

OM NAMO VENKATESAYA

02-01-2026

Total pilgrims: 85,032

Tonsures: 27,572

Hundi Vanukulu: 4.10 CR

Waiting Compartments: Outside Adding at Silathoranam.

Approx. Darshan Time for Sarvadarshanam (with out SSD Tokens) :20H

TO BOOK YOUR ADS CALL

99484 80279, 73307 78889



NATION | NEWS

Shashi Tharoor, Priyank Kharge slam BCCI, BJP over release of Bangladeshi cricketer Mustafizur Rahman from IPL 2026



WORLD | NEWS

Helicopter crashes in Arizona mountains, killing 4 people aboard

SPORTS | NEWS

Siraj makes ODI comeback for New Zealand series, Iyer's participation subject to fitness



INBRIF

ECI details 91.46 lakh logical discrepancy cases in Bengal SIR

Kolkata, January 3: The Election Commission of India (ECI) has released a detailed breakup of 91.46 lakh "logical discrepancy" cases identified during progeny mapping in the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal. Voters classified under "logical discrepancy" are those whose records showed unusual or inconsistent family-tree data during the verification process. Initially, at the end of the enumeration phase—the first of the three stages of SIR—the ECI had identified about 1.36 crore such cases. After detailed scrutiny, the number has been reduced to 91.46 lakh. These cases are in addition to 58.20 lakh "excluded voters" and 30 lakh "unmapped voters," who could not establish linkage with the 2002 electoral roll either through self-mapping or progeny mapping. The Commission is currently hearing cases related to unmapped voters, after which the logical discrepancy cases will be taken up. According to sources in the Chief Electoral Officer's office, the largest category among the discrepancy cases relates to name mismatches with the 2002 voters' list, accounting for around 51 lakh cases.

Drugs worth Rs 33.18 crore seized in Mizoram

Aizawl, Jan 2 : Assam Rifles have highly addictive methamphetamine tablets valued at over Rs 33.18 crore by arresting a drug peddler on Friday, officials said. A defence spokesman said that acting on credible intelligence inputs related to narcotics trafficking near India-Myanmar border, Assam Rifles conducted joint operation with Mizoram Police at Kaifang areas of Saitual district in Mizoram on Friday. During the operation, unusual movement was detected near the suspected location, he said. A swift and thorough search resulted in recovery of 11.062 kg of Methamphetamine tablets, a psychotropic substance with an estimated international market value of Rs 33.186 crore. The seized contraband and a vehicle were handed over to Mizoram Police for detailed investigation and further legal action. The drug peddler, identified as Hasan Ali, resident of Badarpur district in southern Assam was also apprehended in the operation and he was also handed over to Mizoram police for taking legal action under the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act 1985.

Expected KCR to attend House, offer suggestions: Revanth



Hyderabad (TSIT): Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Thursday said he had expected former Chief Minister and BRS chief K. Chandrashekar Rao (KCR) to attend the Assembly and offer constructive suggestions on river water issues after raising the matter publicly. Participating in a short-duration discussion on "Water-Facts" in the Legislative Assembly, the Chief Minister said the government had initiated a detailed debate on river water issues immediately after KCR spoke about them, but the former Chief Minister did not attend the session. Revanth Reddy said the public needed to know the truth about Krishna river projects and pointed out that the undivided Mahbubnagar district had suffered injustice both during the united Andhra Pradesh period and over the last ten years. He said this was why he expected

KCR, as a senior and experienced leader, to come to the House and share his advice. Stressing the importance of legislative debate, the Chief Minister said statements made in the Assembly carried more weight than those made at public meetings or offices. He expressed regret that the opposition leader had not attended the Assembly for the past two years. Recalling past instances, Revanth Reddy said Congress leaders continued to attend the Assembly and raise issues even when they were criticised by BRS leaders. He warned that when opposition leaders fail to speak in the House, it is the people who ultimately suffer. He added that while KCR had brought the issue of Krishna waters into public discussion, his absence from the legislature reflected a disregard for the Assembly, which he termed unfortunate.

VENEZUELA-US CONFLICT

Captured Prez Maduro, his wife aboard US warship; to face prosecution

CARACAS (TSIT): Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has been captured and flown from the country, President Donald Trump announced early on Saturday after confirming that the US forces conducted what he called "a large-scale strike against Venezuela and its leader." In a post on social media, Trump said Maduro's wife was also seized in the operation conducted along with US law enforcement. Trump said he planned to deliver a statement later Saturday morning. Venezuela's vice president has appeared on state TV to say that the government doesn't



know where the president and his wife are after U.S. forces captured them. "We do not know the whereabouts of President Nicolás Maduro and First Lady Cilia Flores," Delcy Rodríguez said. "We demand proof of life." At least seven explosions and low-flying aircraft

were heard around 2 am local time on Saturday, January 3, in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, with President Nicolás Maduro declaring a national state of emergency. The Venezuelan government accused the United States of attacking civilian and military

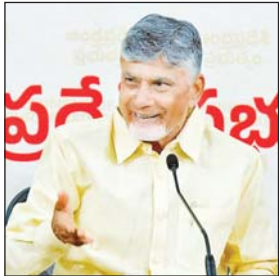
installations in multiple states. "The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela rejects, repudiates, and denounces before the international community the extremely serious military aggression perpetrated by the current Government of the United States of America against the Venezuelan territory," the government said. The statement added that President Maduro had "ordered all national defence plans to be implemented" and declared "a state of external disturbance." Additionally, Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino said that Venezuela will resist the presence of foreign troops in a video after the attack.

Indians lose over Rs 52,976 crore to cyber frauds over 6 years

New Delhi (TSIT) : Indians lost over Rs 52,976 crore to various frauds and cheating cases over the past six years, with Maharashtra recording the highest monetary losses in such offences, according to reports. Losses of about Rs 19,813 crore and 2,177,524 cheating-related complaints were recorded in 2025, according to data from Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) that compiled information from National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal.

AP CM thanks investors for placing confidence in govt's vision

Vijayawada, Jan 3 (UNI) Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has thanked investors for placing confidence in his government's vision and coming forward to invest in the State. On social media 'X' on Saturday, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu tagged a Bank of Baroda report which says Andhra Pradesh has firmly established itself as India's leading investment destination, capturing a remarkable 25.3% of all proposed



CM N.Chandrababu Naidu

investments in the first nine months of FY26, stating that is a welcome news for the people of Andhra Pradesh and a strong start to the year. "It reflects the impact

of our forward-looking policy reforms, particularly the Speed of Doing Business initiatives, including introducing the concept of an escrow-based mechanism for timely and transparent incentive distribution, as well as the introduction of clear, sector-specific policies," the Chief Minister acknowledged. Naidu said: "I thank the investors who have chosen Andhra Pradesh as their destination for growth and for the confidence they have placed in our vision.

14 Maoists neutralised in Chhattisgarh

Raipur/Sukma/Bijapur, Jan 3 : In one of the largest "anti-Naxal" operations this year, security forces have neutralised more than 14 Maoists in two separate fierce encounters in Sukma and Bijapur districts of Chhattisgarh's South Bastar region. The primary gunbattle erupted in the dense forests of the Kistaram area under the Sukma district, where joint teams of security personnel were conducting an intensive search operation based on intelligence inputs. The forces came under heavy fire from Maoists, leading to intense



exchanges that lasted several hours. According to Sukma and Bijapur police officials, several Maoists were killed in the encounter, with initial reports pegging the toll at over 14 in Sukma and Bijapur. Police officials indicate that most of the slain Maoists belonged to the Darbha Valley Committee (DVCM) cadre, a key Maoist formation. Notably, the Naxal commander allegedly involved in the killing of Additional SP Akash Girpunje of Konta was among those neutralised, dealing a significant blow to the outfit.

Colombia on high alert, calls for an urgent UN meeting on Venezuela

Bogota, Jan 3 : Expressing deep concern over the US attacks on Venezuela, Colombian President Gustavo Petro on Saturday called for an urgent UN meeting, calling for prohibition of the use or threat of force and peaceful settlement of international disputes. In a post on X late Saturday afternoon, India time, Petro also said that Colombia is deploying forces at the border considering the tense situation in the



region. "We just finished the national security council meeting that started at 3 a.m. Public forces are being

deployed to the border, along with all available assistance resources in case of a mass influx of refugees. The

Russia, Iran and Cuba condemn US 'armed aggression' against Venezuela
Moscow, Jan 3 : Several countries across the globe, including Russia, Iran and Iran, on Saturday severely criticised the US military attack on Venezuela, calling it a "flagrant violation" of the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Modi govt weakened village power: CM Siddaramaiah

Bengaluru (TSIT): Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday strongly criticised the Modi-led BJP government at the Centre, alleging that it has systematically weakened village-level governance and harmed the rural economy by diluting the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). Addressing a press conference at his Home Office Krishna, Siddaramaiah said the Centre introduced a new law by effectively withdrawing key provisions of the MGNREGS without consulting state governments, calling it a "dictatorial approach."



CM Siddaramaiah accused the Centre of weakening MGNREGS through a "dictatorial" law, warning it will hurt rural livelihoods, women workers, and panchayat self-governance.

to Education, while the present government was dismantling pro-people laws to favour corporate interests. Highlighting the scale of impact, he said around 12.16 crore workers across the country depend on NREGA, including 6.21 crore women. In

Karnataka alone, there are over 71 lakh NREGA workers, more than half of them women. Siddaramaiah alleged that the new law removes the guarantee of 100 days of employment, restricts work to notified areas, weakens the role of gram panchayats, and shifts the funding pattern to a 60:40 Centre-State ratio, placing a heavy burden on states. He warned that these changes would increase unem-

TN to assure 50% of last-drawn pay as pension under new scheme: Chief Minister Stalin

CHENNAI (TSIT): Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Saturday (January 3, 2026) announced that the State government will implement the Tamil Nadu Assured Pension Scheme (TAPS) for State government employees, according to a Daily Thanthi report. Under the new scheme, State government employees will be provided with an assured pension equal to 50% of their last-drawn basic pay. To ensure this, the Tamil Nadu government will bear the entire additional funds required for the pension fund, along with the



Under the new scheme, State government employees will be provided with an assured pension equal to 50% of their last-drawn basic pay. To ensure this, the Tamil Nadu government will bear the entire additional funds required for the pension fund, along with the 10% contribution made by employees.

10% contribution made by employees. As part of TAPS, pensioners receiving the assured 50% pension will also be granted dearness allowance (DA) hikes every six months, in line with

those given to serving government employees. In the event of the pensioner's death, 60% of the pension will be paid as family pension to the nominated family members. The scheme also provides for

the payment of gratuity not exceeding Rs 25 lakh to government employees who retire or die during service, based on their length of service. In addition, a minimum pension will be paid to officers who retire without completing the qualifying service period required for pension. Further, a special compassionate pension will be extended to employees who joined service under the Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS) and retired without pension during the interim period before the implementation of TAPS.

Mumbai's next mayor will be 'Hindu-Marathi' and from ruling Mahayuti: Devendra Fadnavis

MUMBAI: As political campaigning heats up for the city's top civic post, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Friday that the next Mayor of Mumbai will come from the ruling alliance and will be "both Hindu and Marathi."

His comments come as the push for the important Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections builds, with polling set for January 15 and results to be announced on January 16.

"The Mumbai mayor will be from the Mahayuti (BJP-led ruling alliance). The Mumbai mayor will be a Hindu and a Marathi person," Fadnavis said, responding to a question.

The issue had snowballed after Mumbai BJP president Ameet Satam recently remarked that his party would not allow any "Khan" to become the city's mayor, triggering sharp reactions from the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS).

After uniting with Sena (UBT) chief and his cousin Uddhav Thackeray recently, MNS president Raj Thackeray had declared that "Mumbai's mayor will be Marathi, and he will be ours".

Fadnavis has now sharpened his party BJP's pitch by stating that Mumbai will have a Hindu and Marathi mayor, further intensifying the political sparring as campaigning for elec-



tions to the 227-member municipal corporation, India's biggest and richest civic body, gathers pace.

The BJP Chief Minister made the remarks while speaking to 'Mumbai Tak' news channel during an interaction, titled 'Mahachavadi', as he travelled on the city's underground Metro line and answered questions on a

range of political issues.

About a query concerning former state minister and his party colleague Kripashankar Singh's reported comments about a north Indian becoming the mayor, the CM said, "Singh had not made the remark in the context of Mumbai. He is not even an official party spokesperson." Singh said on

Wednesday that efforts would be made to ensure the election of a "north Indian and Hindi-speaking" mayor in the Mira Bhayandar Municipal Corporation in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).

