded him to transfer another Rs 1.2 crore after which he realised that he was duped by fraudsters and approached the Telangana Cyber Security Bureau (TGCSB) on December 30.

Based on the complaint, a case was registered, police said adding the victim earlier did business.

Digital arrest is a fraud where imposters posing as officials of police department or other investigating agencies dupe the victims of money, after confining them via video calls.

Around 500 two-wheelers gutted in fire at Thrissur railway station parking area

THRISSUR: Around 500 two-wheelers were gutted after a fire broke out at the parking area of the railway station here on Sunday. Fire and Rescue Service officials said. The blaze erupted at the paid-parking shed at around 6.20 am, and a distress call was received at around 6.40 am, the official added.

A spark from an electric line that fell on a two-wheeler parked with a cover on it, was suspected to be the cause of the fire. Officials estimated that around 500 two-wheelers were parked in the shed, and a majority of them were gutted in the incident.

Five fire tenders were deployed, and the blaze was brought under control by around 7.45 am, officials said. All measures were taken to prevent the fire from spreading to the railway station platforms and causing further damage.

Even though a locomotive was parked on the railway track near the spot where the fire accident occurred, the Railways has not confirmed any major damage to it, the officer said. Apart from the two-wheelers, the



entire shed covered with tin sheets was damaged in the fire, the official said.

Police and railway authorities have launched a probe to ascertain the exact cause of the fire, fire officials added. Thrissur West Police registered a case in connection with the fire incident and launched an investigation. As per the FIR, around 500 two-wheelers were gutted in the fire, along with a parking fee printing machine belonging to Aswathy Enterprises, which holds the contract to operate the parking facility on the western side of the railway station.

Apart from this, two mobile phones belonging to employees of Aswathy Enterprises and Rs 10,000 in cash were also lost in the fire, the FIR said. State Police Chief Ravada A Chandrasekhar visited the

spot and assessed the situation. "We have made a preliminary assessment based on the statements of employees at the parking area. A special team led by an Additional Superintendent of Police, including an Assistant Commissioner and Circle Inspectors, has been constituted," he told reporters. He said that in the wake of the incident, a decision has been taken to conduct fire audits at paid parking facilities across Kerala.

"The Superintendent of Police (Railway) has been tasked with this. He will examine the matter and submit a report. In addition, a joint effort will be made to enhance security apparatus involving local police, railway police and the Railway Protection Force (RPF)," Chandrasekhar said. He said preliminary statements indicated that a spark from an electric line may have caused the fire, but further investigation is required to confirm it. Revenue Minister K Rajan also visited the spot and assessed the situation. He said a thorough audit would be conducted to ensure such incidents do not occur again.

Rajnath to commission ICG ship Samudra Pratap in Goa on Jan 5

PANAJI: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will commission Indian Coast Guard ship 'Samudra Pratap', the first of two pollution control vessels, in Goa on Monday.

The vessel is equipped with advanced systems to detect oil spills, enabling comprehensive pollution response operations within the Exclusive Economic Zone and beyond.

"It is capable of high precision operations, recover pollutants from viscous oil, analyse contaminants, and separate oil from contaminated water," the Indian Coast Guard said.

Defence Minister Singh will commission the ship Samudra Pratap at Goa Shipyard Limited, Vasco, in South Goa on Monday, it said.

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, Indian Coast Guard Director General Paramesh Sivamani and other dignitaries will be present on the occasion. As per the ICG, the ship built by the Goa Shipyard Limited has over 60 per cent indigenous content.

The 114.5 metres long and 4,200-ton vessel boasts a speed of more than 22 knots and an endurance of 6,000 nautical



miles, significantly enhancing the ICG's pollution response, fire-fighting and maritime safety and security capabilities.

The vessel is equipped with state-of-the-art technology, including a 30mm CRN-91 gun, two 12.7mm stabilised remote-controlled guns with integrated fire control systems, an indigenously developed integrated bridge system, integrated platform management system, automated power management system, and a high-capacity external firefighting system, as per the ICG. The ship will be based at ICG's Kochi base.

Gang rape took place in ambulance, not van: Police

Faridabad, Jan 4: A fresh revelation has emerged in the gang rape case of a 25-year-old woman in Faridabad, with police confirming that the crime was committed inside a private hospital's ambulance and not a van, as initially believed.

A senior investigating officer on Sunday said the two accused were employed as a driver and helper on the ambulance of a private hospital. Both men, natives of Mathura and Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh, have been arrested and remanded to judicial custody. The survivor continues to remain hospitalised, six days after the incident.

Meanwhile, a purported video of the victim has surfaced in which she claims that after offering her a lift, one of the accused transferred Rs 600 to her PayTM account before locking the vehicle and snatching her mobile phone. She alleged that despite shouting for help amid dense fog, no assistance came. Police said the authenticity of the video is yet to be verified.

According to investigators, once the woman recovers, an identification parade will be conducted before a magistrate, following which the accused will be brought on a production warrant for further questioning. As per police records, the woman had visited a friend's house in Sector 23 on Monday evening. While returning, she reached Metro Chowk around midnight, where the accused offered her a lift. Instead of taking her home.



According to police, Ram Lal, a resident of Narayan Vihar, reported that his buffalo and calf had gone missing about a month ago.

on Sunday. A veterinary medical board was constituted, and the buffalo was taken to a government veterinary hospital in Kota's Mokhapada area for examination. After examining the teeth and physical condition of the animal, the veterinary doctors concluded that the buffalo was approximately four to five years old, and not seven years as claimed by Indrajit, she said.

Based on the medical report and supporting evidence, police confirmed Lal's claim and handed over the buffalo and calf to him on Saturday late evening, she further said. The other claimant, Inderjit, however, was not satisfied with the decision, upon which he was asked to produce evidence, but he failed, and the buffalo was finally handed over to Ramlal, the CI said.

Priyanka named chairperson of Congress screening committee for Assam ahead of 2026 polls

New Delhi, Jan 4: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has been appointed chairperson of the party's screening committee for the selection of candidates in Assam, which is set to go to Assembly polls in barely three months. Assam is among the key states heading for high-stakes elections in 2026, along with West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

According to a report, the Congress has also named veteran leader Madhusudan Mistry as head of the screen-

ing committee for Kerala, former Chhattisgarh deputy chief minister T S Singh Deo for Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, and senior leader B K Hariprasad for West Bengal. In Assam, the Congress is eyeing a comeback by forging alliances with other opposition parties to challenge the BJP, which has been in power since 2016. The appointment of Priyanka Gandhi is being seen as a significant move, as it marks the first time a member of the Gandhi family has been given charge of a state-level



screening committee.

As chairperson, Priyanka Gandhi will play a key role in finalising the party's candidate list and steering alliance talks with smaller parties. Her close aides, Lok Sabha MPs Imran Masood and Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka, along with Sirivella Prasad, have been appointed as members of the Assam screening committee. Gaurav Gogoi, son of former Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi, is being seen as a frontrunner from the Congress camp.

Gogoi is currently the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, next to Rahul Gandhi. Party sources believe Priyanka Gandhi's involvement could give a strong push to the Congress campaign and bolster Gogoi's challenge against the BJP.

Assam is considered a crucial battleground, with the last Assembly elections seeing the BJP-led NDA winning 75 seats in the 126-member House, while the Congress-led alliance secured 50 seats. Notably, the vote share difference

between the two blocs was just 1.6 per cent. Priyanka Gandhi, who entered active politics in 2019, faced a setback in the 2022 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, where the Congress performed poorly under her supervision. However, in recent months, she has been on the offensive, taking on the BJP in Parliament, leading protests on issues ranging from voter roll revision to MGNREGA-related legislation, and drawing attention for her sharp interventions and public presence.

Case registered over alleged hate speech on social media in Karkala

Karkala, Jan 4: Karkala Rural Police have registered a case against a man for allegedly posting content on social media that promotes communal hatred and disrupts public harmony. According to police sources, the case was registered based on a complaint filed by Rudresh, an official at the Karkala Rural Police Station. During routine monitoring of social media platforms, the police noticed a post published at around 4:45 pm on January 3 on a Facebook page titled 'Sudeep Shetty Nitte'.

In the post, it was stated



that if Hindu-Muslim harmony is truly desired, the so-called harmony committees have many important responsibilities to address. Instead of that, there is no need to organize programs like 'Dhaf Duf Dum' during Hindu processions. The post further stated that if they

genuinely care about harmony, they should work to eliminate issues such as love jihad, cow slaughter, terrorism, attacks on Hindu processions, spitting on food, attacks on Hindu religious places, encroachments, assaults, thefts, and actions that disturb social peace.

BWSSB Acts Swiftly on Lingarajapuram Contamination: Robotic Probe Launched; Issue to be Resolved by Monday Evening



Bengaluru : The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) has taken serious cognizance of reports regarding water contami-

nation in the Lingarajapuram area. Acting swiftly to protect public health, the Board has immediately stopped the water supply to the

affected zones.

In a bid to identify the source of contamination with precision and speed, BWSSB has launched an intensive investigation utilizing advanced robotic technology alongside dedicated ground staff. "We are using every technological resource available to trace the fault line without digging up the entire area blindly" BWSSB Chairman Dr. Ram Prasath Manohar stated.

'Sanchari Kaveri' To ensure residents do not face water scarcity during this repair period, BWSSB has already deployed 'Sanchari Kaveri' mobile tankers. Free, clean potable water is being supplied to all affected households since yesterday.

MLA Janardhana Reddy targeted in conspiracy to eliminate him, police also involved: Opposition leader R. Ashok



Ballari : opposition leader R. Ashok demanded that In Ballari, a conspiracy was hatched to eliminate MLA Janardhana Reddy. Since the police are also involved in this case, it should be handed over to a judicial or CBI inquiry.

Speaking at a press conference, he said that while people expected the government to do good for them in the new year, opposition party leaders are instead being targeted. MLA Nara Bharat Reddy brought thousands of people and attacked MLA Janardhana Reddy's house. The police provided support for this. Videos recorded on mobiles clearly show who used the gun. Yet, the police are still saying the killer hasn't been caught. Police stations have now turned into Congress offices. Putting up banners is not wrong, but putting them on someone's house is wrong. They came holding beer bottles in their hands, brought private gunmen, and put up banners on the house compound. Therefore, this case should be handed over to CBI or a judicial inquiry. We will also

appeal to the Governor about this. We will request that instructions be given to the state government to conduct an inquiry, he informed.

