

OM NAMO VENKATESAYA

05-01-2026

Total pilgrims: 82,650
Tonsures: 23,331
Hundi kanukaku: 4.08Cr
Waiting Situation at 6am on 06-01-26: Compartments: 31

Approx. Darsan Time for Sarvadarshanam (with out SSD Tokens)-13Hr

TO BOOK YOUR ADS CALL

99484 80279, 73307 78889



NATION | NEWS

Adityanath attacks Cong, INDI alliance over ‘misinformation’ on law replacing MGNREGA



WORLD | NEWS

Zelensky replaces Ukraine's powerful security service chief

SPORTS | NEWS

'Ajit Agarkar Should Be Given 10/10': Harbhajan Singh's Stunning 'T20 World Cup' Take



INBRIF

Hoax bomb threats trigger security alerts across Gujarat courts & offices

Ahmedabad, Jan 6: A spate of bomb threats targeting courts and government buildings across Gujarat in recent days has put security agencies on high alert, leading to temporary suspension of court proceedings and extensive searches. Authorities have so far found no explosives in any of the locations, describing the threats as hoaxes, though investigations remain underway. In Ahmedabad, an email threatening a bomb blast was received by the registry of the City Civil and Sessions Court, prompting officials to immediately halt court proceedings. Bomb Disposal and Dog Squad teams were rushed to the premises and carried out a thorough sweep before declaring the complex safe. Around the same time, a similar threat was reported at the Gandhinagar Collector's Office, where police conducted a complete security check and found nothing suspicious. Courts in Rajkot and Surat also received threats, triggering precautionary evacuations and heightened security.

Gangrape accused shot dead in police encounter

Lakhimpur Kheri (TSIT): A wanted gangster accused in the gangrape of two minor girls was killed in a police encounter during a joint operation by Lakhimpur Kheri and Sultanpur police early Monday morning. The deceased has been identified as Talib alias Azam Khan, a resident of Lakhimpur Kheri, who was carrying a reward of Rs 1 lac. Police said Azam had 17 criminal cases registered against him at various police stations in the district. According to police, Azam, along with his associates Salman and Mukhtar, was involved in the gangrape of two minor girls on December 15. The incident occurred around 6.30 am when the victims were cycling to attend tuition classes. The accused allegedly intercepted them, dragged them into a sugarcane field and raped them before fleeing. Following a complaint by the victims' families, an FIR was registered. Based on descriptions provided by the girls and intelligence inputs, police identified the three accused. On December 20, police arrested Salman and Mukhtar after an exchange of fire.

Telangana industrial land policy to boost development: Uttam



Hyderabad (TSIT): State Minister for Irrigation and Civil Supplies N. Uttam Kumar Reddy on Tuesday said that the Industrial Land Transfer Policy introduced by the Telangana Government would serve as a strong foundation for sustainable development of both Telangana and Hyderabad. Speaking in the State Legislative Assembly during the discussion on the newly introduced policy, the Minister stated that the initiative would help transform Hyderabad into a pollution-free global metropolitan city while ensuring balanced industrial growth and environmental protection. He strongly rejected the criticism being made by opposition parties on the policy, terming it “baseless and meaningless.” He demanded that BRS and BJP clearly state their stand on

the Industrial Land Transfer Policy and clarify whether they support the relocation of highly polluting industries beyond the Outer Ring Road. The Minister categorically clarified that the policy does not apply to leased lands and is strictly limited to lands with full ownership rights. He also expressed strong displeasure over opposition claims that lands worth 5 lakh crore, spread across 9,000 acres, were being diverted, stating that such allegations were made only for the sake of criticism. Uttam Kumar Reddy said the government's sole objective is to make Hyderabad a more livable city. He noted that decades of unplanned industrial growth had made several residential areas uninhabitable, and the policy was aimed at correcting this long-standing problem.

Air pollution: SC pulls up pollution watchdog for ‘failing in its duty’

New Delhi (TSIT) Pulling up the pollution watchdog for seeking a two-month adjournment on temporary closure/relocation of toll plazas at Delhi borders to ease traffic congestion, the Supreme Court on Tuesday directed it to convene a meeting of experts in two weeks and submit a report on major causes behind worsening air pollution in Delhi-NCR. “Have you been able to identify the causes of pollution? During all these days, a lot of material is coming into the public domain, experts are writ-



ing articles, people are having opinions (and) they keep on sending to us by mail. Heavy vehicles are contributing a large part, so the first question is: how do we address that... By holding a meeting on January 2 and telling us that we will come after two months... that's not acceptable to us. The CAQM is failing in its

duty,” a Bench led by CJI Surya Kant told the Commission of Air Quality Management (CAQM). The Bench – which also included Justice Joymyalya Bagchi – made these comments after Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, representing the CAQM, referred to minutes of the meetings with stakeholders and sought two months on the issue of temporary closure/relocation of toll plazas at Delhi borders to ease traffic congestion leading to air pollution control.