Elections to 29 municipal corporations in the state, including the BMC, will be held on January 15.

Chhattisgarh liquor 'scam': HC grants bail to former CM Bhupesh Baghel's son Chaitanya

RAIPUR: The Chhattisgarh High Court in Bilaspur on Friday granted bail to Chaitanya Baghel, son of former chief minister and senior Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel, in two cases related to the alleged liquor scam.

The HC granted him bail in a case lodged by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and another by the Chhattisgarh Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB)/Economic Offences Wing (EOW), ED counsel Saurabh Kumar Pande told PTI.

Once the order copy is uploaded, the details of the grounds on which the bail has been granted will be shared, he said.

Bhupesh Baghel welcomed the high court's decision, calling it a "victory of truth".

"Truth may be troubled, but it cannot be defeated. The high court has given a great relief. It is a matter of great happiness that Chaitanya has been granted bail," he told reporters.

Chaitanya was arrested based on the statement of one Pappu Bansal, who is an absconder.

I have been saying this from the beginning that the central and the state governments have been leaving no stone unturned to harass us, he alleged.

The agencies, such as the ED, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the EOW were being used to harass opposition leaders, he claimed.

He alleged that the people have now understood that the BJP-led central government targets oppo-

sition parties through investigative agencies.

"Those who get scared, join their party or compromise, while those who do not are sent to jail. Our ancestors went to jail during the fight for Independence. If they did not fear the Britishers, why should we fear them (BJP) today?" Bhupesh Baghel said.

The ED arrested Chaitanya Baghel on July 18 last year in connection with its money laundering probe in the alleged scam, while the ACB/EOW placed him under arrest while he was in jail, on September 24 in its case linked to the corruption probe.

The liquor "scam" in the state, according to the ED, was orchestrated between 2019 and 2022 when Chhattisgarh was governed by the Bhupesh Baghel-led Congress government.

The alleged scam resulted in a "massive loss" to the state exchequer and filled the pockets of the beneficiaries of a liquor syndicate, it said.

As per the ED, Chaitanya Baghel was at the helm of the syndicate behind the alleged liquor scam and personally handled nearly Rs 1,000 crore generated from the scandal.

The ACB/EOW has claimed Chaitanya Baghel, along with managing the proceeds of crime at a higher level, received around Rs 200-250 crore as his share. The proceeds of crime linked to the scam could exceed Rs 3,500 crore, the state agency had claimed.

CAQM revokes GRAP-3 curbs in Delhi-NCR as air quality improves

NEW DELHI: The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in NCR and Adjoining Areas on Friday revoked curbs imposed under GRAP 3 following improvement in air quality, officials said. "The AQI of Delhi, which was recorded as 380 on Thursday, has significantly improved and recorded 236 at 4 pm on Friday, exhibiting a trend. Keeping in view the prevailing trend of air quality, the CAQM Sub-Committee on GRAP decides to revoke all actions as envisaged under Stage-3 of the extant GRAP, with immediate effect, in the entire NCR," an official said.

"All actions under Stages 1 and 2 of extant GRAP to remain in force in NCR," the official added. Non-essential construction and demolition activities are now allowed to restart across Delhi-NCR. Works such as earthwork, piling, open trenching, welding, painting, plastering, tiling and flooring can also resume, along with the operation of stone crushers, brick kilns and mining activities, subject to compliance with pollution control norms, an official stated.

The transport of construction materials, including cement, sand and fly

ash, has also been permitted again, it said.

Restrictions on vehicles imposed during Stage 3 have been lifted as well. BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel four-wheelers can return to the roads, while the ban on non-essential diesel-run medium goods vehicles has been withdrawn, the statement said.

Inter-state diesel buses that do not meet CNG, electric or BS-VI norms are also no longer barred from entering Delhi, it read. Physical classes for students up to Class five, which had shifted to hybrid mode during Stage 3, can fully resume, it added.

Indore water contamination: Infant born after 10-year wait dies; family rejects govt compensation

INDORE: In a narrow, quiet lane of Marathi Mohalla, the silence is heavy in the Sahu family with grief that no amount of money can compensate, as they mourn their six-month-old baby, born after ten years of fervent prayers, medical treatments and sacred vows.

Last week, baby Avyan, referred to as a miracle child by the family, was extinguished by a simple, everyday act of diluting the infant's milk with tap water.

Baby Avyan is now the youngest face of a devastating water contamination crisis in Indore's Bhagirathpura area, a tragedy that has turned India's "cleanest city" into a site of mourning.

Talking to PTI on Friday, Avyan's grandmother, Krishna Sahu, said, "We have not taken any compensation from the state government so far. Our child is gone. Will the compensation bring him back to life? Money is not greater than a child."

According to the family, Avyan died on December 29.

Residents have claimed that 15 people died due to the vomiting-diarrhoea outbreak caused by contaminated drinking water in Bhagirathpura over the last few days. The health department, however, has not confirmed this claim and said only four deaths have occurred.

The government has announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh each to the families of the deceased persons.

"The entire family prayed for Avyan's birth and made a sacred vow at Hussain Tekri Dargah. My prayers were answered, but I never imagined that the baby would leave us so soon," she said in tears.

Krishna Sahu said the child was healthy and had put on five kgs.

"He played in his mother's lap. One day, he suddenly started suffering from diarrhoea and, on a doctor's advice, we started with medicines at home. His condition, however, worsened, and he was taken to a hospital, where doctors de-

clared him dead," she said.

Due to insufficient breast milk, the infant was fed packaged milk and milk powder mixed with water from the municipal tap, she said.

Sahu alleged that the water was contaminated and proved fatal for the child.

Anita Sen, a neighbour, said, "I have a month-old girl, a four-year-old and a 10-year-old in my house. Now the government should ensure that no mother is robbed of her child due to contaminated water."

More than 1,400 people have been affected by vomiting and diarrhoea in Bhagirathpura over the past nine days.

Tusker tramples 3 persons to death in J'khand

CHAIBASA: Three persons were trampled to death by a tusker in separate villages under Chaibasa Forest Division in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district late Thursday night, officials said.

Chaibasa Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Aditya Narayan told PTI that the incidents took place in different villages under Roro forest range.

He said a quick response team (QRT) has been deployed to track the elephant and warn villagers against venturing into areas frequented by it.

"The tusker strayed from its herd and attacked the villagers out of fear."

UP Congress forms committee in each district for scrutiny of deleted names in draft electoral roll

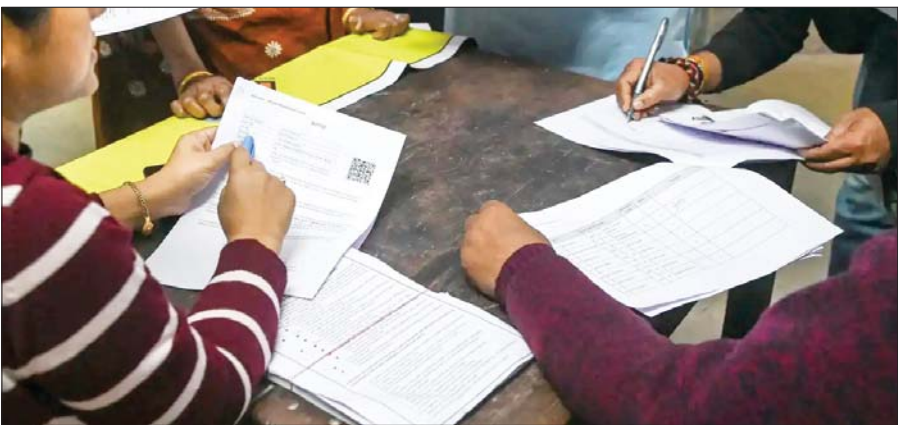
LUCKNOW: The Uttar Pradesh Congress has formed a committee of senior party leaders in each district for the scrutiny of the draft electoral roll scheduled to be published on January 6.

Provisional data suggest that the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls could lead to the deletion of nearly 2.89 crore names, or 18.70 per cent of the electorate, from the pre-SIR voter list.

According to the Congress, the committees will physically verify the deleted names and ensure that no legitimate voter is removed and no fraudulent names are added to the final list.

"Following the instructions of Congress in charge for Uttar Pradesh, Avinash Pandey, and with the approval of state Congress president Ajay Rai, a committee of senior leaders has been formed in each district to monitor the names deleted in the SIR exercise."

"The committees will physically verify the deleted names and ensure that no legitimate voter is removed and no fraudulent



names are added," the party said in a statement. The Constitution has given the common man the most powerful weapon – the right to vote, the statement quoted Ajay Rai as saying. "Recently, our leader Rahul Gandhi proved with data that vote theft occurred in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Haryana due to the unholy alliance

between the BJP and the Election Commission. "Given this situation, every Congress worker in Uttar Pradesh must help protect the votes of the poor, SCs, backward classes and minorities, because the BJP knows that these groups are largely not their voters and are suffering from its anti-poor policies," Rai said.

Indians travelling to Saudi Arabia need clearance for carrying restricted drugs: NCB

NEW DELHI: Indians travelling to Saudi Arabia should obtain prior permission for carrying certain "restricted" medicines in and out of the country, as the Kingdom there has introduced a mandatory online clearance system, the NCB said on Friday.

The federal anti-narcotics agency, in a statement, said the General Directorate of Narcotics Control, India Country Office, Saudi Arabia, has formally communicated to it that certain medicines that are legally available in India or other countries may be prohibited or subject to restrictions in the Kingdom.

"It has also been informed that carrying medicines in excess of prescribed limits may also attract regulatory action," the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) said.

The West Asian country

has launched an electronic service platform -- with the web address <https://cds.sfd.gov.sa> -- for submission of applications and related details. Permission can be sought online for the medicines intended to be carried for personal use.

As per the advisory, the NCB said, applications are required to be submitted by those who are travelling or their authorised representatives through the platform.

"Travellers are also advised to consult the official list of restricted and prohibited medicines issued by the Saudi authorities prior to undertaking travel," it said.

The NCB added that Indian travellers are advised to verify the permissibility of medicines they intend to carry and to obtain the requisite approvals, wherever applicable, before travel.

New Year stabbings rock Delhi, leave 3 dead

NEW DELHI: The New Year evening was streaked with blood with three all-time back-to-back stabbings leaving an equal number of people dead in Delhi.

Bihari Lal, 50, was allegedly stabbed in an attack by a group of juveniles when he asked them to stop shouting and playing loud music in northwest Delhi's Lal Bagh area.

A tailor by profession, Bihari Lal had just returned home Thursday evening from his job in Shastri Nagar, when he was faced with a raucous mob of revellers, whom he chastised for making noise.

"This led to a heated exchange, during which one of the juveniles stabbed Lal," a police officer said, adding that one of the boys kicked the victim several times during the fight.

Bihari Lal was rushed to Babu Jagjivan Ram Memorial Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

Police apprehended a juvenile in connection with the killing and seized the weapon of the crime. A hunt for the rest involved in the fight is on.

An FIR was registered at the Adarsh Nagar Police Station, and investigators are examining eyewitness accounts and CCTV footage from the area.

Bihari Lal's family and neighbours alleged that the group was notorious for creating disturbance in the area.

"He had just returned from duty and was parking his cycle when they came and started abusing everyone, throwing buckets, boxes and people's belongings. Bihari Lal only told them not to use abusive language and shout, as there were women and children around. That was all he said," Dimple, a neighbour, recounted.

Pushpa, a relative, alleged that the group had been terrorising residents for some time. "They keep throwing bottles, stones and sticks, and nobody does anything. We complained earlier, but no action was taken. The police never did anything," she said.

Pushpa said four boys were involved in the attack and "they stabbed him three times."

Hours later, in outer Delhi's Mangolpuri, an e-rickshaw driver, Vikas, was stabbed in a fight.

According to police, Vikas and his friend Sandeep, a daily-wage labourer, both aged 20, were sitting together when a group of youths started a fight with them.

"During the altercation, one of the accused stabbed Vikas, causing fatal injuries. Sandeep also suffered a minor lacerated wound," an officer said.

Will double rural job from 100 days to 200 if voted to power in Bengal: BJP's Suvendu Adhikari

CHANCHAL: Amid a sharply rising political heat in poll-bound West Bengal, the state's Leader of Opposition, Suvendu Adhikari, on Friday said the Narendra Modi government at the Centre will double the guaranteed 100-day rural employment scheme to 200 days if the BJP is voted to power in the upcoming elections.