The conspiracy to eliminate MLA Janardhana Reddy is a direct allegation I am making. If Sriramulu hadn't come, even more problems would have arisen. The home minister should have called the person in danger and provided protection. But the home minister called the one who fired the gun and inquired about his well-being. We are now seeing the results of the transfer racket. For the first time in Karnataka's history, someone has come to an MLA's house and fired a gun. As the Congress government's term is nearing its end, people will throw Congress MLAs into the trash bin, he said.

A Valmiki corporation officer committed suicide and died. In Raichur, a police officer died due to pressure. CM Siddaramaiah himself tried to slap a police officer on the cheek. In this case, they have suspended the SP. They have taken such action to twist the matter. This is

not right, he said.

There is nothing here that needs fact-checking. It is clear to everyone whose fault it is. Fact-checking is being done to pin the blame on BJP. According to the information provided by the police, Bharat Reddy himself came to Janardhana Reddy's house with more than a thousand supporters. The police know exactly from which gun the fired bullet came. But senior officials are not opening their mouths. At least now, the government should open its mouth and tell the truth. Now even the intelligence department has effectively died, he said.

Congress cannot stand the name of Rama. Maharshi Valmiki is our deity. But for Congress, none of this matters. We stand with BJP workers in Ballari. Not just one bullet was fired. Five or six bullets were fired. The culprits need to be exposed publicly. Strict action must be taken against the MLA's supporters and private gunmen. Corporation officials must reveal who gave permission to put up the banners, he insisted.

Mangaluru: Unidentified man found dead in lodge

Mangaluru, Jan 4: An unidentified man, aged around 40-45 years, who had checked into a lodge in the city, was found dead under suspicious circumstances. A case has been registered at Bunder police station.

According to the complaint, the unidentified man, who gave his name as Mani, had taken a room in the lodge on December 26. On the morning of December 31, when lodge staff attempted to speak to him as he was lying on the bed on the floor of the room, he did not respond. He was immediately shifted to Wenlock Hospital for treatment, where doctors declared that he had died before being



brought to the hospital.

The deceased is described as approximately 5.8 feet tall, dark-complexioned, with a black mark on the chest and a red thread tied on his right hand. He was wearing a brown T-shirt and light blue jeans.

Police have requested anyone with information about the identity of the deceased to contact Bunder police station.

Global Schools Group Hosts 800+ Students at Global One Championship 2025

Bengaluru : Global Schools Group successfully concluded its first-ever multi-sport inter-school tournament, the Global One Championship, which brought together 800+ students from across India, representing more than 25+ schools, for three days of energetic competition and collaboration. The event was held in Bengaluru, with students participating from Global Indian International School (GIIS), One World International School (OWIS), Witty International School and Glendale, showcasing remarkable teamwork, competitive spirit and sportsmanship.

The championship featured eight sports, including athletics, badminton, basketball,



chess, cricket, football, swimming, and table tennis. Students competed in the under-14 and under-17 categories for both boys and girls, with cricket conducted exclusively for boys. All events were live-streamed, allowing families across India to follow the action in real time.

The Opening Ceremony was hosted at OWIS Sarjapur, which set a positive and enthusiastic tone for the days ahead. The championship was conducted over three days of competitive sporting events, followed

by a Closing Ceremony and prize distribution on the fourth day, held at GIIS Whitefield, where students, coaches and school leaders came together to honour the exceptional performances and highlight the values of fair play and discipline that marked this year's championship. The tournament also included a dedicated sightseeing day for students travelling from outside Bengaluru, giving them an opportunity to experience the culture and landmarks of the city.

Concern over the Commission gearing up for voter list revision in the state: Dr. Anand Kumar

Bengaluru : Dr. Anand Kumar, National Coordinator of the AICC SC Department and in-charge of Maharashtra said that, The Central Election Commission has embarked on an attempt to weaken the very foundational pillar of democracy by conducting a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls, and now the fact that it is preparing to revise the voter list in the state as well is a matter of grave concern. Along with this, the opposition parties have taken up another dangerous and condemnable attempt to vitiate the political atmosphere by using one of the Commission's old surveys.

On one side is the Election Commission, and on the other, the opposition parties are engaged in misleading voters. They are involved in a massive conspiracy to weaken democracy. Basing themselves on an outdated survey conducted by the Commission in May this year, there is an attempt to wrongly portray the current political situation and mislead the public, which amounts to a conspiracy that strikes at democratic values, he alleged.

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, raised his voice regarding electoral irregularities in August this year. However, the Commission has so far not provided any clarification regarding the serious allegations of vote manipulation made by Rahul Gandhi. Meanwhile, the opposition parties in the state



are misleading the public by projecting figures related to the SWEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation) awareness activities, he criticized.

In a statement issued in this regard, he said that any survey or study conducted by the Commission reflects only the social, economic, and political conditions prevailing at that particular time; it cannot be used to conclude that the same situation continues years later. However, the opposition parties are concealing this basic truth and are creating confusion among the public by attempting to apply findings from old surveys to the present political context, which is condemnable.

Misinformation will damage public trust and lead to adverse consequences by eroding confidence in constitutional institutions like the Election Commission. Twisting and using the functioning of the Commission for political gain goes against the spirit of democracy. The opposition parties' resort to such old documents to divert public attention exposes their political weaknesses. Instead of engaging in political debate based on facts, descending into misinformation is an insult to the people, he said.

Furthermore, the Election Commission's readiness to undertake voter list revision in the state has given rise to several doubts. Creating an environment in which the very voting process—the cornerstone of democracy—comes under suspicion is an extremely dangerous development. In particular, there are serious doubts about whether the revision process will be conducted transparently, and it has raised grave questions about it being carried out unilaterally.

The timing, purpose, and methodology of revising the electoral rolls are of utmost importance. However, the Commission's recent actions are increasing anxiety among the general public instead of trust. There is a fear that lakhs of genuine voters may be excluded from the rolls, which amounts to a direct attack on democratic rights, he alleged.

Past experiences show that

in the name of voter list revision, the poor, Dalits, minorities, migrant workers, and the urban poor have been excluded from the rolls in large numbers. In this background, suspicions are growing stronger that the ongoing revision process is being carried out with the intention of promoting a particular political agenda, Dr. Anand Kumar expressed concern.

The Commission should have adopted complete impartiality, transparency, and a people-centric approach. However, implementing decisions unilaterally without providing adequate answers to the concerns raised by political parties and civil society is damaging the credibility of the Commission. Removing a name from the voter list effectively deprives that citizen of the right to vote. This is not merely a technical error; it is an assault on the soul of democracy. Any revision process must be carried out with public participation, wide awareness, and clear guidelines. But a clear lack of these is evident, he said.

Therefore, the Commission must immediately review this revision process. It is the Commission's duty to consult all political parties, social organizations, and experts, and to assure that no genuine voter is deprived of the right to vote. For democracy to remain strong, voter trust is essential. Any attempt that undermines this trust must be firmly opposed by the state, Dr. Anand Kumar stated.

Term insurance made mandatory for medical education staff

Bengaluru : In the wake of technical issues that led to a reduced insurance payout to the family of late IAS officer Mahantesh Bilagi, who died in a road accident last month, Medical Education and Skill Development Minister Dr Sharanaprakash Patil has directed that all doctors, officers and staff under his department mandatorily enrol for term insurance as a social security measure.

The issue came up during a governing council meeting of a medical college on Saturday, where a senior official from the Finance Department informed the meeting that the late officer had not updated his service status in the term insurance system after being promoted from the State Civil Services to the IAS. This oversight resulted in his family receiving nearly 50 lakh less than the entitled amount for an IAS officer in the event of death.

Taking serious note of



the lapse, Dr Patil immediately instructed Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) Mohammed Mohsin to issue a circular mandating all medical college and hospital doctors, officers and staff to pay term insurance premiums commensurate with their current salary and desig-

nation. This, the Minister said, would ensure that families receive the full entitled insurance amount in the unfortunate event of an employee's death. The Minister observed that many employees, particularly those in lower pay scales, may not have opted for adequate term insurance

due to financial constraints or lack of awareness. To address this, Dr Patil directed the ACS to convene a meeting with leading banks and insurance companies to offer department employees the best possible term insurance schemes at affordable premiums. The objective is to pro-

vide comprehensive financial security to the families of employees across all cadres. The Minister also asked senior officials to examine the feasibility of extending term insurance benefits to contract employees working in the department.

Outsourced Employees to Be Migrated to Contract Posts

In another employee-friendly decision, Dr Patil directed the ACS and Directors of all medical colleges and hospitals to consider absorbing experienced and meritorious outsourced employees into contract positions, strictly following the reservation roster system.

Instead of resorting to fresh recruitment to fill temporary vacancies, the Minister said institutions may identify eligible outsourced personnel with proven experience and migrate them to the contract category, ensuring continuity and fairness in employment.

EDITORIAL

It Is Time for India to Speak Up for its Christians

In recent years, we have witnessed a sharp rise in targeted violence against religious minorities across the country. With Christians in particular, there are disturbing patterns of attacks, vandalism of churches, and arrest of pastors on the allegation of forced conversion. The United Christian Forum (UCF) recorded 814 incidents of violence against Christians in 2024. In 2025 alone, 706 incidents were recorded. Other organisations, like Open Doors, reported an even higher figure, over 2,900 incidents from January to November 2025. On this Christmas, a celebration of joy, peace and harmony, was claimed to be a crime of forced conversion, triggering miscreants of certain organisations to mount attacks, displaying a disturbing trend of hatred against Christians.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, like last year on the occasion of Christmas, visited churches, met Christian leaders, and even extended wishes on a social media platform. It is a gesture that is worth appreciating. However, for a Christian like me, these symbolic acts lose all meaning when juxtaposed against his silence on the escalating attacks.

What good are platitudes when the fundamental right to celebrate one's faith without fear remains elusive? It would have been better to spend a minute to condemn the attacks and tell the organisations to stop creating an atmosphere of disharmony. The government's resounding silence is not only causing a deficiency of trust and a breaking of its promise of sabka sath sabka vikas (with all, development for all), but is also conveying a dangerous message.