Telangana records 8,861 fire accidents in 2025: Ponnam



Hyderabad (TSIT): Telangana Transport Minister Ponnam Prabhakar on Tuesday, January 6, told the Assembly that the state recorded 8,861 fire incidents in 2025, wherein a total of 163 people died. Additionally, property worth Rs 879 crore was also damaged. During a discussion

on the Fire Services Department in the Winter Session of the Legislative Assembly, the minister highlighted the two biggest tragedies of the year – the Sigachi Industry blast near Sangareddy and the Charminar fire in Hyderabad, where 17 people died in the same house. Prabhakar said that the Congress government is taking comprehensive measures to strengthen fire safety infrastructure and that presently, there are 138 fire station centres in the state, with nine outposts in each district.

Stray dogs matter: So many applications don't even come in cases of humans, says SC

NEW DELHI (TSIT): The Supreme Court on Tuesday took note of the number of interlocutory applications being filed before it in the stray dogs case and said that so many applications normally don't come even in cases of humans.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta made the observations when two lawyers



mentioned the stray dogs matter before it. One of the lawyers said they have

filed an interlocutory application in the case. “So many applications

normally don't even come in cases of humans,” Justice Mehta observed. The bench said the stray dogs matter is slated to come up for hearing before the apex court on Wednesday. When another lawyer mentioned a transfer petition in the matter, the top court said many pleas would be taken up for hearing on Wednesday, and the bench will hear all the lawyers. A three-judge special

bench comprising Justices Nath, Mehta and N V Anjaria is slated to hear the matter on Wednesday. Taking note of the “alarming rise” in dog bite incidents within institutional areas such as educational institutions, hospitals and railway stations, the apex court on November 7 last year directed forthwith relocation of stray canines to designated shelters after due sterilisation and vaccination.

Venezuela crisis poses no immediate risk to India's oil bill: Report

New Delhi (TSIT): The ongoing geopolitical tension between the United States and Venezuela does not pose any immediate risk to India and that the country's oil import bill is unlikely to rise under present conditions, a report said on Tuesday.

The report from Bank of Baroda said the import bill will remain unchanged as “global crude supplies are likely in a glut mode”, and Venezuela's share of global production is marginal at about 1 per cent.

The bank maintained that Venezuela's proven reserves are large, at roughly 19.4 per cent of the world total. Market conjecture that the reserves could be tapped by US to increase supplies has already softened crude



prices in today's trading. “Given the current global supply scenario and surplus conditions, the report does not foresee any upside risk to India's oil import bill in the near term,” it said. Bilateral trade between India and Venezuela stood at \$1.9 billion, with exports of \$217 million and imports of \$1.6 billion, and that petroleum, oil and lubricants account for the bulk of imports. “For imports, Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants (POL) occupy the major share especially

crude petroleum. The unit value of India's import of POL is also lower for Venezuela compared to major countries from which India imports oil,” said Dipanwita Mazumdar, Economist, Bank of Baroda.

India's exports to Venezuela have declined at a 5-year CAGR of -8.8%, compared to 6.9% growth in India's overall global exports, reflecting reduced trade momentum. The US leads Venezuela's crude exports, followed by China and India, reinforcing the importance of oil diplomacy in ongoing negotiations. Venezuela offers one of the lowest unit values for crude oil imports among India's major suppliers, helping contain import costs.

Andhra Pradesh CM calls for developing island tourism

Amaravati, (TSIT) : Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday called for developing island tourism in the state on the lines of the Maldives.

The Chief Minister directed the officials to promote tourism in a big way and prepare a master plan for beach tourism. Addressing the Pradesh State Investment Board meeting, the Chief Minister said that the Suryalanka beach should be developed over a stretch of 15 kilometres.

He told officials that the Suryalanka beach-front should be a pollution-free area. Along with Suryalanka, the small islands near Sullurpeta



can also be developed under beach tourism.

“We should develop island tourism on the lines of the Maldives. If we can build 25,000 rooms, we can attract tourists,” he said.

Naidu wanted officials to focus on developing the Papikondalu-Polavaram region for tourism. Konaseema, Pulicat, and

Visakhapatnam clusters will become excellent tourism clusters. There is also potential for tourism from Anantapur to Gandikota. He said plans should be prepared to ensure that the Tourism Corporation generates an income of Rs 1,000 crore in the next 15 years.