Addressing a public meeting at Chanchal in Malda district, Adhikari urged people to preserve their job cards, claiming that the BJP would expand the rural employment guarantee scheme beyond its current scope.

"Keep your job cards well preserved. Once you elect the BJP to power, we will double the 100 days of rural job guarantee to 200 days," Adhikari said.

In December 2025, the BJP-led Centre passed the new Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB G RAM G) Bill, replacing the erstwhile MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act). The new law guarantees 125 days of work

instead of 100, integrates employment with infrastructure, and shifts 40 per cent funding responsibilities to the states, sparking wide-spread debate within the Parliament and outside over its impact and funding structure. Claiming that the TMC was making false allegations against the central government about blocking funds to the state for housing and rural job guarantee schemes, Adhikari alleged that money given for these was looted by unauthorised beneficiaries backed by the ruling dispensation of the state.

"BJP will give Rs 3 lakh for each house to the beneficiaries if it comes to power in the state," he said, maintaining that Rs 1.20 lakh earmarked by the Mamata Banerjee government to build a house under the state's own housing scheme wasn't sufficient in the wake of rising material costs.

Lashing out at the TMC government for putting up administrative obstacles before all programmes he planned, Adhikari alleged he has had to knock the doors of the Calcutta High Court

104 times since the 2021 assembly polls to secure permissions for his rallies and political events, the current one at Chanchal included.

"Why? Because the tyrannical TMC regime and their puppet police force keep denying permissions without a shred of justification, purely to stifle opposition voices and crush democratic rights," he said. "Time and again the Hon'ble Calcutta High Court has repeatedly slapped down these arbitrary denials and granted permissions, exposing the blatant abuse of power by Mamata Banerjee's Administration. This isn't governance; it's dictatorship in disguise," he added in a post on X. Adhikari asserted that the ongoing SIR process is an indicator of what is likely to happen in the upcoming polls.

"The difference between the votes obtained by TMC and BJP in the state in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections was only 40 lakh. Already 58 lakh names have been deleted in the published draft voter list," he said. Echoing the words of Union Home

Minister Amit Shah during his visit to Kolkata earlier this week, Adhikari said, "Trinamool Congress will sit in the opposition benches of West Bengal assembly after the polls in April."

The BJP leader designated West Bengal as "the homeland for Bengali Hindus" and referred to the attack on Malda Uttar BJP MP Khagen Murmu in Jalpaiguri in October last year to state that the party cannot allow such spilling of blood to continue on the soil of the state.

"Badla chaille badal korun (To exact revenge, bring about change first)," Adhikari said, tweaking the TMC's "Badla Noy, Badal Chai (no revenge, only change)" slogan of 2011 state polls where it toppled the Left Front government in Bengal.

Addressing the meeting, titled 'Parivartan Sankalp Sabha', Adhikari referred to attacks on Hindus during the anti-Waqf Amendment Act violence in Murshidabad in early 2025, stating that the "need of the hour" was to "unite the Hindus statewide".

EDITORIAL

Can Innovation Happen Only with Science and Engineering?

Sometimes received wisdom prevents us from appreciating a larger reality. What if everything we've heard about the importance of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) graduates for the needs of economic growth and for fuelling innovation is only partially correct? The mantra is insistent: every country is exhorted to produce more graduates in STEM fields, citing their critical, even exclusive importance for economic growth, innovation, and competitiveness. In every country, from India to the United States, alarms are being raised about the number of STEM graduates produced by China and their role in promoting the meteoric rise of new growth centres in the economy. It is strongly implied that unless very large numbers of STEM graduates are churned out, it will sound the death knell of prospects for growth, and everything that goes with it, both domestically and globally. There is no disputing the critical role scientists and engineers play in the development of technology, nor the contribution of many technology intensive sectors to economic growth. However, STEM is not the whole story.

The STEM narrative comes at the expense of graduates in arts, humanities, and even social sciences. At least some of the latter, above all, economics, are more easily defended in this narrative. Also, sociology, political science, psychology and history are understood to have a direct bearing on the evolution, efficacy and development of institutions of governance, society and economy. Since economics is prone to ever encroaching disciplinary imperialism, its methodology and data also nudge a significant part of the research in other social sciences towards the economic dimension.

The traditional approach to education in the arts and humanities has been to stress one of two following broad streams: First, there are those who enter the arts and humanities streams to pursue careers in those fields. They contribute uniquely to society, not just by creating movies, music, literature, all of which are an integral part of being human. It should also be noted that this cultural vibrancy by itself has positive economic consequences. Second, instruction in the arts and humanities provides a broad liberal arts education for a well-rounded, comprehensively educated citizenry. And indeed, this is valuable for a democratic, and socially and economically vibrant future. But there is a possible third stream: we could liberate the arts and humanities from their assigned place for balanced, harmonious development of society and unleash them onto other reaches of the economy, not just in kindred fields of advertising and marketing, but also in product development, and, dare we say it, the process of innovation itself. The broad challenge is to combine the numeracy, systematic data collection, analysis, experimentation, and logic of the hard sciences with the free-flowing yet focused creativity of the arts – the magical prism through which they view the world – in the service of technological innovation. Of course, there may well be many in those fields who may look down upon these humdrum, earthly and practical concerns! An assumption about arts and humanities is that they are soft subjects, without the rigour and rules demanded by the hard sciences. But whether it be music, or painting, or poetry, these are disciplines with structures, systems, and organisation. The rules and structures are often subtle, not overt or obvious to those not in the field. Creativity in those fields is enabled by rules and organisation, and is not about giving free reign to whimsical arbitrariness, a charge often levied by the STEM folk at the arts and humanities practitioners. The arts and humanities could enable a different sensibility, a creative leap, especially in the conception and design of new goods and conveniences. In a deep sense, everything is connected to everything else and people trained in what appears to the uninitiated to be the “unstructured” world of arts and humanities can display sensitivity to the most distant.

BEYOND THE FARM:

How Bihar’s Women are Reimagining Livelihoods From the Margins

Every day, thousands of government and non-government employees enter the Bihar secretariat in Patna. A large number of them use the public canteen, run entirely by a group of women popularly known as Jeevika Didis. From cooking and serving food to managing daily accounts and deciding the menu, every aspect of the enterprise is handled by women. This canteen has emerged as a symbol of women-led enterprise in Bihar. This model has become a compelling example of women's entrepreneurship. More importantly, the public discourse around women-led enterprises in Bihar is no longer confined to the corridors of power. It has begun to expand into villages, kasbas, and semi-urban spaces across the state. “The reason for this shift is both simple and significant. Recently, the Bihar government announced the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana, which proposes a base grant of Rs 10,000 for women from rural households, with additional assistance of up to Rs 2 lakh linked to enterprise performance. The scheme aims to lower entry barriers and improve the long-term viability of women-led enterprises. Jeevika and the architecture of collective enterprise The backbone of the scheme is around a leading social institution of the government of Bihar which is known as Jeevika. Jeevika has mobilised more than 12 million women across Bihar into Self-Help Groups (SHGs), creating one of the largest women's collectives in the world. These groups pool savings, access bank credit and, crucially, provide social and institutional support to women who would otherwise remain excluded from formal economic systems. The enterprises themselves reflect a pragmatic adaptation to local constraints. With limited access to capital, infrastructure or formal training, women have gravitated towards activities that require low initial investment and build on existing skills and social networks. These include poultry and small livestock rearing, food processing, handi-



crafts, catering services and small-scale hospitality ventures. Traditional crafts such as Madhubani painting and block printing, once confined to domestic spaces, are increasingly being organised into collective production units. Similarly, food processing units producing pickles, snacks and regional staples operate with basic machinery and local inputs. Community kitchens, popularly known as Didi Ki Rasoi, now supply meals to hospitals, offices and public institutions in several districts, simultaneously addressing nutrition needs and income generation. Backyard poultry and goat-rearing initiatives under Jeevika reach over two lakh families, providing both dietary protein and modest but steady cash flows. In some areas, women-run tea stalls, catering units and homestays are also emerging, linked tentatively to local tourism and service demand. Linking micro to macro The crucial question now is how to design and implement strategies that effectively link micro-level initiatives to macro-level outcomes. This question reveals multiple layers of constraints and barriers to scaling women-led enterprises in Bihar. Among the most critical challenges is ensuring genuine ownership of enterprises by women, while also addressing structural economic

barriers in the state. In a positive light, one key element for fostering ownership has been articulated by Nikhil Raj, who argues that grants should follow a matching model. Under this approach, women would contribute at least 25% equity, thereby promoting ownership, responsibility and long-term commitment rather than dependence on state support. Markets: The missing link Despite their promise, these enterprises face a fundamental challenge from markets. Bihar's low per capita income translates into weak local purchasing power, limiting demand for value-added goods in rural areas. Many women-led enterprises struggle to sell beyond their immediate geographies, making access to urban markets essential for sustainability. However, market linkage remains fragile. Limited digital literacy, patchy internet access and unfamiliarity with e-commerce platforms constrain women's ability to reach wider consumers. Sales often depend on periodic government-sponsored fairs or exhibitions in places like Bodh Gaya and Patna, providing visibility but little continuity. Scaling beyond such episodic opportunities has proven difficult. Research by Gurpreet Singh, Praveen Jha and Nivedita Sharma on rural non-farm employment in

Bihar highlights how fragmented markets and weak value chains limit growth, particularly for micro-enterprises lacking brand recognition, quality certification or logistical support. These challenges are not unique to Bihar, but they are magnified in a state where infrastructure gaps and low consumer demand intersect. The deeper constraint becomes visible when per capita income is considered. Bihar's per capita GSDP remains roughly one-third of the national average, reflecting a large population base, continued dependence on agriculture, limited industrialisation and a narrow services sector. As economist Alakh Narayan Sharma of the Institute for Human Development notes, this structural fragility is compounded by migration. He points out that remittances sent by migrant workers account for an estimated 28% of total village income in Bihar, making out-migration a central pillar of household survival rather than a supplementary strategy. It is within this constrained economic landscape that a quieter transformation is unfolding – one that is led largely by women, and largely outside agriculture. Possibility from the margins Women-led non-farm enterprises in Bihar represent neither a miracle solution nor a marginal footnote.

Usman Khawaja's Retirement Presser Shows Sportspersons the Moral Compass

The acronym GOAT has been in currency for a few decades, often to describe athletes whose on-field achievements have transcended generations. If there was a category for retirement speeches that go beyond the sport and offer a mirror to society, Australian cricketer Usman Khawaja would be a strong contender to top the list. Historically, retirement speeches and press conferences have always been feel-good, emotional, and sometimes heartbreaking. Players get nostalgic and express gratitude, while hard-nosed journalists asking softball questions. Everyone moves on in a few days. But some speeches linger. For fans earnestly invested in a sport, such speeches invariably bring heartache, even grief. The great American baseball player Lou Gehrig announced he has ALS (now known as Lou Gehrig's Disease). It was a cultural turning point when Magic Johnson stunned the world by announcing he was retiring immediately after testing positive for HIV. Kobe Bryant broke the mould by announcing his retirement through a poem titled 'Dear Basketball'. More recently, Roger Federer's retirement became internet-famous not just for his words, but for the visuals of him and his greatest rival, Rafael Nadal, sitting on the bench crying together. And closer home, Sachin



Tendulkar's meticulously written retirement speech, scribbled on a piece of paper, brought a one-sport nation to tears. In terms of skills, Khawaja doesn't belong to this league of elite sportspersons, but his retirement press conference is arguably the most searing sociological critique. It included polarising keywords like Gaza, Islamophobia, and right-wing politics. He was openly critical of the media, former players, and – even if indirectly – the people of his adopted country, Australia. It's important to understand why. Khawaja was born in Islamabad, before moving to Australia at the age of five. In 2011, he became the first Muslim and first Pakistani-born player to wear the much-romanticised Baggy Green (a term

to describe the hat the Australian Test team wears). He has had a distinguished career, punctuated by the most stunning comebacks. He has courted controversy, and repeatedly copped it for speaking up. While his importance stems from being a first in multiple categories, his legacy has been built on his refusal to simply fit in – something he tried in his younger days. It's worth watching the press conference to understand the many moments he felt let down. Culturally, everything Khawaja said felt out of place given the moment he chose, and definitely given how we, as an audience, are conditioned. He makes deliberate references to Allah, speaks of their hardship as a family, how he couldn't find social accept-

ance growing up, how he would hang out late to fit in with his teammates while they drank (and he didn't), and how white players who drink and get injured were lads, while he was lazy. “If you want to talk about integration, I've got a white wife who I love and cherish, and I've got half-Australian, half-Pakistani kids.” Listening to him is both disturbing and refreshing. Yet, in saying what he did, and even invoking Indian-origin cricket journalist Bharat Sundaresan, who has faced discrimination and been asked for his ID at cricket grounds while white colleagues weren't, Khawaja has set the bar for what free expression can look like. Over the years Sundaresan has spoken openly about the micro-aggressions he has experienced as a reporter, and found support from many Australian cricketers including Khawaja. It's not hard to find old social media posts from India's most prominent sportspersons complaining about administrative matters. But for over a decade they have stayed famously quiet on topics that could be perceived to be critical of the administration, and hurt their personal interests in any way. Though they've been happy puppets, forming a cross-sport hashtag team to condemn Rihanna for bringing up the farmer protest. When Mohammed Shami was targeted for his religious identity.