We all know that the prime minister knows who the perpetrators are and which specific political ideology they are associated with. Take the case in Jabalpur, where a BJP city vice-president assaulted a visually impaired woman, used unacceptable derogatory words against her. To my knowledge, no leader from the party has come out in public to condemn the act. Does silence imply tacit endorsement? Condemning these affiliates might disrupt vote banks, but refraining from unequivocal condemnation, endorsing directly or indirectly, gives more power and immunity to such anti-social elements. What has become the situation of today is the visible result of the prolonged silence of the authorities on recurring attacks on churches. Assam is a case in point. Misguided, communally charged individuals entered a private premise and vandalised a crib and other decorations. Decorations within a school campus are claimed to be aiding forceful conversions with no evidence. Christian leaders from the Northeast and elsewhere, affiliated with the ruling party, have refrained from speaking out, but what about the lakhs of non-Christians, many of whom were educated in Christian institutions across the country? Though the perpetrators in the Nalbari incident are arrested, it would be meaningless if they are not punished as per law, and if the authority does not ensure security to Christians staying there. The news of the attacks on Christians in India is also reported by the international media. The hypocrisy is for the global audience to see. France's laïcité laws prohibit public displays of religious symbols, yet the authorities in Paris allow a grand Ganesha procession, embracing Hindu traditions. If Western nations can accommodate diversity, why has India grown intolerant toward Christianity? Meanwhile, large Hindu communities in the West celebrate other Hindu festivals publicly. What message do these attacks send to them? That their homeland rejects the very inclusivity they experience abroad? A few journalists and concerned citizens have highlighted these issues and their efforts are appreciated. Yet a Christian on a panel on a national news show indirectly justified the attacks, calling it an inevitable friction caused by the actions of "some crazy people in a country of 1.47 billion people."

ACT OF TERROR OR WAR?

The Trump Corollary To The Monroe Doctrine Reaches Venezuela

'Welcome to 2026, and under President Trump, America is back': These words by US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth best encapsulate the impact of 'Operation Absolute Resolve,' which resulted in the capture of Venezuelan socialist leader Nicolas Maduro. America is certainly back, in news headlines, as a dominating force in geopolitics, reclaiming influence in Latin America, and perhaps also back to its old ways as an architect of regime change. The operation was audacious: an integrated effort by the US Navy, Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 150 military aircraft from 20 different bases launched military strikes across Venezuela in the early hours of January 3. Turning off the electricity grid in Caracas, US forces entered Maduro's compound at 2:01 am local time - with the help of a confidential source who tracked Maduro's exact location. In a matter of minutes, Maduro was captured. This should come as no surprise: the US deployed more than a dozen warships and military aircraft off the coast of Venezuela since August 2025. Yet, Venezuela was never going to be an easy target. A country twice the size of Iraq, Venezuela has a population of 28 million and more than 130,000 active military personnel, 300,000 paramilitary, 229 military aircraft, a naval fleet of 34 vessels, 172 tanks, and 8,802 armoured vehicles. Conducting an operation on Venezuelan soil without any loss of US life and capturing the country's leader is no small feat. The drivers for a military attack in Venezuela A combination of factors contributed to Washington's decision to attack Venezuela and capture Maduro. First and foremost is oil. Venezuela is home to the world's largest oil reserves, at more than 300 billion barrels. In his recent press conference, Trump made no qualms about the US's interests in Venezuela's oil resources, stating that "very large United States oil companies, the biggest anywhere in the world, [will] go in, spend billions of dollars, fix the badly broken



infrastructure, the oil infrastructure, and start making money for the country." He even mentioned that the 'reconstruction' of Venezuela will be done with the support of and be paid for by US oil companies. The second driver is that Maduro is a dictator, and a socialist one at that. The 2024 and 2018 elections in Venezuela have been widely acknowledged to be fraudulent, and some even question the legitimacy of the 2013 elections that first brought Maduro into power. This is reinforced by Maduro's political lineage as the ideological successor to late Venezuelan socialist Hugo Chavez, who ruled Venezuela from 1999 until he died in 2013. Washington's attack in Venezuela falls in line with the "Trump Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine, outlined in the White House's National Security Strategy document as a "potent restoration of American power and priorities, consistent with American security interests." This also sends a message to other Latin American leaders that Washington considers troublesome, such as Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega, whose saving grace may be the fact that his country has no oil reserves whatsoever. In case this was intended to win more influence in Latin America, it may instead make the region more wary of

Washington, even if some Trump allies cheer the US's military exploits. The US military operation in Venezuela has immediate and long-term repercussions, both domestically and internationally. From a domestic standpoint, this will likely increase support for the Republican Party amongst Latinos in the US and will be projected as a major win for Trump's support base. Internationally, it is a show of force: a highly coordinated operation in a large foreign country, with no US lives lost, and the chief objective met within minutes. It shows that Washington, Langley, and the Pentagon are ready to conduct sophisticated military and covert operations on foreign soil, even if it may violate international law - as leaders from Spain, Italy, Germany, and even Senators within the US have claimed. Countries and territories that Trump has so far threatened with military force, including Iran, Nigeria, North Korea, or even Panama, will now pay much closer attention; whether Washington follows through or not, though, is anybody's guess. China and Russia, staunch allies of Maduro and providers of military and economic support to Venezuela for more than a decade, will also keep a close watch on Caracas. Although India engaged with high-level officials

from Maduro's regime, India's relationship with Venezuela has remained mostly limited to the oil trade. This is also evidenced by the fact that Maduro has never had a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Between 2007 and 2019, India imported copious amounts of oil from Venezuela, and Indian companies like ONGC Videsh also invested billions in Venezuelan oil fields. After US secondary sanctions were imposed on Venezuela in 2019 and 2020, India's oil imports from the Andean nation reduced dramatically. Now, with the US attempting to exert more influence in Venezuela's local production, India's oil firms may have to wait in line behind Western firms. What next for Venezuela? Trump stated his intention to 'run the country' until Washington can be assured of a 'safe, proper and judicious transition' in Venezuela. Yet, amidst the noise of the US military operation, we should remember that Venezuela has not yet undergone a regime change. The regime in question is the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV in Spanish), and it remains entrenched in power, at least for the time being. Delcy Rodriguez, the country's vice president, addressed Venezuelans on Saturday afternoon.

A 'SWOT' Analysis Of Abhishek Banerjee As He Embarks On His Bengal Yatra

As the Trinamool Congress prepares for what's shaping up to be an intense political battle in West Bengal, Abhishek Banerjee's Bengal yatra marks a decisive moment. No longer seen merely as the heir apparent, he is increasingly positioning himself as a national-level leader for the party. Here is a SWOT analysis of Abhishek Banerjee at this juncture. Strengths (1) Abhishek Banerjee is a young, 38-year-old leader with a modern outlook and clear generational advantages. He has exposure beyond Bengal, is English-speaking, studied in Delhi, and has a background in management, all of which shape a contemporary political style. (2) He possesses strong common sense and has a keen interest in surveys, election management, and research. Beyond IPAC, he conducts surveys through several other organisations and actively seeks feedback from professional agencies, including gauging public reactions to events such as the Messi incident in Kolkata ahead of elections. (3) He does not believe in sycophancy and is willing to take action against party members, even if they are personally close to him, reinforcing a sense of discipline with-



in the organisation. (4) He is attentive to the language and style of his speeches to suit the audience and political context. (5) Mamata nominated him as the second command-in-chief and, unofficially, as the next leader. This gave him a political legacy almost spontaneously. (6) He does not fall into complacency and consistently analyses the BJP's strengths, both nationally and at the state level, to anticipate challenges. (7) He functions primarily as a party leader rather than as a minister or part of the government. This keeps him relatively fresh and untested in governance, allowing him to sell a dream of good gover-

nance as the vision of a new Bengal. Weaknesses (1) Mamata has the experience of a long struggle in opposition politics against the CPM, while Abhishek Banerjee lacks such grounding. His outreach to the masses tends to be more cerebral, especially when the TMC is in power. (2) Old-school politicians within the party continue to align more closely with Mamata, while Abhishek wants to induct more young blood. This generational gap is a challenge. (3) He has a brilliant, modern, corporate-style and calculative approach to politics, but this also makes him appear less spontaneous at times. (4)

While he is popular, his personal charisma is still not on par with Mamata's towering presence. Opportunities (1) Operating from Camac Street, he is holding the fort of the party organisation. He spearheads district committee formation and positions himself as the pivotal leader, emerging clearly as the man in charge. (2) He has begun district-wise rallies, tours, and padayatras to build visibility. (3) He enjoys the backing of the industrial sector, which strengthens his image as a pro-development leader. (4) There is no real competitor for the number two position in the party. The TMC rank and file already view him as the second-in-command and the future of the party. (5) As a Member of Parliament and the parliamentary leader of the TMC, he is actively engaged in national politics and understands the broader national political landscape. Threats (1) Enforcement Directorate and CBI cases pose a serious threat, amplified by the BJP's campaign against him over alleged coal and other scams. (2) He must evolve from being a cerebral young leader into a mass leader in the mould of Mamata if he is to fully consolidate his position.