The Andhra Pradesh State Investment Board meeting on Tuesday

approved 14 projects involving investments to the tune of Rs 19,391 crore. The meeting cleared the projects in the industries, tourism, food processing, and energy sectors, which are likely to create employment opportunities for 11,753 youth.

With this, the SIPB has so far approved investments worth Rs. 8,74,705 crore, which is expected to create employment opportunities for 8,35,675 people. The Chief Minister praised the teamwork of officials in attracting huge investments during 2025 and advised them to work with the same team spirit during 2026 also.

Siddaramaiah confident on completing term, equals Devaraj Urs record as longest serving CM

MYSURU (TSIT): Siddaramaiah, who on Tuesday equalled Devaraj Urs' record as the longest-serving chief minister of Karnataka, while expressing confidence about him completing the full five-year term, maintained that the Congress high command will have to decide on it.

He also said that he will discuss with the high command regarding the much-awaited cabinet rejig when they call him for discussion.

In his second term as chief minister, Siddaramaiah on Tuesday, January 6, equalled Devaraj Urs' record as the longest



serving Chief Minister of Karnataka for 2,792 days, and will surpass it on January 7.

This unique record has come even as the power tussle within the ruling party has intensified amid speculations about a change in chief minister in the state, after the

Congress government reached the halfway mark of its five-year term on November 20. The speculation was fueled by the “power-sharing” pact between Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM D K Shivakumar in 2023.

“I have not done politics to break any record;

It's only a coincidence. I did not know how many years and days Devaraj Urs served as CM. Today because of the blessings of the people, I have got an opportunity to equal Devaraj Urs's record. Tomorrow it will be broken,” Siddaramaiah told reporters here. Asked if he will create another record by completing the full five-year term, he said, it has to be decided by the Congress high command. “I don't know when the high command will decide.”

To a question whether he has confidence about completing the full term and that the high command will decide in his

favour, he said, “I have confidence. If I had no confidence, how would I have been the Chief Minister?... It all depends upon the high command's decision.”

Regarding his meeting with AICC General Secretary K C Venugopal on Monday in Mysuru, Siddaramaiah said the Congress leader was on his way to Bengaluru from Wayanad via Mysuru, before heading for Delhi. “As he was in Mysuru and I too was here, we met.” Ruling out any discussion on cabinet reshuffle during the meeting, in response to a question as to when it can be expected, he said.

UP SIR draft voter list out: 12.55 crore voters retained, 2.89 crore removed

LUCKNOW (TSIT): The draft electoral roll for Uttar Pradesh was published on Tuesday after the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) excluded 2.89 crore voters but retained 12.55 crore, said Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Navdeep Rinwa.

The 2.89 crore voters, or 18.7 per cent, of the 15.44 crore listed earlier could not be included in the draft list due to deaths, permanent migration or multiple registrations, he said at a press conference. The final electoral list will be published on March 6,



Rinwa added. The opposition parties in UP have criticised the draft electoral roll after the SIR exercise. Talking to PTI Videos, UP Congress president Ajay Rai said the time allotted for the SIR exer-

cise was short. “This is a completely hasty decision. The way the SIR process was started by giving only one month in a large state like Uttar Pradesh is unreasonable.”

“They gave one month even to a small state like Kerala. Uttar Pradesh should have been given at least five to six months, as was done earlier in 2002-03... Had it been done that way, the booth level officers (BLOs) would not have been under such pressure and suicides could have been avoided.”

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Monday said prosecution material suggests that activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam were involved in "planning, mobilisation and strategic direction" of the 2020 Delhi riots, as it denied them bail in the conspiracy case.

The apex court cited Section 43D (5) of the UAPA, which requires the court to deny bail if, on perusal of a case diary or chargesheet, it finds that there are reasonable grounds for believing

that the accusation against such a person is prima facie true.

"This court is satisfied that the prosecution material taken at face value as required at this stage discloses a prima facie attribution of essential and formative role by the appearance in appeals... of Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the alleged conspiracy," a bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and NV Anjaria said.

The material suggests "involvement at the level of planning, mobilisation



and strategic direction, extending beyond episodic or localised acts", the bench said, adding "this statutory threshold under 43D (5) of UAPA therefore stands attracted qua these appellants".

under Chapters IV and VI of this Act shall, if in custody, be released on bail or on his own bond unless the Public Prosecutor has been given an opportunity of being heard on the application for such release.

"Provided that such accused person shall not be released on bail or on his own bond if the Court, on a perusal of the case diary or the report made under Section 173 of the Code, is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation against such person is prima facie true."

The top court said that when prosecution material prima facie discloses offence, statutory restriction must prevail, and if not, liberty must prevail.