How Mamata Banerjee Is Banking On 'Bengali Hinduism' To Counter BJP

At every rally and public event, Mamata Banerjee states that she does not practise appeasement of any particular religion and that her politics is secular. A few days ago, however, the West Bengal government announced it would build a Durga temple in New Town, Kolkata, where Mamata laid the foundation stone for the project. The project is called 'Durga Angan', and the invitation card for the inauguration ceremony was issued on behalf of the state government. The letter noted that West Bengal's traditional Durga Puja was recognised by UNESCO in 2021 as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and that the Durga Angan project was meant to preserve that tradition. During the ceremony, Mamata placed a red sari and a white dhoti at the site. The explanation offered was symbolic: Durga is where Shiva is, and Shiva is where Durga is - the merger of 'Gauri' and 'Hara'. Mamata also announced plans to build a Mahakal Shiva temple in North Bengal. The BJP leadership views these actions as a response to political pressure and to ease the perception that the Trinamool Congress engages in Muslim appeasement. Union Home Minister Amit Shah says that while building a Durga temple is not a problem and is, in fact, a good thing, Mamata's actions have come too late and may be seen as inauthentic. But what's behind this shift in Mamata's politics? It is undeniable that Hindutva has been central to the BJP's politics. With the BJP in power in most states, it has been able to spread its Hindutva agenda nationwide. To counter this, parties have had to take their own respective routes. Images of Rahul Gandhi wearing the sacred thread and taking a dip in the Ganga aren't a surprise anymore. Earlier, Rajiv Gandhi had sent Buta Singh to Ayodhya. Kejriwal, too, frequently visits temples before elections. However, the fact is that often, when opposition parties adopt Hindutva to counter the BJP, they often end up appearing like its B-



team. Mamata's case, however, is shaped by the distinct nature of Bengali Hinduism. For instance, Bengali Hindus are largely non-vegetarian, with fish considered auspicious in their culture. In several temples, fish offerings are still common. Shakta traditions are deeply influential. Bengalis are culturally pluralistic, shaped by both Aryan and non-Aryan influences. The Hinduism of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda reflects this difference. Mamata Banerjee's composite cultural identity is also rooted in this Bengali tradition. Mamata never really foregrounded her religious identity in the past. Yet, like many Bengali Hindu women, she has always been personally devout. What has changed now is the public display of her religiosity. This approach helped her against the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. What will happen in 2026 remains to be seen. Mamata has also built a political narrative positioning Modi and Amit Shah as outsiders from Delhi, framing their presence as an attempt by an 'external' power to take control of Bengal. By saying “they are not Bengalis”, Mamata isn't referring only to ethnic Bengalis but also Gujaratis,

Marwaris, Maharashtrians and Hindi-speaking residents. Linguist Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay explained extensively how the Bengali identity is rooted in language. It is this collective Bengali identity that Mamata is trying to tap to take on Delhi. As an opposition leader, Mamata is also positioning the election as a direct contest between herself and Modi, rather than between the West Bengal BJP and the Trinamool Congress. While the BJP relies on Modi's brand, Mamata is banking on her radical anti-Centre politics. There is no single axis to this election. The BJP, meanwhile, is looking towards new political formations to split the Muslim vote. It hopes that Humayun Kabir's party will make gains in North Bengal and that the ISF will weaken Mamata in the South. With Murshidabad's 21 seats and Malda's 10, these districts are key targets. Owaisi, too, is attempting to dent Mamata's Muslim support. In any case, many Muslim leaders have begun feeling that Mamata is overperforming Hindu religiosity and neglecting Muslim concerns. Mamata, however, counters this by warning Muslims that such fragmentation will only help the BJP.

of the day uote

Social media should be responsible for the content they publish. Intervention is required

ASHWINI VAISHNAW | UNION MINISTER

A high degree of localisation has enabled us to achieve such scale while maintaining world-class quality, highlighting the strength and global competitiveness of India's automotive manufacturing ecosystem

HISASHI TAKEUCHI | MD AND CEO, MARUTI SUZUKI INDIA

We look forward to 2026 with confidence. We will be collaborative, agile, and bold... working as one team to live our purpose and achieve our potential. Think big. Do less. Execute flawlessly. And, most importantly, enjoy the journey

ANISH SHAH | CEO AND MD, MAHINDRA GROUP

SHORT TAKES

CIL opens auctions to neighbour nations

New Delhi: State-owned CIL Friday said buyers from neighbouring nations Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal can now join its online coal auctions directly, skipping the Indian middlemen. The move will help in utilising the surplus coal resources better and promote transparency. Earlier, access to Coal India Ltd's (CIL) dry fuel by consumers across the borders was only through domestic coal traders who were allowed to buy and sell without any end-use restrictions. "In a first, effective January 1, 2026, CIL has permitted coal consumers located in the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, who wish to import coal from India, to directly participate in the Single Window Mode Agnostic (SWMA) auctions conducted by the company," CIL said. SWMA auction is a unified, simplified e-auction system launched in 2022 to replace multiple existing auction windows (Spot, Special Spot, Forward) into one single platform, making coal procurement easier, transparent, and market-driven for all buyers.

₹7,295-cr scheme to ease export credit

New Delhi: The government Friday announced a Rs 7,295-crore export support package, comprising a Rs 5,181-crore interest subvention scheme along with a Rs 2,114-crore collateral support, to improve exporters' access to credit. Both measures will be rolled out over a period of six years (2025-31). Additional Secretary in the Commerce Ministry Ajay Bhadoo said that these interventions will address the trade finance issues of exporters. Under the interest subvention scheme, exporters will get a subsidy on pre- and post-shipment export credit. This is the second component of the Rs 25,060-crore export promotion mission (EPM) approved in November 2025.

UCO Bank sees 13% growth in total biz

Kolkata: Public sector lender UCO Bank Friday reported a 13.29 per cent growth in its total business to Rs 5.54 lakh crore for the third quarter of the current fiscal. The bank's total business stood at Rs 4.89 lakh crore in the corresponding period of the previous year. According to a regulatory filing, the Kolkata-headquartered bank's total advances rose by 16.27 per cent to Rs 2.43 lakh crore during the quarter that ended in December, compared to Rs 2.09 lakh crore in the year-ago period.

Govt accelerates electronics mfg

Foxconn, Dixon, Samsung among 22 projs cleared for electronics components manufacturing scheme

Agency

New Delhi, Jan 2: Foxconn, Dixon, Tata Electronics and Samsung are among the 22 new proposals approved by the government under the ambitious Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS), with a projected investment of Rs 41,863 crore and production worth Rs 2,58,152 crore.

The approvals - third set of clearances under the scheme - are expected to generate 33,791 new jobs, reduce India's import dependence for critical electronic components, and accelerate the build-out of high-value manufacturing capabilities in the country.

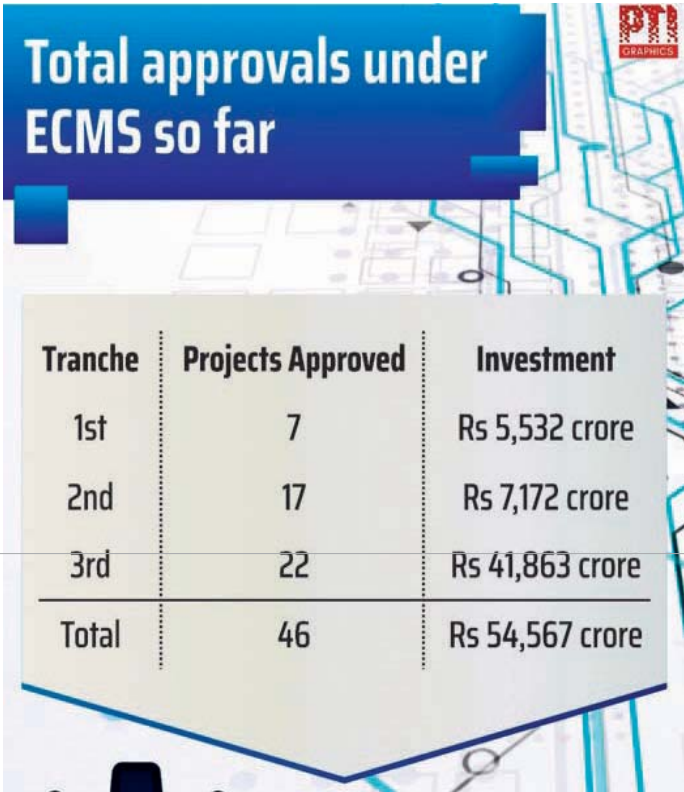
Taken together with previous ECMS tranches and ongoing semiconductor initiatives, the latest clearances underline India's firm resolve to emerge as a major hub in global electronics supply chains.

According to sources, a large chunk of investments and employment will come from Apple's new vendors, who are now joining its global supply chain. Some of them will be exporting to Apple's international locations.

Notably, Motherson Electronic Components, Tata Electronics, ATL Battery Technology India, Foxconn (Yuzhan Tech India's), and Hindalco Industries are five vendors from Apple's ecosystem.

The approved projects are spread across eight states, including Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, and reflect the government's focus on geographically balanced industrial growth and expansion of electronics manufacturing across the country, according to the IT Ministry.

At a briefing announcing the new set of investment proposals approved by the govern-



The approval of the third tranche under the ECMS sets a powerful new trajectory for India's electronics manufacturing journey

PANKAJ MOHINDROO | CHAIRMAN OF INDIA CELLULAR AND ELECTRONICS ASSOCIATION

ment, Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw underlined the Centre's focus on big reforms, enabling policies, and efficient and speedy execution of projects and initiatives.

The results are clearly visible sector after sector, Vaishnaw said. The minister asked the industry to prioritise setting up design teams and nudged players to go for Six Sigma to be globally competitive.

In the latest batch, the maximum investments are set to come in the category of enclosures (mobile enclosures are structural housings that protect and support internal electronic components, widely used in smartphones and handheld devices), where three projects will attract Rs 27.166 crore worth of investments.

Nine projects fall in the PCB space (commonly used in con-

sumer electronics, industrial controls, and automotive systems, among others) and would involve an investment of Rs 7,377 crore, while Rs 2,922 crore investment would go into a lithium-ion cell project.

Li-ion cells are rechargeable energy storage components used to power portable consumer electronics, including smartphones, notebooks, tablets, power banks, and audio accessories.

Of 11 products, 5 are bare components, such as PCBs, capacitors, connectors, enclosures, and Li-ion cells; 3 pertain to sub-assemblies, such as camera modules, display modules, and optical transceivers; and 3 are supply chain items like aluminium extrusion, anode material, and laminate.

As per a background note circulated by the ministry on the new tranche of approvals, the nod includes the manufacturing of 11 target segment products that have cross-sectoral applications, such as mobile manufacturing, telecom, consumer electronics, strategic electronics, automotive, and IT hardware.

OHPC signs MoU with ALIMCO to empower Divyangjans, sr citizens

Agency

Bhubaneswar, Jan 2: Odisha Hydro Power Corporation Ltd. (OHPC) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO), Bhubaneswar, to distribute aids and assistive devices to around 400 Divyangjans and senior citizens across Odisha under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative.

Fully funded by OHPC, the programme aims to enhance mobility, independence, and quality of life for persons with disabilities and eligible elderly citizens. As per the MoU, ALIMCO will supply and distribute a wide range of modern, need-based assistive devices. These include tricycles, motorised tricycles, wheelchairs (including joystick-operated models), rollators, walkers, CP chairs, hearing aids, crutches, Braille and smart canes, smartphones for the visually impaired, and ADL kits for leprosy patients.