History as Ethical Compass in Crises of the Present and the Future

Of many that engulf our ideas of the present and the future, four are the most significant. First, post-cold war (fall of the Berlin wall, fall of the USSR, and the phase of liberalisation and privatisation in India, for instance), the disparity between the rich and the poor has increased. This development is a result of a paradox between economic and political process. The entrenchment of capitalism, the intensified harnessing of all forms of energy, and the emergence of new forms of global businesses coincided with a push to democratise and radicalise the formerly elitist political orders. For instance, in a country like India, from the early 1990s through the 2010s, the liberal economic policies that allowed the operation of private capital into various spheres of production and investment went hand in hand with an outlook of social justice politics which, at least theoretically, stood for equitable distribution of resources in the favour of the deprived. Yet, the net result of the last 30-40 years is the widening of the economic gap: the rich have become richer and the poor poorer. The richest 1% of India's population controls almost 50% of the total wealth, which is the highest in the last six decades. Second, the subsequent journey of the relationship between economic liberalisation and political questioning of the erstwhile set-up that turned blind to the growing class disparity has transformed the liberal aspirational journey into a widescale popularity for right-wing politics. As capital became highly mobile and culture began to cross boundaries in a more rapid manner,



new ideas of identity and territory - two central ingredients of right-wing ideologies - resurfaced in a dominant and populist manner. The core of the right-wing resurgence across the world All across the world, in varying degrees, the core of the right-wing resurgence is based upon these two entities: one, identity, which has taken forms of majoritarianism, supremacist ideologies, and exclusionary policies; and two, territory which is tied to the idea of exclusivity belonging: that only a certain ethnic group, through an invented logic of purity and authenticity, belongs to a certain piece of territory. The irony of this mode of thinking is glaring: the whole of human history and existence is based upon numerous big and small cycles of migration yet in the world in which we live, the migrant has become the most villainous figure of the society. Although they provide the necessary cheap labour by doing irregular, dirty, and low-paid jobs to help the capitalist and middle classes gen-

erate profit and comfort for themselves, the migrant is not an economic category alone. The value system behind this term works through larger social practices defined by race, religion, class, gender, caste, language, and region. In some places migrants are bad because they happen to belong to a certain religious faith; in others, they are hated and thrashed because they speak different language. The third feature of our current times is the deep and astonishingly normalised practice of sub-or de-humanization of people who are seen and treated as inferior and unwanted. The current form of capitalism has become a conduit for practising unequal human relationships, which we otherwise casually characterise as feudal. But our own modern values and systems based upon informal work, low-paid jobs, and continued faith in the relevance of maintaining social distinctions have emboldened the process of dehumanisation. Some lives have become cheaper than others; the dignity of a few is

precious than the rest. History has never been egalitarian. For centuries, race, gender, and caste, for example, have governed the systems of hierarchies amongst people. But an interesting feature of our times is the effectiveness with which the exclusionary social and political views have been mobilized under the name of nationalism, civilisational legacy, democracy, and even constitutionalism%concepts which are modern in provenance and have at least nominally adhered to establish the principles of equality - to create unequal relationships among people. The inversion of the concepts which otherwise were meant to establish equality and inclusion within the framework of diversity has created one of the biggest intellectual blackholes of our times. The fourth challenge, which is in some ways an aggregate of all three, is the effect of human actions on the planet Earth, leaving a question mark dangling before the future of not only humans but other species as well.

US-Venezuelan conflict not to impact India’s trade: GTRI

New Delhi: The US-Venezuela conflict will have a negligible impact on India’s trade with the South American country, think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said on Sunday. On January 4, American forces carried out a large military operation in Venezuela, capturing President Nicolas Maduro and his wife and taking them to the US to face various charges, including narco-terrorism and drug trafficking. “India faces negligible impact, as trade with Venezuela has collapsed under sanctions, with crude imports down 81.3 per cent in FY2025 and overall bilateral trade remaining marginal,” the GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said. For India, he said, the Venezuelan disturbance is unlikely to have any material economic or energy impact. Although India was a major buyer of Venezuelan crude in the 2000s and 2010s, bilateral engagement has weakened sharply since 2019 due to US sanctions, which forced India to cut oil imports and scale back commercial activity to avoid secondary



sanctions, he added. As a result, Srivastava said India’s trade with Venezuela is now small and declining. In FY2025, India’s total imports from Venezuela were just USD 364.5 million, of which crude oil accounted for USD 255.3 million, an 81.3 per cent drop from USD 1.4 billion in crude imports in FY2024. India’s exports to Venezuela were modest at USD 95.3 million, led by pharmaceuticals worth USD 41.4 million. “Given the low trade volumes, existing sanctions constraints, and the large geographical distance, the

current developments in Venezuela are not expected to have any meaningful impact on India’s economy or energy security,” he said. Venezuela holds about 18 per cent of the world’s oil reserves, more than Saudi Arabia (about 16 per cent), Russia (about 5-6 per cent), or the United States (around 4 per cent). Sharing his annual outlook for the new year, S Naren, Executive Director and Chief Investment Officer at ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund said 2025 turned out to be a “year of hibernation” for Indian markets, even

though the country’s macro-economic fundamentals remained strong. “India maintained low fiscal and current account deficits, controlled inflation and healthy economic growth,” Naren mentioned. Despite these positives, Indian equities failed to deliver strong returns and the rupee underperformed against most global currencies, including the US dollar. Looking ahead, Naren believes the situation could change in 2026. He said Indian markets are well placed to do better than most global markets in the

coming year. “India continues to offer one of the strongest growth stories over the next decade, supported by favourable demographics and long-term economic potential,” he mentioned. Naren advised investors to focus on proper asset allocation rather than chasing short-term returns. He suggested that portfolios could have a slightly higher allocation to equities compared to early 2025, as Indian markets have underperformed many global markets over the past year. He said this creates an opportunity for investors who are willing to take measured risks. At the same time, Naren cautioned investors about increasing exposure to precious metals. He noted that gold and silver have been the best-performing asset classes over the past one year and even over longer periods, which has led to stretched valuations. Silver prices have more than doubled in the last year, while gold prices have risen over 70 per cent, far outperforming equity indices that delivered returns of around 10 per cent.

Experts warn tobacco tax hike may boost smuggling, hit revenue

New Delhi: An unprecedented tax hike, coupled with a new excise duty structure on tobacco, could lead to a surge in illicit trade of cigarettes and result in significant tax revenue losses for the country, experts said. Earlier this week, the finance ministry notified amendments to the Central Excise Act, imposing an excise duty ranging from Rs 2,050 to Rs 8,500 per 1,000 sticks based on cigarette length, effective February 1. This duty will be over and above 40 per cent GST. This would imply the overall tax hike of 60-70 per cent, varying across lengths. Currently, the overall tax of about 50-55 per cent, depending on the length. The unexpected tax hikes proposed in the transition from the GST compensation cess to excise on demerit goods have triggered concern of increased smuggling of tobacco products and cigarettes, Think Change Forum Secretary General Ranganath Tannir said. “Public finance theory is clear that excessive taxation of inelastic goods fuels illicit trade, not compliance. This risk is amplified in India, where cigarettes are already among the most unaffordable globally, as measured by the WHO’s affordability indicators. Making them even more



expensive will not suppress demand, but redirect it—most likely towards smuggled and illegal products—undermining revenue,” he said. According to global financial firm J P Morgan’s Asia Pacific Equity Research report, a higher rate for the King Size Filter Tip (KSFT) segment implies increased risk of consumer downtrading to cheaper variants, and may also induce an increase in the offtake of illicit cigarettes. In India, illicit tobacco already accounts for about 26 per cent of the total tobacco market, making it the fourth-largest market for smuggled tobacco globally. Another brokerage house, Nomura, in its research report said, “high taxes on cigarettes, while aimed at reducing consumption, have unintended consequences of fuelling growth of illicit cigarettes and pushing consumers

towards cheaper, non-tax paid smuggled cigarettes”. Citing a report by the Tobacco Institute of India (TII), Jefferies said the industry body has requested the government for a review, as a wider legal price gap could help non-duty-paid cigarettes, which will also result in tax leakage. International experience from Australia demonstrates how overly aggressive tobacco taxation can backfire by fuelling organised crime. Repeated tax hikes between 2012 and 2020 drove cigarette prices sharply higher, triggering a surge in illicit tobacco from under 2 per cent to around 14 per cent of the market. “The new excise levies are unprecedented. Since they come into effect from February 1, 2026, there is still time to revisit and rectify them before they spawn a much larger problem of uncontrollable illicit networks,” an analyst said.

EV penetration in luxury car segment dips in GST 2.0 era

New Delhi: Electric vehicle (EV) penetration in the luxury car segment has seen a drop by nearly 3 percentage points in the GST 2.0 era with the internal combustion engine versions offering better total cost of ownership, according to industry players. While the trend is also visible in the mass market segment, it is the entry luxury segment that is witnessing a more marked shift towards internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles as price difference between EV and ICE widened under the new GST rates. “If I look at October and November (2025), it came down by 2 to 3 percentage points across mass market as well as luxury, because of ICE having much better TCO (total cost of ownership) compared to EV. So, the moment the equation changes, we can see a change in (EV) penetration,” Mercedes-Benz India Managing Director and CEO Santosh Iyer told PTI. The major “fluctuation” is in the entry luxury EV segment, he said, adding that for Mercedes-Benz India, its



EVs are mostly in the top-end luxury segment. “In the top-end EV, the price sensitivity is a bit lower compared to what you see in the entry segment. The degrowth in the luxury EV is more driven from entry level,” Iyer noted. For Mercedes-Benz India, he said EV penetration in its overall sales is 8 per cent but in the top-end vehicle priced above Rs 1.5 crore, it is 20 per cent. BMW Group India President and CEO Hardeep Singh Brar said, “While GST 2.0 has made our ICE portfolio more attractive, we are

seeing strong and sustained momentum in EV demand as well. Customers today are not driven by pricing alone. They value sustainability, lower running costs and future-ready technology.” He said on ICE models, BMW Group India had passed on the entire benefit of GST 2.0, with an average reduction of 6.7 per cent across the range and customers took the “double advantage of exclusive financial offers by BMW Smart Finance as well as reduced prices”. Brar reiterated that BMW’s ICE and EV

models have been growing remarkably well. “For the period Sep-Nov, sales of our ICE cars have posted double digit growth YoY. At the same time, BMW and MINI EV sales have grown by over 130 per cent YoY. Our overall growth and EV penetration are ahead of the luxury segment average,” he said. For BMW, EV penetration is 21 per cent of its total sales in India. It has set a target of taking it to 30 per cent by 2030. Offering another perspective, Audi India Brand Director, Balbir Singh Dhillon said the GST 2.0 framework is still being absorbed by the market and its full impact is likely to become evident over the coming year. “In this evolving environment, our electric portfolio has continued to perform steadily, underscoring the growing acceptance of luxury EVs among Indian buyers,” he added. Dhillon further said, “The Audi e-tron range has seen consistent demand, with current allocations sold out under our global planning cycle.”

FPIs pull out Rs 7,608 cr from equities in just 2 days of Jan

New Delhi: Foreign portfolio investors have started 2026 on a cautious note, extending their selling streak from last year by withdrawing Rs 7,608 crore (USD 846 million) from Indian equities in the first two trading sessions of January. The withdrawal of funds followed the largest outflow of Rs 1.66 lakh crore (USD 18.9 billion) recorded in 2025, triggered by volatile currency movements, global trade tensions and concerns over potential US tariffs, and stretched market valuations. This sustained selling pressure by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) has significantly contributed to the nearly 5 per cent depreciation of the rupee against the dollar during 2025. However, market experts believe the tide could turn in 2026. VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Investments, said the year is likely to witness a shift in FPI strategy, as improving domestic fundamentals may start



attracting net foreign inflows. A robust GDP growth and the prospects of a recovery in corporate earnings bode well for positive FPI flows in the coming months, he added.