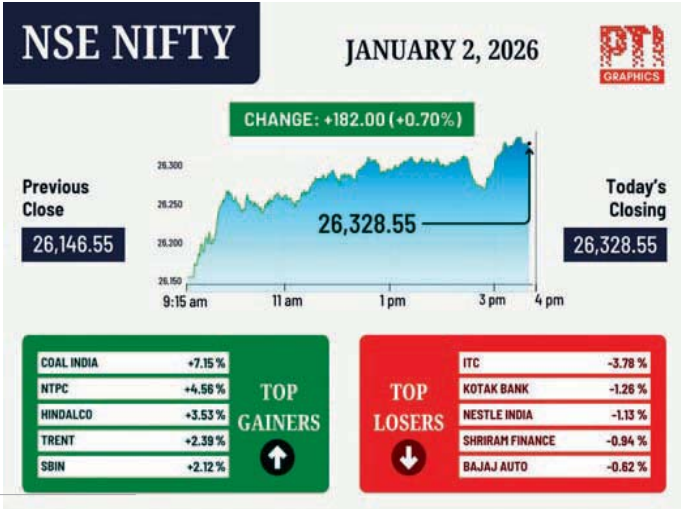
Senior citizens will receive support equipment such as walking sticks, elbow and axilla crutches, walkers, wheelchairs with and without commode, commode chairs and stools, silicon foam cushions, knee braces, spinal and cervical supports, lumbar-sacral belts, rollators with brakes, walking sticks with seats, foot care kits, and other essential aids to ensure comfort and safety.

The MoU was signed by Anima Tripathy, Chief General Manager (HR), OHPC, and Vivek Dwivedi, General Manager (Marketing) I/c, ALIMCO, in the presence of OHPC Directors Sandeep Patnaik (HR) and Ami-ya Kumar Mohanty (Operation) I/c, along with senior officials from both organisations.

The initiative underscores OHPC's commitment to social responsibility and inclusive development, reinforcing its focus on empowering vulnerable sections of society to lead lives of dignity and independence.

Nifty hits record intra-day peak

Rising for the third-straight session, the 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 182 points, or 0.70%, to 26,328.55. During the day, it surged 193.45 points, or 0.73%, to reach an all-time peak of 26,340



Agency

Mumbai, Jan 2: Equity benchmark index Nifty hit its lifetime peak before closing 182 points higher Friday, and the BSE Sensex jumped 573 points, powered by strong buying in power, banking and metal stocks.

Unabated capital infusion by domestic institutional investors amid a sharp rally in Asian peers also supported the domestic stock market, traders said.

Charting out a firm trend, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 573.41 points or 0.67 per cent to settle at 85,762.01. During the day, it jumped 623.67 points, or 0.73 per cent, to 85,812.27.

A total of 2,772 stocks advanced, while 1,449 declined and 150 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Rising for the third-straight session, the 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 182 points, or 0.70 per cent, to 26,328.55. During the day, it surged 193.45 points, or 0.73 per cent, to reach an all-time peak of 26,340.

"After the New Year holiday, the global markets initiated 2026 on a positive note, while strong domestic automobile sales

helped Indian equities to touch a fresh all-time high. Investor sentiment remains broadly constructive as attention turns to Q3 earnings, which are expected to guide near-term market direction," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

From the 30-Sensex firms, NTPC, Trent, Bajaj Finance, Power Grid, Maruti, State Bank of India, ICICI Bank and Bharat Electronics were among the biggest gainers.

In contrast, ITC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Titan Company, Axis Bank and Bharti Airtel were the laggards.

Shares of cigarette and tobacco product makers ITC, Godfrey Philips and VST Industries ended lower Friday, extending their previous day's decline, after the government imposed an additional excise duty on such products effective February 1.

ITC's stock ended 3.79 per cent lower at Rs 350.15 on the BSE. During the day, the stock tumbled 5.11 per cent to Rs 345.35 - its 52-week low. ITC emerged as the biggest laggard among the BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty firms.

LIC launches spl campaign to revive lapsed policies

Agency

New Delhi, Jan 2: Insurance behemoth Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) on Friday announced the launch of a two-month-long campaign for the revival of individual lapsed policies.

This special drive, to be carried out from January 1 to March 2, 2026, is extended to all non-linked policies with a very attractive concession in late fee. Concession is being offered in late fee for all non-linked insurance plans up to 30 per cent of the late fee, up to a maximum amount of Rs 5,000,

if eligible for revival, LIC said in a statement.

There is a 100 per cent waiver of late fee for micro insurance policies to facilitate affordable restoration of risk cover, it said. Policies which are in a lapsed condition during the premium-paying term and not completed policy term are eligible to be revived in this campaign, it said. There are no concessions on medical/health requirements, it said.

The campaign is launched for the benefit of policyholders who were not able to pay premiums on time due to any unfavourable circumstances, it said.

Odisha to host Mining and Infrastructure International Expo

Agency

Bhubaneswar, Jan 2: Reinforcing its position as the 'Mineral Hub of India', Odisha will host the 4th Edition of the Odisha Mining and Infrastructure International Expo 2026 from January 8 to 11 at Baramunda Ground, Bhubaneswar.

The four-day international B2B trade show aims to position Odisha as India's mining powerhouse and a global hub for innovation, sustainable mining and advanced infrastructure solutions.

The expo seeks to create a robust ecosystem for environmentally responsible mining, cutting-edge technologies and global policy dialogue. Recognised as India's largest mining exhibition, the event will showcase advanced machinery, equipment and services while connecting entrepreneurs, start-ups and young professionals from Odisha with global industry leaders.

Announcing the event, Swami Prem Anveshi, Chair-



man, Futorex Trade Fair and Events Pvt Ltd, said, "Over the past three years, the expo has emerged as a catalyst for the future of mining in India and beyond. The 2026 edition will promote sustainable technologies and foster dialogue on policy, innovation and global best practices, helping shape a

unified roadmap for the Indian mining industry."

Tapan Kumar Chand, former CMD, NALCO and Chairman of the Expo Organising Committee, said the focus would be on sustainable and zero-net mining, global policy discussions and empowering start-ups. "The 4th edition will feature over 250 exhibitors from 10+ countries, spread across 30,000 sq. mtrs, with 20,000+ visitors and 150 live demonstrations," he added.

The expo will be inaugurated by Odisha Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati and conclude with the valedictory ceremony graced by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi as chief guest.

KFC, Pizza Hut operators merge

The deal comes at a time when fast-food operators in India are grappling with slowing same-store sales and pressure on margins, as consumers cut back on eating out and ordering food amid rising living costs

Agency

New Delhi, Jan 2: Sapphire Foods India and Devyani International Ltd (DIL), the two leading operators of the KFC and Pizza Hut brands, are set to merge, creating a fast-food giant with over 3,000 stores.

The boards of Devyani International Ltd (DIL) and Sapphire Foods India Ltd (SFIL), the two leading franchise operators of Yum! Brands, at their respective meetings held Thursday, approved a scheme of arrangement for the merger, which will have a combined turnover of nearly Rs 8,000 crore.



As per the scheme of arrangement, SFIL will merge with DIL, an RJ Corp firm promoted by the Jaipuria family. The combined entity will have operations in markets such as India, Nigeria, Nepal, Thailand and Sri Lanka.

Besides Yum! Brands like

KFC, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell, the combined entity will also hold licenses for other global QSR brands, including Costa Coffee, Tea Live, New York Fries, and Sanook Kitchen, in their respective markets.

Moreover, this strategic consolidation of the two Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) operators will also create a single unified Yum! India Franchisee for KFC and Pizza Hut.

The merger is happening at a time when Indian QSR chains are witnessing sluggish growth, lower margins, and almost flat demand growth.

According to the scheme

of arrangements, 177 equity shares of DIL will be issued for every 100 equity shares of SFIL.

Currently, SFIL Promoters owns 25.35 per cent stake in the company, of which Arctic International, a group company of DIL, will buy 18.5 per cent. "Balance to get swapped for DIL shares," said DIL.

The proposed merger is subject to receipt of all customary regulatory and statutory approvals. "The process of obtaining these approvals is expected to take approximately 12 to 15 months, following which the merger will become effective," according to a joint statement.

Union Bank celebrates 'Ethics & Compliances Week'

Bhubaneswar:

Union Bank of India has conducted walkathon for observing 'Ethics & Compliances Week' in Bhubaneswar. The walkathon started from Rupali Square, proceeded to Ram Mandir Square, and returned to the starting point. It was attended by Hare Krishna

Das, Zonal Head, Bhubaneswar, D Venkatswarulu, Deputy Zonal Head, Bhubaneswar, Niranjana Barik, Regional Head, Bhubaneswar Region, Vinay Sharma, Deputy Regional Head, Bhubaneswar Region, Jeetendra Kumar Samal, Deputy Regional Head, Bhubaneswar Region, along with staff members from various offices and branches in and around Bhubaneswar. On this occasion, the officials of the bank encouraged for following Ethics, Sincerity, good practices in every sphere of life.



US launches strikes on Venezuela, captures President Maduro and charges him with drug offences

"We were going to do this four days ago but the weather was not perfect," Trump tells Fox News. "The weather has to be perfect... all of a sudden it opened up and we said go," he says. He adds that, when they captured Maduro, he was "in a house that was more like a fortress than a house" with "solid steel all around". Reiterating that he doesn't think any US soldiers were killed, Trump adds "a couple of guys were hit but they came back and they're supposed to be in pretty good shape". More from US President Donald Trump, who is speaking to Fox News. Trump says that the US is going to be "strongly involved" in Venezuela's oil industry moving forward. He adds that he spoke to Maduro "a week ago" and that he told him "you have to give up, you have to surrender". "We had to do something much more surgical, much more powerful", Trump says. Donald Trump is speaking on Fox News



right now. The US president says there were "a few injuries but no deaths on our side" during the strikes on Venezuela. We'll bring you more on what he has to say in the next few moments. We've just heard from US Vice President JD Vance. He says in a post on X: "The president offered multiple off ramps, but was very clear throughout this process: the

drug trafficking must stop, and the stolen oil must be returned to the United States. "Maduro is the newest person to find out that President Trump means what he says. Kudos to our brave special operators who pulled off a truly impressive operation." In Caracas, there is apprehension in the streets. People barely speak out, but there are queues in

pharmacies and supermarkets. WhatsApp groups are bursting with messages and videos, while people in the streets of Eastern Caracas are mostly silent. "Do you know what happened?" a woman asks me in a low voice outside a plaza. She went out to get medicine for her nerves but found the 24-hour pharmacy closed. "Please don't record me,"

she asks. A strong smell, reminding me of tear gas - so familiar from the famous protests of 2017 - seeps through my window. I'm in a high-rise building, in the eastern part of the capital, Caracas. My mother notices it too. Earlier, on the balconies of nearby buildings, there was an outburst of euphoria minutes after a message began circulating on social media from President Donald Trump announcing the capture of Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores. "But the shouts lasted only seconds. A supermarket that also operates 24-hours kept its shutters down for most of the morning, with a line of people waiting for it to open. Although it had been a possibility for months, what happened today has come as a shock to Venezuelans. For the opposition to Nicolás MaSince early this morning, BBC Verify have been working through a number of videos showing explosions,

fire and smoke in various locations around Caracas to identify which sites have been targeted. So far, we have confirmed four locations. Generalissimo Francisco de Miranda Air Base aka La Carlota - footage filmed at a distance shows two plumes of smoke and an explosion close to this military airfield in Caracas Port La Guaira - Caracas' main conduit to the Caribbean Sea, located in Miranda state. Footage filmed nearby shows several plumes of smoke rising into the air, and at least one fire burning Higueroate Airport - also located in Miranda state, just east of Caracas. Footage filmed from two angles shows fire and repeated flashes on the ground, a possible indication of secondary explosions Fuerte Tiuna - The Getty news agency has released images of fire burning in the direction and damage to vehicles at this key military facility in Caracas.