Echoing similar views, Vaqarjaved Khan, Senior Fundamental Analyst at Angel One, said normalisation in India-US trade relations, a benign global interest rate environment

and stability in the USD-INR pair could create a favourable backdrop for foreign investors. He noted that equity valuations have become relatively comforting compared to last year, which could further support a revival in inflows. Despite these positive expectations, FPIs have begun 2026 on a cautious note, and according to data from NSDL, they pulled out nearly Rs 7,608 crore from Indian equities between January 1 and 2. This trend is not unusual, as foreign investors have historically remained guarded in January, having withdrawn funds in eight out of the past ten years, Khan said. Consequently, FPI flows are likely to remain highly sensitive to global cues and macroeconomic developments. While high valuations were a key concern over the past year, that pressure appears to have eased for now, offering some room for optimism going ahead, he added.

GIG MODEL DOESN’T PRESSURE RIDERS: DEEPInder GOYAL



Amid the debate on gig workers’ payouts and working conditions, Eternal Founder and CEO Deepinder Goyal said this model does not pressure riders, and flexible schedules and welfare benefits make gig work a reliable source of income for many. Eternal owns Zomato and Blinkit businesses. His remarks come at a time when gig workers’ unions have been staging protests, demanding better payouts and improved working conditions. “In 2025, Zomato and Blinkit spent over Rs 100 crore on insurance coverage for delivery

partners. In 2025, average earnings per hour (EPH), excluding tips, for a delivery partner on Zomato were Rs 102. In 2024, this number was Rs 92. That’s a ~10.9 pc year-on-year increase. Over a longer horizon also, EPH has shown steady growth,” Goyal said on X. He claimed that the 10-minute delivery promise does not pressure riders, explaining how flexible schedules and welfare benefits make gig work a reliable source of income for many. However, his comments drew mixed responses from internet users on X,

with several accusing riders of rash driving and violating traffic rules to meet 10-minute delivery deadlines. The Gig & Platform Services Workers’ Union (GPSWU) last month wrote to Union Minister for Labour and Employment Mansukh Mandaviya raising several issues, with a key highlight being their demand to “urgently discontinue 10-20-minute service delivery mandates to prioritise worker safety”. Goyal also battled for “less regulation” for India’s gig economy, arguing that it will eventually help bring more people into the “organised” workforce. “Delivery partners are not overworked on our platforms. In 2025, the average delivery partner on Zomato worked 38 days in the year and 7 hours per working day, reflecting true gig style participation rather than fixed schedules. Only 2.3 pc of partners worked more than 250 days in the year.

INDIA LIKELY TO OUTPERFORM GLOBAL MARKETS IN 2026

Mumbai: Sharing his annual outlook for the new year, S Naren, Executive Director and Chief Investment Officer at ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund said 2025 turned out to be a “year of hibernation” for Indian markets, even though the country’s macroeconomic fundamentals remained strong. “India maintained low fiscal and current account deficits, controlled inflation and healthy economic growth,” Naren mentioned. Despite these positives, Indian equities failed to deliver strong returns and the rupee underperformed against most global currencies, including the US dollar. Looking ahead, Naren believes the situation could change in 2026. He said Indian markets are well placed to do better than most global markets in the coming year. “India continues to offer one of the strongest growth stories over the next decade, supported by favourable demographics and long-term eco-



omic potential,” he mentioned. Naren advised investors to focus on proper asset allocation rather than chasing short-term returns. He suggested that portfolios could have a slightly higher allocation to equities compared to early 2025, as Indian markets have underperformed many global markets over the past year. He said this creates an opportunity for investors who are willing to take measured risks. At the same time, Naren cau-

tioned investors about increasing exposure to precious metals. He noted that gold and silver have been the best-performing asset classes over the past one year and even over longer periods, which has led to stretched valuations. Silver prices have more than doubled in the last year, while gold prices have risen over 70 per cent, far outperforming equity indices that delivered returns of around 10 per cent. Naren also highlighted

that global risks remain high. He warned that many international markets appear overvalued, especially US technology stocks, and that precious metals are showing signs of excessive optimism. In this environment, he stressed the need for a balanced and cautious investment approach, combining growth opportunities with risk management as markets head into 2026. The combined market capitalisation

of seven of the top-10 most-valued firms surged Rs 1,23,724.19 crore last week, in line with an optimistic trend in equities, with Reliance Industries stealing the limelight with the biggest jump in its valuation. Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 720.56 points, or 0.84 per cent. From the top-10 pack, Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Larsen & Toubro and Hindustan Unilever were the gainers, while Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, and Bajaj Finance faced erosion from their valuation. The market valuation of Reliance Industries jumped Rs 45,266.12 crore to Rs 21,54,978.60 crore. State Bank of India added Rs 30,414.89 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 9,22,461.77 crore. Larsen & Toubro’s valuation surged Rs 16,204.34 crore to Rs 5,72,640.56 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever climbed Rs 14,626.21 crore to Rs 5,51,637.04 crore.

Trump says US will 'run' Venezuela and 'FIX OIL INFRASTRUCTURE'

The US will "run" Venezuela until a "safe, proper and judicious transition" can be ensured, Donald Trump has said, after US strikes led to the capture of country's President Nicolas Maduro. US oil companies would also fix Venezuela's "broken infrastructure" and "start making money for the country", the US president said. The US launched strikes on Venezuela on Saturday morning in which Maduro and his wife, First Lady Cilia Flores, were captured by US forces and removed from the country. Venezuela announced a state of national emergency and denounced the "military aggression", with the country's vice president saying Maduro is its only leader. Maduro and Flores were flown out of the capital, Caracas, on a US helicopter in the early hours of Saturday morning and



taken aboard the USS Iwo Jima at an unknown location in the Caribbean Sea. They were later flown to the Guantanamo Bay US Naval Base in Cuba before being transferred to another plane to head to New York state, and then flown by helicopter into New York City's

Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn. US Attorney General Pam Bondi said Maduro and Flores had been indicted in the Southern District of New York. The pair have been charged with conspiracy to commit narco-terrorism and import cocaine, possession

of machine guns and destructive devices, and conspiracy to possess machine guns and destructive devices against the US. "They will soon face the full wrath of American justice on American soil in American courts," Bondi wrote on X. Previously, Maduro has vehemently denied being a cartel leader and has accused the US of using its "war on drugs" as an excuse to try to depose him and get its hands on Venezuela's vast oil reserves. Trump told a news conference ahead of Maduro's arrival in New York: "The oil business in Venezuela has been a bust, a total bust for a long period of time. "We're going to have our very large United States oil companies, the biggest anywhere in the world, go in, spend billions of dollars, fix the badly broken infrastructure, the oil infrastructure, and start making money for the country." The South American country has approximately 303 billion barrels' worth of crude, accounting for about 20% of the world's oil resources, according to the US Energy Information

Administration. It is unclear exactly how the US plans to "run" Venezuela, but the president said it will be a "group" of people leading the charge. "We're going to be running it with a group, and we're going to make sure it's run properly," Trump said. When pressed by reporters as to who inside Venezuela would form part of that group, Trump said US Secretary of State Marco Rubio had been talking to Delcy Rodríguez, the country's vice-president. Trump said Rodríguez - who has since been sworn in as interim president by Venezuela's Supreme Court - had expressed her willingness to do "whatever the US asks". However, speaking on state TV after Trump's remarks, Rodríguez called Maduro the "only one president in Venezuela", adding that the government was ready to defend itself.

How UK plush toy Jellycat conquered China



Stella Huang bought her first Jellycat plush toy when she lost her job during the pandemic. A school friend was a fan of the British-designed toys and told her all about them. But she only fell in love with the brand when she saw a gingerbread house plushie on the Chinese social media app RedNote. Christmas is not widely celebrated in China and is more of a commercial event than anything more traditional. "The festival doesn't mean a lot to me... But I always like the sight of gingerbread houses," she says. It was then that she asked her friend in their hometown Guangzhou to buy it for her. That was in 2021, just as Jellycat was about to make it big in China

and around the world. "Everyone felt jittery, and no-one knew what would happen," says Stella, who has developed a habit of petting and squeezing her plushies since Covid. She had to spend a lot of time at her home, in Beijing, which had some of the strictest lockdowns in China, if not the world. Now 32, Stella has a new job, as a sales manager in the tourism industry, but is still buying Jellycats. Her collection has grown to 120 toys, costing a total of about 36,000 yuan (\$5,145; £3,815). "At my age, there are many things you can't share with others... and the troubles we face are a lot more complicated than before," she says with a sigh.

Brigitte Bardot Foundation issues warning about scam memorabilia



The charity Brigitte Bardot established has issued a warning about "scam" merchandise purporting to fund its work following the French actress's death. The Brigitte Bardot Foundation said it was aware of "crude fabrications" being advertised online alongside claims the proceeds will go to the animal welfare charity. It threatened to take legal action against anyone taking part in "these alleged illegal fundraising efforts", stating: "Everyone is asked to respect the memory of the deceased." Bardot died aged 91 last Sunday. After revolutionising 1950s French cinema and becoming a symbol of sexual liberation, she quit acting to devote her life to animals. But the actress-turned-activist courted controversy later in life over a string of remarks about Muslims, gay people and the #MeToo movement. She was fined five times for inciting racial hatred. Her death prompted tributes in

France, with President Emmanuel Macron saying the nation was mourning "a legend of the century". Her films, her voice, her dazzling glory, her initials, her sorrows, her generous passion for animals, her face that became Marianne, Brigitte Bardot embodied a life of freedom," he said. But now, online scammers were co-opting her iconic image for "vulgar and despicable attempts to exploit her legacy", the Brigitte Bardot Foundation said. It warned of "the spread on the internet and social networks of offers for sale of photographs, AI-assisted montages, and all kinds of media" reproducing her image, including "in fabricated situations". "These are crude fabrications, illicit offers and sales, and purported fundraising campaigns that have never received any endorsement from the Brigitte Bardot Foundation, which cannot condone these scams," it wrote in a statement on Saturday.