What we know about Maduro's capture



The US has captured Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro after a large scale strike on the South American country, US President Donald Trump has said. Trump said Venezuela's left-wing president and his wife were flown out of the country in a military operation in conjunction with US law enforcement. They have been charged with drug and weapons offences in New York. It comes after explosions were reported across the capital Caracas in the early hours of Saturday morning, including at military bases. The Venezuelan government has since demanded proof Maduro is alive. It has also deployed its

armed forces and declared a national emergency. Maduro's capture comes after heightened tensions between the two countries, with Washington striking boats in the Caribbean it says are being used to carry drugs. The US has accused the Venezuelan president of being personally involved in drug-smuggling and being an illegitimate leader, while Maduro has accused the US of intimidation. Here is what we know so far. What do we know about the operation? There are few details about Maduro's capture. Trump did not disclose how the Venezuelan president was detained or where he has been taken.

More than 100 shelter overnight in Japan shrine due to heavy snow



More than 100 people have had to shelter in a shrine on a mountain top in Japan after heavy snowfall cut off access by road. Around 130 people were forced to spend the night in the halls and lobbies of the Mitsumine Shrine in the Saitama prefecture on Friday after the roads around it were closed due to safety concerns, public broadcaster NHK reports. The local authority confirmed the occupants of around 50 cars had stayed in the shrine building, and said no one had fallen ill. Japan is experiencing heavy snowfall at present, with up to 40cm forecast to fall in some parts on Saturday. Up to 80cm of snow has fallen in some parts of the country in the past 72 hours, data from the Japan Meteorological

Agency shows, with more predicted to fall as a cold front persists. Several accidents around the Mitsumine Shrine including cars slipping had prompted the road closure, NHK reported, citing local police. Up to 4cm of snow has fallen in the region, while temperatures as low as -15C have made for icy conditions. Located 1,110m (3,640 ft) above sea level in the mountains near the city of Chichibu, the Mitsumine Shrine is a popular centre for Shinto worship and is dedicated to Izanami and Izanagi, the divine couple credited with creating the Japanese islands. The shrine is said to have been founded in the 1st Century by Prince Yamato Takeru no Mikoto, son of Emperor Keiko.

Craig the beer-ambassador elephant dies aged 54

A Kenyan elephant believed to have been one of Africa's largest male tuskers has died of old age. The pachyderm, fondly known as Craig, died of natural causes on Saturday morning at Amboseli National Park in southern Kenya, conservationists confirmed. "Craig had just turned 54 years old. He led a long life and no doubt fathered many calves," said the Amboseli Trust for Elephants in its farewell message. Famed for his long tusks, Craig the elephant was a major attraction at the park near the Tanzanian border. In 2021, he was named an ambassador for the popular Kenyan lager brand Tusker - a name also used for adult male elephants



with tusks. The Kenya Wildlife Service described Craig as an "icon" of successful conservation. "Craig was one of the last remaining super tuskers in Africa - a rare class of bull elephants whose two tusks weigh over 45kg (100lb) each. Fewer than a handful remain today, making him a living monument to Africa's natural heritage."

Zelensky names spy chief to head presidential office after corruption row



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has named spy chief Kyrylo Budanov as his new chief of staff, just over a month after his previous top aide resigned in a corruption row. "At this time, Ukraine needs greater focus on security issues," Zelensky said in a social media post, alongside a photo of his meeting with Gen Budanov in Kyiv. The 39-year-old has until now led the Hur military intelligence, which has claimed a number of highly effective strikes against Russia. Zelensky also said he intended to replace his defence minister Denys Shmyhal, appointing his current minister of digital transformation Mykhaylo Fedorov to take up the post. Budanov's predecessor, Andriy Yermak, wielded

enormous political influence throughout Russia's full-scale invasion, which began in 2022. He also led Ukraine's negotiating team in crucial talks with the US aimed at ending the war. Zelensky wrote on Friday: "At this time, Ukraine needs greater focus on security issues, the development of the defence and security forces of Ukraine, as well as on the diplomatic track of

negotiations. "Kyrylo has specialist experience in these areas and sufficient strength to deliver results." The president added that he had already instructed his new office chief to update and present key documents regarding "the strategic foundations" of Ukraine's defence. The chief of presidential staff in Ukraine is historically a very powerful position. There was a time

in the 2000s when a presidential administration head in Ukraine wielded about as much power as the president himself. Ostensibly administrative, the role traditionally offered not just close access to the head of state, but also plentiful opportunities to pull the strings of government. For example, the chief of presidential staff could lobby for government appointments and apply pressure to business circles, often resulting in personal gain. Budanov's appointment suggests an intention to overhaul the role. It puts the president's office on a war footing - it will very likely be much more focused on security and the war with Russia. Later on Friday, Zelensky announced other changes to his top team.

POLICE IDENTIFY FIRST FOUR VICTIMS OF SWISS SKI RESORT FIRE

Police have identified the first four bodies of people who were killed in a fire at a bar in a Swiss ski resort on New Year's Eve. The bodies of two Swiss women aged 21 and 16, and two Swiss men aged 18 and 16 have been returned to their families, police said. "Extensive" work from officers and the Institute of Forensic Medicine made the identifications possible, Valais cantonal police said in a statement, and work to identify the remaining victims continues. The blaze at Le Constellation in Crans-Montana killed 40 people and injured 119 others, officials have said. With many



of the injured identified, families now face an agonising wait for information about those still missing. The likely cause of the fire was sparklers on champagne bottles being carried too close to the ceiling, a preliminary investigation of how the fire began

found. Switzerland's President Guy Parmelin called it "one of the worst tragedies" experienced by the country. Further details about the identified victims, including names, have not been released. On Friday, police said 113 of the injured have been iden-

tified, and include 71 Swiss, 14 French and 11 Italian citizens. Among the dead and missing are many teenagers. Le Constellation was a venue known to be popular with a younger crowd in the ski resort town, where the drinking age is 16. A teenage golfer from Italy was the first death to be named, though Swiss and Italian officials have so far declined to confirm his death. Bunches of flowers, soft toys and messages of love and hope are piled up outside the police barriers outside the bar. On Saturday, families were being directed to a conference centre just outside Crans.

Missile attack on Kharkiv kills two including child, authorities say



Two people including a three-year-old child have been killed and around 28 others injured in a Russian strike on Kharkiv, Ukrainian officials have said. A multi-storey residential apartment block was almost completely destroyed in the dual missile attack on Friday afternoon, which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called "heinous". Russia's Defence Ministry denied reports of an attack, suggesting the blast had been caused by Ukrainian ammunition detonating. The strike comes ahead of crunch talks on a US-brokered peace plan in Kyiv on Saturday. Zelensky says around 15 countries are expected to attend the talks, along with representatives from the EU and Nato, with a US delegation joining the meeting via video link. Leaders of the so-called coalition of the willing are then set to meet in France on 6 January.

Officials in Kharkiv said the bodies of a woman and a three-year-old child were found in the rubble, with preliminary information suggesting the pair may have been a mother and son. "Unfortunately, this is how the Russians treat life and people - they continue killing, despite all efforts by the world, and especially by the United States, in the diplomatic process," Zelensky wrote on X. Of the 28 injured, which included a six-month-old baby, 16 have been taken to hospital. A search and rescue operation is ongoing, with more than 80 volunteers working at the scene, according to regional governor Oleh Syniehubov. The Russian Defence Ministry said in a statement on Telegram that its armed forces "neither planned nor launched attacks using missile weapons or aircraft weapons within the city of Kharkiv".

TRUMP WARNING OVER IRAN PROTESTS 'RECKLESS' SAYS FOREIGN MINISTER

Donald Trump's warning that the US will intervene if peaceful protesters are killed was "reckless and dangerous", Iran's foreign minister has said. Abbas Araghchi's comments came after the US president said Washington "will come to their rescue" of demonstrators taking part in protests over Iran's economy, writing in a brief social media post: "We are locked and loaded and ready to go." Araghchi indicated Iran's armed forces were on standby and "know exactly where to aim" in the event of an attack. At least eight people are reported to have died during the week-long protests, as of Saturday morning. Trump wrote on Friday: "If Iran shots [sic]

and violently kills peaceful protesters, which is their custom, the United States of America will come to their rescue." The US president did not specify what action Washington might take. Previously, it has carried out strikes on Iran's nuclear sites, which elicited a retaliatory strike on a US base in Qatar. "Given President Trump's deployment of the National Guard within US borders, he of all people should know that criminal attacks on public property cannot be tolerated," Araghchi wrote on X. Iran would "forcefully reject any interference in their internal affairs", he added. Meanwhile, an Iranian police spokesman said offi-



cers would not allow what he called "enemies" to turn "unrest into chaos". Protests have spread to a number of cities and towns with running battles reported between security forces and demonstrators. The protests began in Tehran, with shopkeepers angered by another sharp fall in the value of the

Iranian currency, the rial, against the US dollar on the open market. By Tuesday, university students were involved and the protests had spread to several cities, with people chanting against the country's clerical rulers. Two people died in clashes between protesters and security forces in the south-west-

ern city of Lordegan, according to the semi-official Fars news agency and the human rights group Hengaw, which said they were protesters, naming them as Ahmad Jalil and Sajjad Valamanesh. Three people were killed in Azna, while another died in Kouhdasht, all in the west of the country, Fars reported. It did not specify whether they were demonstrators or security forces personnel. One death was reported in Fulaadshahr, central Iran, and another casualty in Marvdasht, in the south. BBC has not been able to independently verify the deaths. The demonstrations have been the most widespread since an uprising in 2022 sparked by the death in

custody of Mahsa Amini, a young woman accused by morality police of not wearing her veil properly, but they have not been on the same scale. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has said he will listen to the "legitimate demands" of the protesters. But the country's Prosecutor General Mohammad Movahedi-Azad warned that any attempt to create instability would be met with a "decisive response". This stance was echoed by Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who said it was "completely fair" that shopkeepers protest the economic situation, but that any "rioters must be put in their place".

India May Give Bangladesh Cricket Pakistan-Like Treatment After Mustafizur Rahman's Release: Report

Amid mounting political tensions, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has reportedly decided to put the Indian team's tour of Bangladesh on hold. This comes after the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced it would host India for a three-match ODI as well as a T20I series to be played in September this year.

According to a report in The Indian Express, the BCCI will seek government approval before taking a final call on the Indian team's tour. "We didn't travel to Bangladesh last year too, BCB had issued their international calendar, but it looks doubtful, as we need Indian government approval to play in any other country. As far as the T20I World Cup is concerned, Bangladesh will play as per the scheduled games in India," the report quoted a top BCCI official as



saying. On Saturday, the BCCI also asked the Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) to release Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from their squad for IPL 2026-a request with which the

Shah Rukh Khan co-owned franchise agreed to comply. Pressure had been mounting on the BCCI and KKR following the recent killing of a Hindu man in Bangladesh. KKR co-owner

and Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan was also targeted by various groups over the inclusion of Mustafizur in the squad. KKR had roped in Mustafizur for a whopping

₹9.20 crore, making the left-arm pacer the only player from Bangladesh to be picked at the IPL mini-auction. Following the BCCI's directive, KKR confirmed the release of the 30-year-old in a media statement: "Kolkata Knight Riders confirms that BCCI/IPL as the regulator of IPL has instructed it to release Mustafizur Rahman from the squad ahead of the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) season. The release has been carried out following due process and consultations, upon the instruction of the Board of Control of Cricket in India," KKR said in a statement. This development mirrors the long-standing policy where Pakistani players are excluded from the IPL due to cross-border tensions. India has also not toured Pakistan for a bilateral series since 2006 for similar reasons.

Big BCCI Move After Shah Rukh Khan Faces Fury Over KKR's Bangladeshi Pacer Mustafizur Rahman

In a significant move that highlights the intersection of sport and geopolitics, the BCCI has formally requested that Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) release Bangladesh pace spearhead Mustafizur Rahman from their squad for the upcoming IPL 2026 season. The announcement was made by BCCI Secretary Devajit Saikia, who confirmed the board's directive to the franchise following a period of intensifying public and political pressure. While the BCCI had initially maintained a "wait and watch" policy, Saikia noted that the decision was taken in light of "recent developments all across." This appears to be a direct reference to the deteriorating diplomatic situation and reported civil unrest in Bangladesh, which has sparked widespread protests within India. The pacer recently became a lightning rod for controversy after KKR secured him for a record Rs 9.20 crore at the December auction, making him the



most expensive Bangladeshi player in the league's history. "Due to the recent developments that are going on all across, BCCI has instructed the franchise KKR to release one of their players, Mustafizur Rahman of Bangladesh, from their squad," Saikia said in a chat with news agency ANI. BCCI has also said that if they ask for any replacement, BCCI is going to allow that replacement." What BCCI's Directive Means For KKR The BCCI's directive to release Mustafizur represents a significant tactical and financial setback for Kolkata

Knight Riders. By committing Rs 9.20 crore to the Bangladeshi pacer, KKR had clearly designated him as their premier death-overs specialist. His world-class "cutters" and ability to exploit the slower nature of the Eden Gardens pitch provided a unique left-arm angle that is difficult to replicate. Losing him this close to the season leaves a gaping hole in their bowling attack and places immense pressure on Matheesha Pathirana to shoulder the burden of the final overs alone. From a strategic perspective, KKR's overseas balance has been thrown into disarray.

Shubman Suffers Fresh Setback In Vijay Hazare Trophy Ahead Of Selection For NZ Series

India ODI skipper Shubman Gill did not feature in the Playing XI of Punjab in their Round 5 Vijay Hazare Trophy match against Sikkim on Saturday. Both Gill and star India pacer Arshdeep Singh were set to play for Punjab but only the latter found a place for himself in the domestic match. The fans were left heartbroken as they were excited to see Gill in action in Jaipur. Now, the reason for Gill's sudden snub has been revealed and it is related to the batter's health. According to a report by Sportstar, Gill had to sit out of the game due to food poisoning. If Gill had played the match, then it would have been his first appearance since his snub from India's T20 World Cup 2026 squad.



Apart from the T20 World Cup, Gill also missed out on the spot for the T20Is against

New Zealand. However, he is reportedly set to lead India in the ODIs against the

Kiwis, which will begin from January 11. Talking about the Vijay Hazare Trophy match, Punjab registered a dominating 10-wicket victory over Sikkim as they chased down the target of 76 in just 6.2 overs. Pacer Arshdeep Singh took a five-wicket haul. Meanwhile, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Devajit Saikia said that the Team India squad for the upcoming India vs New Zealand ODI series will be announced on Saturday. Speaking to ANI, the BCCI secretary confirmed that the Indian Cricket Selection Committee for the Senior Men's team will hold a meeting on Saturday and then announce the team for the India vs New Zealand three-match ODI series.

6,6,6,6,6,4: HARDIK PANDYA SLAMS 5 SIXES IN ONE OVER IN VHT, REGISTERS 133

In a breathtaking display of raw power and clinical hitting, India all-rounder Hardik Pandya on Saturday clobbered nearly half a dozen sixes, including five in an over, on way to a 93-ball 133, for Baroda against Vidarbha in their Vijay Hazare Trophy contest here. Pandya hit an overall 11 sixes and eight fours to turn the tables on Vidarbha, who had taken control of the game by reducing Baroda to 71 for five at one stage and then 136 for six in the first half. Batting as low as No 7 in his first match of the competition, Pandya came out all guns blazing to bring up his maiden List A century in his 119th match, taking Baroda to a competitive total of 293 for nine in



their 50 overs. This milestone was a long time coming for the flamboyant cricketer, who chose the perfect moment to exhibit his finishing prowess and stabilise a crumbling innings. His ability to absorb pressure while maintaining a high strike rate provided a masterclass in modern limited-overs bat-

ting. In the 39th over, Pandya went after Vidarbha spinner Parth Rekhade to collect a total of 34 runs, which included five sixes and a four. The atmosphere at the ground was electric as Rekhade struggled to find a length that Pandya could not exploit. The first five balls of the left-arm spinner went fly-

ing over the ropes, while the final ball was hit for a boundary. Pandya's innings included only 31 singles as he launched the counter-attack, hitting most of his sixes in the midwicket region and over long-on. A few also went flying over long-off, showcasing his incredible strength and reach. A maiden List A brought up in some style Hardik Pandya was on 66 off 62 balls against Vidarbha...and then he went berserk in the 39th over to complete his 100, smashing five sixes and a four. Pandya's domination could also be judged with the fact that the next best batter in Baroda's innings was Vishnu Solanki, who made 26.

Rishabh Pant's Batting Template Not Liked By Indian Team Management Member: Report's 'Open Secret' Claim



The Indian cricket team selection for the New Zealand ODI series will be a crucial one for Rishabh Pant. Several reports have predicted that the star wicketkeeper-batter will make way for Ishan Kishan for the three-ODI series against New Zealand, starting January 11. Pant started his ODI career in October 2018. Since then, he has played 31 ODIs, with the last one coming against Sri Lanka in August 2024. Rishabh Pant's form in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy has been patchy, with just one half-century in four matches. But if he is dropped for the upcoming New Zealand series without being given even one ODI game in the last 18 months, it could be deemed slightly harsh by the Ajit Agarkar-led committee. The BCCI selectors will announce the squad for the series against

the Black Caps on Saturday, and Pant's inclusion is the major talking point. "It is an open secret that at least one member in the Indian team management doesn't exactly like Pant's high-risk, high-reward batting template and would like him to employ a more traditional way of batting," a report by news agency PTI stated. "But dropping a second-choice glovesman without giving him a fair go could obviously lead to more questions being asked without tangible answers being provided," the report added. In 2025, Pant didn't play a single ODI, although he was part of the Champions Trophy squad as well as the series against South Africa last month. While Rituraj Gaikwad, a specialist opener, was tried at No. 4, Pant was left cooling his heels during all three games.

"Save Indian Football": Sunil Chhetri, Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, Other Stars Appeal To FIFA For Resolving Crisis

Indian football is in a crisis. There is still no clarity on whether the national football league (the ISL) will happen at all. With the future of the Indian Super League (ISL) still uncertain, Indian footballers, along with international stars, have urged the sport's global governing body, FIFA, to step in and resolve the lingering state of the franchise-based tournament. Leading figures of Indian football, including Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, Sandesh Jhingan, and Sunil Chhetri, have publicly appealed to FIFA to intervene amid the ongoing crisis facing the sport in the country. "It's January, and we should be on your screens as part of a competitive football game in the Indian Super League," Gurpreet said in a video featuring other players as well. "Instead, here we are, driven by fear and desperation, to say aloud something we all



know," Jhingan added. "Players, staff, owners, and fans deserve clarity, protection, and, more importantly, a future," Chhetri said. "But more importantly, we are here to make a plea. The Indian football governing body is no longer able to fulfil its responsibilities. We are now staring at permanent paralysis. This is a last-

ditch effort to save what we can. So we are calling on FIFA to step in and do what it takes to save Indian football. We hope this message reaches the powers that be in Zurich. This call is not political; it is not driven by confrontation but by necessity. It might sound like a big word, but the truth is that we are facing a humani-

tarian, sporting, and economic crisis. And, of course, we need rescuing at the earliest. We just want to play football-please help us do it," other players said in the statement. The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Thursday received letters from nearly all members of the Indian Super League (ISL) confirming they may be willing to participate in the upcoming 2025-26 season; however, participation will be contingent upon satisfactory financial and governance assurances provided by the AIFF. The member clubs of the ISL further stated that their continued participation is conditional upon the AIFF assuring them that there are no league administration fees associated with participation and that the AIFF will accept full financial responsibility for operational costs incurred due to reduced seasons.

On Usman Khawaja's 'Racial Stereotyping' Allegations, Australia Great Delivers Stunning Verdict

Legendary Australian cricket team fast bowler Jason Gillespie weighed in on the allegations of racial stereotyping made by Usman Khawaja during his retirement press conference. Khawaja announced his retirement just ahead of the fifth Ashes Test against England, starting January 4. He revealed that he felt singled out throughout his career and claimed he was unfairly targeted for his Ashes preparation. Khawaja participated in a golf tournament shortly before the Perth Test, a decision that drew heavy criticism from



fans and experts. While Khawaja felt the criticism was "unfair," Gillespie said the questions were legitimate. "I respect Usman and

have really enjoyed his career; I love how he speaks his mind. I felt the questions regarding his preparation before Perth (where he

played a lot of golf and ended up with back spasms) were legitimate. England have been questioned about their prep too," Gillespie wrote on X (formerly Twitter). I respect Usman and have really enjoyed his career, love how he speaks his mind. I felt the questions re his preparation before Perth (where he played a lot of golf and ended up with back spasms) were legitimate. England have been questioned about their prep too. During the 50-minute press conference, Khawaja stated he is still battling stereotypes in his final season.

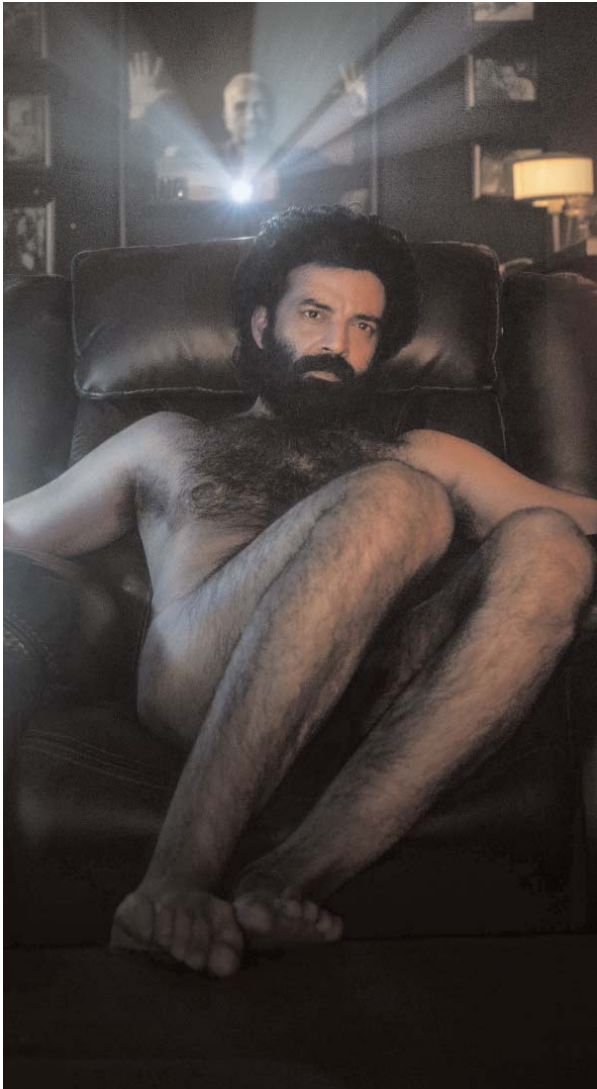
Shubman Gill Meets Manchester City Star Erling Haaland, Gets A Special Gift



India Test and ODI skipper Shubman Gill had a memorable meeting with Manchester City star Erling Haaland. The two exchanged jerseys, while Gill was gifted a signed boot by the Norwegian star. Gill will next be seen in action for India in the ODI series against New Zealand. He was dropped from the T20 World Cup squad. Shubman Gill reflected on a defining 2025, expressing gratitude for the lessons, experiences, and memories as he looks ahead to the new year. "2025, you were truly special to me. So many lessons, experiences, and memories to be grateful for. Carrying it all forward into 2026," Gill wrote while sharing a reel on his official Instagram handle. The year proved to be one of contrasts for the 26-year-old. On one hand, Gill endured a setback in the

shortest format, having been dropped from India's T20I set-up despite being the vice-captain earlier. Following a string of poor performances, he was also left out of India's squad for the T20 World Cup, marking a significant moment in his career. T20Is were his sole format of struggle, scoring just 291 runs in 15 innings with no fifty, at an average of just over 24. However, Gill's red-ball form in 2025 stood in stark contrast to his struggles in T20 cricket. The right-hander enjoyed a phenomenal year in Tests, especially during the tour of England, where he delivered one of the most dominant batting performances by an Indian in overseas conditions. Gill amassed a staggering 754 runs in five Tests at an average of 75.40, scoring four centuries and registering a career-best 269.