Swiss open criminal case against managers of ski resort bar after deadly fire



The managers of a bar where a fire killed 40 people and injured another 119 have been placed under criminal investigation, Swiss prosecutors have said. The French couple - named by the media as Jacques and Jessica Moretti - are suspected of manslaughter by negligence, bodily harm by negligence and arson

by negligence, the prosecutors' office in Valais said. Eight Swiss nationals from among those killed were the first to be identified on Saturday. The likely cause of the fire at Le Constellation bar in Crans-Montana was sparklers on bottles being carried too close to the ceiling, a preliminary investigation found.

UK AND FRANCE BOMB UNDERGROUND IS ARMS BUNKER IN SYRIA

Royal Air Force Typhoon jets have joined French aircraft in a joint strike on an underground arms cache in Syria used by the Islamic State group (IS), the UK Ministry of Defence says. "Careful" intelligence analysis led officials to believe the facility was storing arms and explosives, the statement said, and was in mountains just north of Palmyra, an ancient site in central Syria. "Our aircraft used Paveway IV guided bombs to target a number of access tunnels down to the facility... initial indications are that the target was engaged successfully," the MoD said. There was no sign of any harm to civilians in the strike late on Saturday and all the aircraft returned safely, the MoD added. Detailed assessment



of the strikes is under way but officials believe "the target was engaged successfully". The Typhoon FGR4s were supported by a Voyager refuelling tanker. IS imposed jihadist rule over parts of Syria and Iraq until 2019. "This action shows our UK leadership, and determination to stand shoulder to shoulder with our allies, to stamp out any resurgence of Daesh and

their dangerous and violent ideologies in the Middle East," UK Defence Secretary John Healey said. RAF aircraft have carried out patrols over Syria to "prevent any attempted resurgence" of IS following its defeat at the battle of Baghuz in 2019, the ministry said. "I want to thank all the members of our armed forces involved in this operation for their professional

ism and their courage," Healey said. "They were among thousands of British personnel deployed over Christmas and New Year. This operation, to eliminate dangerous terrorists who threaten our way of life, shows how our armed forces are ready to step up, all year round, keeping Britain secure at home and strong abroad." The RAF has been using aerial drones and manned aircraft to strike IS fighters and targets as part of the international coalition since 2014. The United Nations says IS still has between 5,000 and 7,000 fighters in Syria and Iraq. In November, Syria - under the leadership of new President Ahmed al-Sharaa - became the 90th country to join a US-led coalition to combat the group.

POLICE IDENTIFY 16 MORE VICTIMS OF SWISS BAR FIRE

The bodies of 16 more victims of a bar fire in the Swiss ski resort of Crans-Montana have been identified by police. The youngest person was a Swiss girl aged 14, with nine aged under 18. The group includes people of Swiss, Italian, Romanian, Turkish and French nationalities, police said. This brings the number of people who have been identified as killed in the fire to 24. Among them is 16-year-old Swiss national Arthur Brodard, his mother has said. A criminal investigation into the people who ran Le Constellation bar is under way, while victim's families are enduring an



agonising wait for information about loved ones who are still considered missing. Police said no further details will be released about the victims they had identified out of respect for their relatives. However, Arthur Brodard's mother took to Facebook on

Saturday night to announce that he "has left to party in paradise". "We can start our mourning, knowing that he is in peace and in the light," she said as she appeared visibly upset in a video message. While Arthur was still presumed missing and

information on his whereabouts was scarce, Ms Brodard-Sitre told local newspaper Le Temps that she had been "living a nightmare". Some of his friends had been found with burns covering nearly half their bodies, she told the newspaper. "There are no words - they went through hell." Sparklers on bottles being carried too close to the ceiling are the likely cause of the fire during New Year's celebrations at the bar, a preliminary investigation has found. The devastating fire killed at least 40 people and injured 119 others. Many of the dead and missing are teenagers.

Wicked composer latest to cancel Kennedy Center gig after Trump name change



The composer of the musical Wicked has said he will not appear at the Kennedy Center after its board voted to include US President Donald Trump's name in the name of the venue. Stephen Schwartz said in a statement that appearing at the centre "has now become an ideological statement", adding: "As long as that remains the case, I will not appear there." But Richard Grenell, the center's president, wrote on X that the reports of him pulling out of a gala in May were "totally bogus" and that he had never been signed to attend. The Oscar and Grammy-award winning composer is the latest artist to say they will no longer appear at the national cultural institution over the recent changes. Schwartz told the BBC that at the end of 2024 he was asked by the artistic director of the Washington National Opera to participate in the May event with

them. He said that he had agreed, but that he had received little communication since last February and assumed it was no longer taking place. The composer explained that, on Thursday, he was contacted by a reporter saying that the gala was announced on the Kennedy Center schedule and asking if he would be participating. He had been listed on the centre's website as appearing in the gala, but this was removed from the website on Friday afternoon, according to CNN. "The Kennedy Center was founded to be an apolitical home for free artistic expression for artists of all nationalities and ideologies," Schwartz, 77, said. "It is no longer apolitical, and appearing there has now become an ideological statement. As long as that remains the case, I will not appear there." But Mr Grennell hit back: "The Stephen Schwartz reports are totally bogus. Shame on the woke high school reporters repeating it. "He was never signed and I've never had a single conversation on him since arriving. "He himself said last February he hadn't heard anything on it." Two musical acts cancelled their appearances at the centre earlier this week.

'DEEPLY SHOCKED': WORLD LEADERS REACT TO US ATTACK ON VENEZUELA

Leaders around the world have responded with a mix of condemnation and support to the US capture of Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro. Following a large-scale strike on Venezuela on Saturday, Maduro and his wife were captured by US forces and removed from the country. The pair have been indicted on drug charges in New York. In an initial response, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said his government would "shed no tears" for the end of Maduro's regime. Neighbouring Latin American countries condemned the actions, as did Venezuela's long-term allies, Russia and China. China said it was "deeply shocked

and strongly condemns" the use of force against a sovereign country and its president. Russia accused the US of committing "an act of armed aggression". Iran, which is locked in its own dispute with Trump over his promise of intervention in its country, called the strikes a "flagrant violation of the country's national sovereignty". Trump said the US will "run" Venezuela "until we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition". Many Latin American leaders condemned the US actions. Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva wrote on X that the actions "cross an unacceptable line", adding that "attacking countries in flagrant violation of



international law is the first step toward a world of violence, chaos, and instability". Colombian President Gustavo Petro called the strikes an "assault on the sovereignty" of Latin America, while Chile's President Gabriel Boric expressed "concern and condemnation" and called for "a

peaceful solution to the serious crisis affecting the country". Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Cane accused the US of a "criminal attack", while Uruguay said in an official statement that it was monitoring developments "with attention and serious concern" and "rejects, as it always has, military inter-

vention". Trump has indicated that Cuba could become part of a broader US policy in the region, calling it a failing nation. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Cuba was a disaster run by incompetent leaders who supported Maduro's administration and that the government in Havana should be concerned.

The Venezuelan Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello urged citizens to remain calm and to trust the country's leadership and military, saying "the world needs to speak out about this attack" according to news agency Reuters. But Argentinian President Javier Milei - who Trump has described as his

"favourite president" - wrote "freedom moves forward" and "long live freedom" on social media. Meanwhile, UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer refused to be drawn into whether or not the military action may have broken international law. He did not condemn the US strikes in an interview with the BBC's Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg programme on Saturday morning. He said he was waiting to establish all the facts but would not "shy away from this", adding he was a "lifelong advocate of international law". The UK was not involved in the strikes and Sir Keir said he had not spoken to Trump about the operation.

ICC Open To Moving Bangladesh's T20 World Cup Matches? Report Makes Big Claim

The International Cricket Council (ICC) might consider moving Bangladesh's T20 World Cup 2026 matches out of India following the request from the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), according to a report by Cricbuzz. Bangladesh were set to play all of their league games in India - three in Kolkata and one in Mumbai. However, following an emergency meeting in Dhaka, the BCB said that the Bangladesh cricket team will not be travelling to India for the tournament. The report claimed that ICC has not taken an official call on the request as of now but the global governing body might not be averse to shifting Bangladesh's matches to Sri Lanka, co-hosts of the T20 World Cup. Earlier, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said in their official release that they have requested the International Cricket Council (ICC) to shift their T20 World Cup 2026 matches from India to Sri Lanka. "An emergency



meeting of the Board of Directors of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) was held this afternoon to discuss recent developments related to the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, scheduled to be hosted by India and Sri Lanka," the official press release from BCB read. "The Board reviewed

the situation in detail, taking into account developments over the last 24 hours and expressed deep concern over the overall circumstances surrounding the participation of the Bangladesh National Team in matches scheduled to be played in India." "Following a thorough

assessment of the prevailing situation and the growing concerns regarding the safety and security of the Bangladesh contingent in India and considering the advice from the Bangladesh Government, the Board of Directors resolved that the Bangladesh National Team

will not travel to India for the tournament under the current conditions." "In light of this decision, the BCB has formally requested the International Cricket Council (ICC), as the event authority, to consider relocating all of Bangladesh's matches to a venue outside India."

Australia PM's Brilliant 'Off The Field' Message As Usman Khawaja Retires

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese congratulated veteran opener Usman Khawaja on his retirement from international cricket. Albanese's message came ahead of Day 1 of the fifth Ashes Test between Australia and England at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Saturday. The 39-year-old left-handed batter confirmed that the Sydney Test will be his final appearance for Australia at the international level. Born in Islamabad, Khawaja will draw the curtain on his international journey after representing Australia in 87 Test matches. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese took to the social media and acknowledged Khawaja's contribution to Australian cricket and his impact beyond the field. "Thank you Usman for everything you've done for Australia on the field and everything you've meant to Australians off the field. You can be proud of your record, your legacy and the example you have set for



everyone who will follow in your footsteps," wrote Albanese. Khawaja announced his decision to retire while addressing the media at the Sydney Cricket Ground ahead of the fifth Ashes Test, bringing an end to a long and distinguished international career. Over the course of

his Test career, he scored 6,206 runs at an impressive average of 43.39. His record includes 16 centuries and 28 half-centuries across 157 innings. At Lunch on Day 1, England reached 114/3 in 24 overs, thanks to an unbeaten 57-run partnership for the fourth wicket between Joe Root and Harry Brook.

Bangladesh Reveal Reason Behind Not Travelling To India For T20 World Cup

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said in their official release that they have requested the International Cricket Council (ICC) to shift their T20 World Cup 2026 matches from India to Sri Lanka. Amid the growing political tensions between the two countries, BCB decided that the national side will not be travelling to India due to security concerns. The decision came amid the controversy surrounding IPL side Kolkata Knight Riders' decision to release Bangladesh fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman after receiving instructions from the BCCI. An emergency meeting of the Board of Directors of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) was held this afternoon to discuss recent developments related



to the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, scheduled to be hosted by India and Sri Lanka," the official press release from BCB read. "The Board reviewed the situation in detail, taking into account developments over the last 24 hours and expressed deep concern over the overall circumstances surrounding the participation of the

Bangladesh National Team in matches scheduled to be played in India." "Following a thorough assessment of the prevailing situation and the growing concerns regarding the safety and security of the Bangladesh contingent in India and considering the advice from the Bangladesh Government, the Board of Directors resolved that the

Bangladesh National Team will not travel to India for the tournament under the current conditions." "In light of this decision, the BCB has formally requested the International Cricket Council (ICC), as the event authority, to consider relocating all of Bangladesh's matches to a venue outside India." "The Board believes that such a step is necessary to safeguard the safety and well-being of Bangladeshi players, team officials, Board members and other stakeholders and to ensure that the team can participate in the tournament in a secure and appropriate environment. The Bangladesh Cricket Board looks forward to the ICC's understanding of the situation and an urgent response on this matter."

Mumbai's Stasya Pandya Wins Silver Medal At Junior National Equestrian Championship 2025

Young equestrian talent Stasya Pandya from Mumbai delivered a commendable performance at the Junior National Equestrian Championship (JNEC) 2025, clinching the Silver Medal in the Dressage Team Event (Children 1 category). The prestigious national championship is being held at two premier venues-the Embassy International Riding School, Bengaluru, and the Army Polo and Riding Club, New Delhi-from December 18, 2025, up to January 6, 2026, as per a press release from the Equestrian Federation of India (EFI). Stasya trains and rides at the Amateur Riders Club, Mumbai,



under the mentorship of Coach Bobin Tshering. Competing astride Kirrhi Taonga from Surge Stables, Bengaluru, she scored 67.463, playing a key role in her team's podium finish. The silver-winning team delivered a strong collective performance with Haripriya Singh

astride Fritz scoring 71.243 and Amara Singh astride Count Me In D' Grading scoring 68.581, both representing Sea Horse Equestrian, Gujarat. Dev Harish Kapoor, riding Serrano from Modi Equestrian, Meerut, added 65.934 to the tally. The team secured the Silver

Medal with an impressive total score of 207.287. Speaking on her achievement, Stasya said, as per the press release, "I am really grateful for the faith and trust my coach Bobin sir, has put in me, along with my club, The Amateur Riders Club, for providing world-class training facilities for my training and development. I also thank my school, Billabong High International School, and my parents for being constantly supportive throughout." Her coach, Bobin Tshering, praised her journey and dedication, saying, "Stasya's growth as a rider has been phenomenal."

Miracle As Australian Test Legend Damien Martyn Wakes Up From Induced Coma



Former Australian cricketer and Test legend Damien Martyn has woken from an induced coma after being hospitalised for over a week due to meningitis, according to the Sydney Morning Herald on Sunday. Martyn, 54, was admitted to Gold Coast University Hospital on December 27 after falling seriously ill and was placed in an induced coma. The development was confirmed by former Australian cricketer Adam Gilchrist, who stated that the 54-year-old is now "able to talk and respond to treatment". Martyn represented Australia in 67 Tests, 208 One Day Internationals (ODIs), and four Twenty20 Internationals between 1992 and 2006. He remains widely regarded as one of the greatest ODI finishers in cricket history. Australia cricket great Adam Gilchrist revealed to Code Sports that Martyn "is now able to talk and respond to treatment." "He has responded extraordinarily well since coming out (of the coma) to the point where his family feels it's like some sort of miracle," Gilchrist said. "It has been so positive that they're hopeful he will be able to move

out of the ICU into another part of the hospital which is representative of what a great recovery it's been and how quickly it has flipped around." Gilchrist managed to speak to Martyn's partner Amanda throughout the process. "Amanda just really wants to say to everyone she is convinced that the love, goodwill and sense of care that they felt from everybody, via messages and via the coverage in the press really helped him," he said. "They just feel blessed so many people have wanted to support him in his time in need. He will remain in hospital and continue to receive treatment but the turnaround has been miraculous." Renowned for his elegant stroke play, Martyn finished his Test career with 4,406 runs in 67 matches at an average of 46.37, including 13 centuries. In ODIs, he scored 5,346 runs in 208 games at an average of 40.80, registering five centuries and 37 half-centuries. One of Martyn's most memorable achievements came during the 2004 Border-Gavaskar Trophy in India, where he was named Player of the Series.

BCCI Sent Big 'Ruturaj Gaikwad' Message Over New Zealand ODIs Squad, Asked To Drop This Star

Former Indian cricket team opener Sadagoppan Ramesh believes that Ruturaj Gaikwad should have been a part of the squad for the upcoming ODI series against New Zealand. Ramesh said that Ruturaj should have been included in place of all-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy and questioned the decision to include a fifth seam-bowling option. Gaikwad recently scored a century in the ODI series against South Africa while batting at No. 4 but he was one of the big exclusions for the New Zealand series. Ramesh said that Reddy's role is not well defined as of now and instead, Gaikwad should have been included. "He could've been selected in the squad in place of someone like Nitish Kumar Reddy. Why is a fifth seam-



bowling option required? Whether or not Reddy will bat or bowl is unclear. When it's not even clear whether he will feature in the eleven, someone like Gaikwad should've been there in the squad." Ramesh added that

it is possible that Gaikwad will find a place in the squad if Shreyas Iyer is unable to recover from his injury but added that irrespective of the situation, the young batter was a 'must' in the team. "India doesn't need a fifth

seam-bowling option in the original squad for a home series. Even if there is an injury in the squad, someone can be called up soon as it is a home series. What they may have thought is if Shreyas Iyer doesn't clear the fitness test, Ruturaj Gaikwad can slot into the playing eleven. Even if Iyer is fit and plays all three matches, I feel Gaikwad was a must in the squad," he added. India's squad for the ODI series against New Zealand: Shubman Gill (captain), Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, KL Rahul, Shreyas Iyer, Washington Sundar, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohammed Siraj, Harshit Rana, Prasidh Krishna, Kuldeep Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Arshdeep Singh, Yashasvi Jaiswal.

First Time In 138 Years: Australia's Bold Move During 5th Ashes Test Scripts History

The Australian cricket team made a stunning decision while picking the Playing XI for the fifth and final Ashes Test against England at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG), Sydney. Visiting captain Ben Stokes won the toss and opted to bat first in the game on Sunday, but it was Australia's player combination that hogged the limelight. The host team opted to go ahead with fast-bowling options and ignored a specialist spinner. Australia had right-arm off-break bowler Todd Murphy in the squad, but they decided to leave him out for the final game. This is the first time in 138 years that Australia are playing at the Sydney Cricket Ground with-



out a spinner. The venue is known to provide assistance to spinners, and therefore, Australia's move has come under the spotlight. Talking about the game, Joe Root and Harry Brook shared a 154-run partnership to guide England to 211 for 3 before bad light

stopped play on Day 1 of the final Ashes Test. Root and Brook joined when the tourists were at a perilous 77 for 3 on Sunday and rallied England through the middle session before bad light and rain stopped play just before tea and prevented the match

from resuming after the interval. At stumps, Root was unbeaten on 72 and Brook was 78 not out, sharing England's best partnership of the five-Test series. Australia has already retained the Ashes with wins in the first three Tests. The duo raised their half-centuries within the same over that their stand hit triple figures as England took control on a pitch that didn't appear to offer much assistance for Australia's bowlers. Root made his 67th Test fifty off 65 balls with seven boundaries, while Brook completed his 15th half-century from 63 balls in more stylish fashion, with some big shots narrowly avoiding the catching fielders and frustrating the hosts.

Inclement Weather Wins The Day At Centurion As Pretoria Capitals-Durban's Super Giants Share Points



In a case of deja vu from earlier in the day, the Pretoria Capitals vs Durban's Super Giants fixture was abandoned without a ball being bowled at Centurion on Saturday. A sellout crowd arrived hopeful that the same fate as earlier in the day wouldn't befall them too, but alas it was not to be. There, again, was optimism when captains Keshav Maharaj and Aiden Markram made it out to the middle at 18:50 for the toss (ahead of a reduced 16-overs-per-side match), which was won by Maharaj who chose to bowl, but mirroring the Wanderers that was the

closest the players got to getting the action underway. The rain returned almost immediately, and never let up forcing the match officials into a second abandonment of the day. Both teams were awarded two points with and retain their places at 4th (DSG) and 5th (PC) on the table. Capitals will hope that the weather clears in time for their next fixture, at home, against Sunrisers Eastern Cape on Monday, 5 January while Durban's Super Giants will next be in when these two teams meet in the reverse fixture on Wednesday, 7 January in Durban.

Chiranjeevi–Venkatesh’s Mana Shankara Vara Prasad Garu Trailer Promises a Full-On Sankranthi Entertainer

Witness Mega Swag & Wholesome Family Entertainment- Megastar Chiranjeevi, Victory Venkatesh, Anil Ravipudi’s Mana Shankara Vara Prasad Garu Theatrical Trailer Unveiled Megastar Chiranjeevi and Hit Machine Anil Ravipudi are gearing up to deliver a full-on festive crowd-pleaser with Mana Shankara Vara Prasad Garu, and the buzz is only getting louder. Adding to the excitement, Victory Venkatesh steps in with a key role, making this collaboration one of the most talked-about combinations. The film’s promotions have already struck gold. Every glimpse and poster have amplified expectations, backed by a strong publicity drive that’s keeping the movie consistently in the spotlight. Today, the makers unveiled the film’s theatrical trailer in Tirupati. Shankara Vara Prasad, who once served across various national security agencies, unexpectedly falls in love with Sasirekha and transforms into a devoted family man. But beneath this new avatar, the original fire and instinct remain intact.