‘Spirit’ Director Sandeep Reddy Vanga Launches the Title and First-Look Poster of K. Kranthi Madhav’s Dil Diya – A Naked Truth, a New Box-Office Grammar for Summer 2026



Dil Diya – A Naked Truth has formally stepped into the spotlight with the release of its title and first-look poster, marking the first public move for the upcoming feature. The reveal, carried out by Spirit director Sandeep Reddy Vanga, has sparked early interest across industry circles, setting the stage for the film’s roll-out. Produced by Poorna Naidu under the Sreeyas Chitra – A Poorna Naidu Production banner and written and directed by K. Kranthi Madhav, the film positions itself as a contemporary drama rooted in emotional conflict and personal relationships. For K. Kranthi Madhav, Dil Diya – A Naked Truth continues a body of work defined by emotional sensitivity and narrative restraint. Over the years, he has earned recognition for telling stories that engage deeply with human vulnerability rather than surface-level drama. Films such as Onamalu, Malli Malli Idi Rani Roju, and World Famous Lover reflected his interest in love, moral dilemmas, emotional breakdown, and

inner conflict. With Dil Diya – A Naked Truth, he returns to similar emotional terrain, this time through a more direct and contemporary lens shaped by obsession, failure, intimacy, and self-worth. The film stars Chaitanya Rao Madadi, Ira, Sakhee, and Jessie in the lead roles, supported by Mani Chandana, Pramodini, and Veera Shankar in key supporting parts. The casting reflects the film’s grounded narrative approach, favouring performances that feel organic and lived-in. Rather than leaning on heightened drama, the storytelling allows emotion to emerge naturally through character interaction and consequence. The first-look poster offers a restrained but telling glimpse into the film’s emotional world. Minimal in design and free from visual excess, the imagery hints at vulnerability, contradiction, and inner turbulence. Instead of spelling out its themes, the poster suggests an inward-looking narrative driven by personal truth. This visual language aligns closely with Kranthi

Madhav’s filmmaking sensibility, where emotional clarity and honesty take precedence over stylised spectacle. Produced by Poorna Naidu with Srikanth V serving as co-producer, Dil Diya – A Naked Truth is backed by a strong and experienced technical team. P.G. Vinda handles cinematography, expected to bring an intimate yet cinematic visual texture. Music is composed by Phani Kalyan, while editing is by Ra-Sha (Ravi – Shashank). Chinna overseas production design, Dhani Aelay handles publicity designs, Star Circle manages digital marketing, and publicity is led by S.K. Naidu along with Phani Kandukuri (Beyond Media). Positioned as a youthful love story with emotional depth, Dil Diya – A Naked Truth aims to present an honest and unfiltered portrayal of modern relationships. Moving beyond idealised romance, the film engages directly with emotional complexity and personal consequence, seeking to redefine intimacy within contemporary Telugu Cinéma.

A Cinematic Leap of Faith: Zee Studios’ Prestigious Gandhi Talks with A.R. Rahman’s Music Set to Release on 30th January 2026

Zee Studios has announced the release date of its most ambitious and unconventional cinematic offering, Gandhi Talks, slated to hit theatres on 30th January 2026. Designed as a rare silent film in modern Indian cinema, Gandhi Talks stands as a bold creative leap where silence becomes the strongest form of storytelling. At a time when cinema is often defined by scale and sound, Gandhi Talks chooses restraint, emotion, and stillness to communicate its message. The film brings together an extraordinary ensemble featuring Vijay Sethupathi, Arvind Swamy, Aditi Rao Hydari, and Siddharth Jadhav, all of whom have consciously stepped into a form of storytelling that relies purely on performance and expression. For actors like Vijay Sethupathi and Arvind Swamy, the decision to headline a silent film reflects their unwavering belief in craft-driven cinema. Known for consistently choosing roles that challenge convention, their involvement underlines the film’s artistic integrity. Aditi Rao Hydari and Siddharth Jadhav further enrich the narrative with deeply nuanced, expression-led performances embracing vulnerability and emotion without the support of dialogue. Adding an exceptional layer to the film is A.R. Rahman’s music, which becomes the emotional voice of Gandhi Talks. In the absence of spoken words, Rahman’s score acts as the narrator, guiding the audience through the film’s emotional landscape. His music transforms silence into a powerful, immersive experience elevating the film to a global, festival-ready canvas. Speaking about the vision behind the film, director Kishore Belekhar shared, “Gandhi Talks is a film about trusting silence. As Indian cinema marks over a



century of storytelling, we wanted to return to the medium’s most elemental form pure performance and emotion. The actors embraced that vulnerability completely, and A.R. Rahman’s score became the film’s voice. With Zee Studios’, Meera Chopra’s support, we were able to make a bold, honest piece of cinema.” With Gandhi Talks, Zee Studios once again reinforces its commitment to supporting path breaking.

”Ramam” Movie Team Extends Birthday Wishes to Young Star Hero Bellamkonda Sai Sreenivas

Young star Bellamkonda Sai Sreenivas is playing the lead role in the upcoming film “Ramam.” On the occasion of his birthday today, the team of Ramam extended their warm wishes to the actor. The film is being produced by Venu Donepudi under the Chitralayam banner, with Donepudi Chakrapani presenting the project. Lokamanya is directing the film. The recently released pre-look poster from Ramam, featuring Bellamkonda Sai Sreenivas in a striking shadow avatar, has grabbed attention with its powerful visuals. The film carries the tagline “The Rise of Akira.” Currently under regular shooting, the makers have announced that more exciting updates about the film will be revealed soon.



Mandaadi Set for a Massive Summer 2026 Release, Sailboat Racing Sequences To Be A Major Highlight



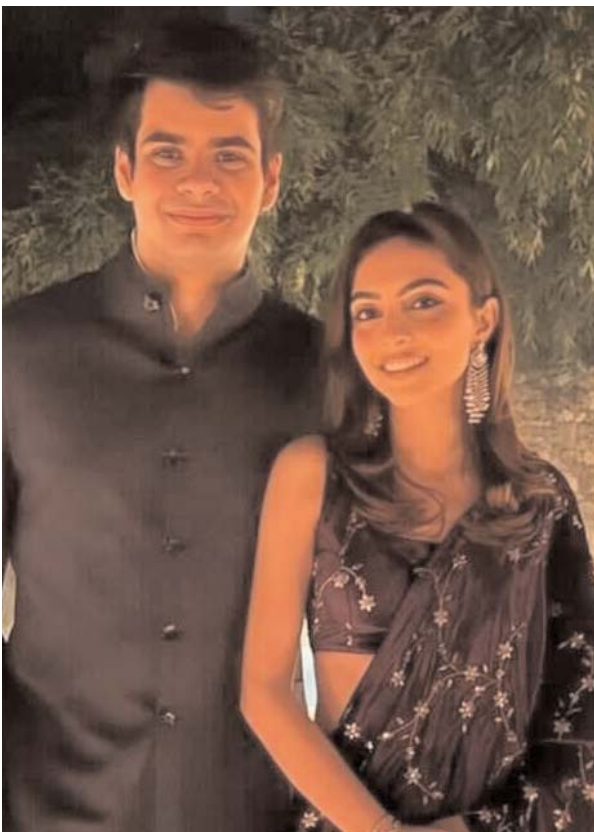
The shoot of Mandaadi, the 16th production from RS Infotainment, is racing ahead under the director Mathimaran Pugazhendhi, shaping into an intense sports-action drama starring Soori and Suhas. Mounted on a grand scale with a strong regional flavour, the film boasts striking visuals and compelling performances. Suhas, in particular, is making headlines for playing a full-fledged antagonist for the first time. The team has already completed 70% of the shoot. Scheduled for a Summer 2026 theatrical release, Mandaadi is positioned as one of the major attractions of the season, with industry buzz growing steadily. It also stands as the

biggest and most ambitious film of Soori’s career, presenting him in a powerful, image-defining role crafted for big-screen impact. A major highlight of the film is Soori’s remarkable physical commitment. He performed all the high-intensity sea action sequences himself, without a body double, despite the risk and extreme difficulty. For the sailboat race episodes, he got trained rigorously for six months, mastering every physical nuance of the sport. His dedication ensures raw, authentic, and immersive visuals. The film, releasing in Tamil, Telugu, and Hindi, aims for a wide pan-Indian reach with its rooted storytelling, universal emotions, and

large-scale making. The sailboat racing segment is set to be its standout USP, an adrenaline-filled block that offers something never seen before in Indian cinema. To achieve global standards, the team brought in international action experts and employed advanced sport-specific camera systems. These additions elevate the visual experience, especially in the racing sequences. Top action choreographer Peter Hein worked on the film for nearly 60 days, ensuring intense, realistic, and emotion-driven stunt design. Mounted on an estimated 75 crore budget, Mandaadi is crafted to showcase its scale and ambition in every frame.

Inside Priyanka Gandhi’s son Raihan and Aviva Baig’s engagement

Mumbai: Days after reports of Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and businessman Robert Vadra’s son, Raihan Vadra, getting engaged began doing the rounds, Raihan has now officially confirmed the news on social media. The 25-year-old announced his engagement to his long-time girlfriend, Aviva Baig, through a heartfelt Instagram post. The engagement took place on Monday and was marked by Raihan sharing two photographs on Instagram. One picture shows the couple together after the ceremony, while the second is a childhood photograph of Raihan and Aviva, offering a rare glimpse into their deep-rooted bond. Keeping the announcement minimal, Raihan simply captioned the post with the date, “29.12.25”. Reacting to the happy news, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra shared a warm message on Instagram, writing, “Love you both very much. May you always love and respect each other and remain the best friends you have been since you were 3!!!” Robert Vadra also extended his blessings, calling it a proud moment as his son begins a new chapter with his life partner, and wishing the



couple a lifetime filled with happiness, love and strength. The engagement ceremony was held at an intimate and private gathering in Ranthambore. In the photographs, Raihan is seen dressed in a dark-coloured sherwani, while Aviva looks elegant in an embellished sari, reflecting the traditional yet understated nature of the celebration. Raihan

Vadra is a photographer with a keen focus on nature and wildlife, and his work has been showcased through exhibitions and digital platforms. Aviva Baig, a Delhi-based creative professional from a family close to the Vadras, has largely remained away from the political limelight. The couple is reportedly likely to tie the knot in 2026.

Lyrical Song “Ninu Kasirina Samayana...” Released from Feel-Good Romantic Entertainer “Sky”, Film Set for Grand Theatrical Release on February 6



“Sky” is an upcoming feel-good romantic entertainer starring Murali Krishnam Raju, Shruti Shetty, and Anand in the lead roles. The film is being produced under the Velar Entertainment Studios banner by Nagi Reddy Guntaka, Srilakshmi Guntaka, Murali Krishnam Raju, and Prudhvi Pericherla, who also serves as the director. With this film, Shiva Prasad is making his debut as a music director in the industry. Sky is all set for a grand theatrical release on February 6. Recently, the makers released the lyrical song “Ninu Kasirina Samayana...” from the film. The song features

soulful lyrics penned by Prudhvi Pericherla and is beautifully rendered by Vaishnavi. Music director Shiva Prasad has composed a melodious and soothing tune that perfectly captures the essence of love. The song expresses deep romantic emotions through lines that reflect longing, devotion, and heartfelt affection. Earlier songs from Sky “Tapane Telupaga...,” “Poyekaalam Neeku...,” and “Ninnu Choosina...” have already turned into chartbusters, crossing million-plus views. The makers are confident that “Ninu Kasirina Samayana...” will also receive a warm response from music lovers.

Nupur Sanon gets engaged to Stebin Ben, sister Kriti Sanon showers love



Mumbai: Actress and the younger sister of Bollywood beauty Kriti Sanon, Nupur Sanon, is engaged to her long-term beau, singer Stebin Ben. Sharing glimpses from the dreamy proposal on her Instagram, Nupur wrote, “In a world full of maybes, I found the easiest YES I’ve ever had to say (sic)”, followed by red heart and evil eye emojis. The primary photo from the post has Stebin down on one knee, lovingly holding Nupur’s hands. We can also see people holding the placards saying, “Will You Marry Me?” in the background. The newly-engaged couple was seen in the middle of a lake with a mesmerizing view in the backdrop. Sharing the milestone moment with their parents, Nupur and Stebin were also on a video call with them after the proposal. Dressed in a pretty floral dress, Nupur also flaunted her giant engagement ring. Stebin opted to wear blue formals for the special occasion. In one of the pictures, a female figure was seen hugging the happy couple. While her face is not visible, it is most likely Kriti expressing her excitement for the lovebirds. Speculations were going around for some time that Nupur and Stebin will be tying the knot in Udaipur soon. The singer is often

seen spending time with Nupur’s family. Recently, Stebin was seen celebrating Christmas with Nupur and her elder sister, Kriti. The ‘Tere Ishk Mein’ actress took to her Instagram account and posted a couple of sneak peeks into her Christmas celebration. The photos showed Kriti with her parents, sister Nupur, and Stebin. “Late Christmas Post. was busy celebrating,” Kriti wrote in the caption. Nupur and Stebin have been reportedly in a relationship since 2023. In the recent past, the lovebirds have been spotted together on various occasions, from dates to family gatherings.