When trouble suddenly enters his otherwise happy life, the story unfolds around how Vara Prasad handles everything in his signature style. Watching Megastar Chiranjeevi in a hilarious role after a long gap feels refreshingly delightful. His grace, swagger, comic timing, body language, and dialogue delivery together remind us why he holds the title of Megastar. And just when you think the experience can’t get any better, Venkatesh’s powerful

mass-entry takes it to the next level. The chemistry and playful banter between these two stars turn into a visual feast for their fans. Nayanthara looks stunning in traditional attire, and her on-screen chemistry with Chiranjeevi is sure to resonate strongly with family audiences. Sachin Khedekar immerses himself completely in his role, and the rest of the cast delivers solid performances. Director Anil Ravipudi once again leaves his

mark. Not only does he present the Megastar in a vintage, charismatic avatar, but he also blends fun and action seamlessly to craft a wholesome family entertainer. Showcasing Chiranjeevi in this manner and bringing Venkatesh on board stand out as major strengths of the film.

Sameer Reddy’s visuals are stylish and vibrant, while Bheems Ceciroleo’s background score evokes a warm sense of nostalgia. AS Prakash’s production design adds richness to the world of the film. Shine Screens and Gold Box Entertainments have ensured top-notch production values throughout. With Megastar’s unmatched swag, vintage charm, Anil Ravipudi’s trademark hilarious comedy, and Venkatesh’s impactful presence, Mana Shankara Vara Prasad Garu shapes up to be a pitch-perfect Sankranti entertainer. The excitement has reached new heights with this highly entertaining trailer. The movie is set for release on January 12th for Sankranti.

Rim Jim’ – A Gangster Drama Based on Real Incidents

Set against the backdrop of real-life incidents that occurred in Andhra Pradesh during the 1990s, the gangster-themed film Rim Jim is being directed by Hema Sunder and produced by G. Sachetan Reddy, Dr. Manasa, and Srinivasa Rao. Made under the banners of AV Cinemas, C Visuals, Rim Jim carries the tagline “Asleedam” and is presented as a story of friendship and love, woven into a gritty, realistic gangster narrative. The film is currently busy with post-production work, and the makers are expected to announce the release date soon. Speaking on the occasion, director Hema Sunder said that the film has shaped up extremely well and assured that it will appeal to audiences across sections with its engaging storytelling and emotional depth. A major highlight of the film is Rahul Sipligunj, who plays a key role and has also sung two songs, which are expected to be major attractions of the movie. Ajay Ved appears in the lead role, while



Vrajana plays the female lead. Supporting roles are portrayed by Bittiri Satti and Raj Thirandas, among others. With a realistic tone and a strong emotional

core, Rim Jim promises an intense cinematic experience and is set to hit screens soon.

Meet August, the Gurgaon cat who built a Rs 4.5 lakh brand



Hyderabad: What started as a fun Instagram page for a ginger cat named August has turned into one of India’s most talked-about pet success stories. Managed by her human from Gurgaon and Nagaland, August earned over Rs. 4.5 lakh in a single year, as revealed through a rare income report posted

on her Instagram page on December 30. This transparency caught the attention of social media users, showcasing the potential of pet influencers in India’s creator economy. A Slow Start, But Consistent Growth August’s journey didn’t begin with viral fame or big brand deals. The account

started the year with no earnings. Growth came gradually. In February, the account made Rs. 33,000, but March saw earnings drop back to zero. Then, in April, the account saw a major jump, earning Rs. 1.4 lakh in a single month. The rest of the year was marked by a mix of quiet phases and busy brand campaigns. December ended strong with Rs. 95,000, pushing the total income for the year beyond Rs. 4.5 lakh. The key to August’s success was consistency, combined with a distinctive fashion style.



Rasha Thadani celebrates 1 year of ‘Uyi Amma’ with a gratitude post

Mumbai: It has been a year since Rasha Thadani left everyone awestruck with her scintillating performance on the “Uyi Amma” track from her debut drama “Azaad”. Sharing a BTS video from the shoot of the peppy number, Rasha expressed her gratitude to the viewers for showering “Uyi Amma” with so much love. “1 year of Uyi Amma...It found its way to you, and yall poured so much love into it. (sic),” she captioned the post. Rasha also thanked all those who are responsible for making his song happen. “Holding all that love so close, thanku to everyone that made this happen @pragyakapoor_ @gat-tukapoor @bosco-

martis And ofcourse @make-upbypompy @ashisbogi @alisha_behura @gul-naazz.u.khan the stars behind the camera...Ever grateful,” she went on to write Composed by Amit Trivedi, the song has been brought to life by Madhubanti Bagchi’s impactful voice. Bosco Leslie Martis is behind the impressive choreography of “Uyi Amma”. Recently, Rasha called the “Birangay” track from the period drama her “favourite”. She took to her Instagram and uploaded a video compiling clips from the shoot of the song crooned by Amit Trivedi, Amitabh Bhattacharya, and Meenal Jain. Rasha captioned the post, “BIRANGAY- the first song I ever shot, my

favourite song. The most special time, with the most special people. In my heart forever.” Made under the direction of Abhishek Kapoor, “Azaad” also marks the Bollywood debut of Aaman Devgn, with Ajay Devgn and Diana Penty in crucial roles. Up next, Rasha is all set to make her Tollywood debut with filmmaker Ajay Bhupathi’s forthcoming drama. Tentatively titled “#AB4”, the project will be presented by Ashwin Dutt and backed by Gemini Kiran under the banner of Chandamama Kathalu Pictures. Sharing her excitement, Rasha wrote on her Instagram, “New beginnings, endless gratitude! Mee andariki prema tho, I’m stepping into Telugu cinema.

Teaser of 'Jockey' produced by PK7 Studios and directed by Dr. Pragabhal unveiled in style



‘Jockey’, starring Yuvan Krishna, Ridhaan Krishnas, and Ammu Abhirami in lead roles, is centered around the traditional cultural sport of goat fight (keda sandai) that takes place in Madurai Following the success and critical acclaim of ‘Muddy’, the first film in India based on the challenging mud racing sport conducted in rainforests, director Dr. Pragabhal is gearing up with next film titled ‘Jockey’. Produced and presented by PK7 Studios, ‘Jockey’ is set in Madurai and revolves around the traditional cultural sport of goat fighting (keda sandai),

capturing the essence of the land and the character of its people. Yuvan Krishna and Ridhaan Krishnas, who starred in director Dr. Pragabhal’s maiden movie ‘Muddy’, play the protagonists, while Ammu Abhirami plays the female lead. Several popular actors have played important characters. The exciting teaser of ‘Jockey’ was released on Saturday (January 3) evening at the 13th Annual Veethi Virudhu event held at Velammal Higher Secondary School, Mogappair East, Chennai. The audience who watched the teaser congratulated the film crew. The film features

music by Sakthi Balaji, cinematography by Udhayakumar, and editing by Srikanth. R.P. Bala worked as the Creative Producer. Production Controller: S. Sivakumar, Art Director: C. U d h a y a k u m a r , Audiography: M.R. Rajakrishnan, Stunt Choreography: Jackie Prabhu, Costumes: Joshua Maxwell J, Makeup: Pandiyarajan, Colorist: Ranga. ‘Jockey’, produced by PK7 Studios and directed by Dr. Pragabhal, starring Yuvan Krishna, Ridhaan Krishnas, and Ammu Abhirami in lead roles, will be released in theatres soon.

Harshavardhan Rameshwar– Anurag Kulkarni Song ‘Yaalo Ee Gubule Elo’ Elevates Trikala Buzz



Animal and Spirit fame Harshavardhan Rameshwar’s music has released the stunning song Yaalo Ee Gubule Elo sung by Anurag Kulkarni from the movie ‘Trikala’. Harshavardhan Rameshwar, who has received National Award along with Pan India hits like Arjun Reddy and Animal, is now providing music for the mythological genre film ‘Trikala’. The latest song ‘Yaalo Ee Gubule Elo’ from the film, which stars Shraddha Das, Master Mahendran and Ajay in the lead roles, has been released under the direction of Mani Tellaguti and produced by Radhika Srinivas. Harshavardhan Rameshwar has brilliantly balanced the depth of the melody with his

style in this song. His musical treatment is the main strength of this song. His trademark intensity is clearly heard in every beat, giving the song a unique identity. It must be said that Anurag Kulkarni’s voice has given life to this song. His voice, which can convey emotions directly to the heart, has further elevated the feeling of love in the song. Anurag has once again proven his versatility with his soft touch and powerful voice modulation. Rakendu Mouli’s lyrics are catchy. Overall, the song ‘Yaalo Ee Gubule Elo’ stands as a perfect combination of Harshavardhan Rameshwar’s music brilliance and Anurag Kulkarni’s emotional singing.

Sara Arjun’s heartfelt thanks to her ‘Dhurandhars’ fans

Mumbai: Actress Sara Arjun, who made her debut as the leading lady in Aditya Dhar’s “Dhurandhar” opposite Ranveer Singh, posted a heartfelt note on social media showing her gratitude to the audience for showing love and support to the film. “Thanking the viewers for dismissing the assertion, she wrote on her Instagram, “For a long time, there has been a narrative that audiences no longer have the patience for long-form storytelling, that attention spans have shortened, that cinema no longer finds its place. But you proved otherwise. You reminded everyone of the true strength of an audience and what happens when people come together to support something they genuinely believe in. (sic).” Sara expressed her delight that they were able to connect with the audience. She revealed, “As artists and makers, we can control every part of the process, but we have no control over the audience, and that’s beautiful. We give our everything and trust that someone, somewhere, will connect. When that connection happens, it is one of the most fulfilling feelings in the world.” “I



bow my head in front of God, and in front of you, with a sincere thank you from the bottom of my heart,” she added. Sara further explained that being able to reach out to people is a true victory for an artist, for which she credits the makers of “Dhurandhar. She shared, “At the end of the day, acting is a performative art. We do what we do so that

someone out there feels something real. To see that you truly felt it, that the story reached you, is a victory I don’t take credit for.” Sara concluded the note by wishing all a great 2026. “As we step into a new year, I wish each one of you reading this, good health, love, growth, peace, and prosperity. Thank you for making me feel seen, supported, and loved.