The apex court, however, granted bail to activists Gulfishan Fatima, Meeran Haider, Shifa Ur Rehman, Mohd. Saleem Khan and Shadab Ahmad, saying it does not reflect a dilution of the seriousness of allegations or findings of guilt against them.

A portrait of a man with dark hair, wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a white shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a dark, textured grey.

Hyderabad, Jan 6: Telangana Police have arrested Amar Deep, managing director of the Falcon Group, in connection with a large-scale digital investment fraud, marking a major breakthrough in the ongoing investigation. Officials from the Crime Investigation Department (CID) apprehended Amar Deep in Mumbai on Monday shortly after his arrival from the Gulf. Acting on precise intelligence inputs from immigration authorities, the CID team intercepted him immediately and placed him under arrest. Police said a lookout circular had already been issued against Amar Deep after he allegedly fled to Dubai when the scam first surfaced. Following his detention, arrangements were made to bring him to Hyderabad, where he will be produced before a court. Investigators allege that the accused orchestrated an elaborate app-based investment scheme through which nearly Rs 850 crore was siphoned off from investors. The fraud involved digital deposit plans that promised unusually high returns over short durations. The case has already seen multiple high-profile arrests. In July last year, Falcon Group's Chief Operating Officer, Aaryan Singh (also known as Aaryan Singh Chhabra), was arrested in Bathinda, Punjab. Earlier, in May, the group's Chief Executive Officer, Yogendra Singh, was taken into custody. With Amar Deep's arrest, the total number of accused held in the case has risen to ten. According to the CID, the scam involved unauthorised deposit collection, cheating, criminal breach of trust, and conspiracy. Officials said the accused developed the Falcon Invoice Discounting Application and created fictitious business deals in the name of well-known multinational companies. Investors were lured with promises of high interest rates and short-term investment plans. The investigation revealed that around Rs 4,215 crore was collected from 7,056 depositors, of whom approximately 4,065 were allegedly cheated. Police said Capital Protection Force Pvt Ltd played a key role in developing and promoting the application. Authorities further stated that the app was aggressively advertised through social media platforms such as Google, YouTube, and Instagram, as well as via tele-calling operations.

New Delhi, Jan 6: The Indian Army last month suspended an infantry commanding officer attached to the Rajputana Rifles Regimental Centre in New Delhi over alleged irregularities, with disciplinary proceedings initiated against him under various provisions of the Army Act. Colonel Ashish Singh Mehta, who was serving as the commanding officer of the 16th Battalion of the Jat Regiment under the 16th Reorganised Army Plains Infantry Division (RAPIDs) at Sri Ganganagar in Rajasthan, is facing 12 charges. Of these, ten charges have been framed under Section 63 of the Army Act, which deals with acts prejudicial to good order and military discipline.

Launching a sharp attack on the Congress and the INDIA bloc over its opposition to the VB GRAM G law, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday said those who “plundered” the country’s resources for decades and pushed the poor into hunger were now questioning a transparent reform aimed at strengthening rural India.

Addressing what he described as an important press conference of the NDA government here, Adityanath said the briefing was convened to explain the newly enacted Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G), 2025, which has replaced the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). “The VB-G RAM G Act will prove to be a milestone for India’s workers, farmers and rural development, and

the Uttar Pradesh government fully supports it and is committed to its effective implementation," he said. The event was attended by Deputy Chief Ministers Brajesh Pathak and Keshav Prasad Maurya, and ministers from NDA allies, including the Nishad Party, SBSP and Apna Dal (S). Slamming the Congress and "INDI alliance", Adityanath said, "those who plundered the country's resources for decades and pushed the poor and youth into hunger and migration are now questioning a transparent reform aimed at strengthening

rural India.” “This law (VBS-GRAM G) has been brought to take forward Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision of Viksit Bharat. It will guarantee employment, ensure livelihoods and create permanent infrastructure in rural areas,” Adityanath said, calling the legislation a milestone for village-centric development.

The chief minister said the press conference was necessary as those opposing the law feared that support for such transparent reforms would expose their past failures. “If the public starts asking why these steps were not taken when they were in power, their reality will be laid bare,” he said. Adityanath alleged that MGNREGA had failed to create durable assets and was plagued by fake job cards, bogus attendance, delayed wage payments, weak social audits and widespread corruption.

Hyderabad, 06 January 2026: K LH Global Business School has achieved a series of significant sporting milestones, reflecting its sustained commitment to competitive university sport and its emphasis on discipline, preparation, and performance, alongside academic pursuits.

Among the notable accomplishments, Dhanshu Srikanth, a first-year BBA student, has been nominated for the prestigious Arjuna Award for Air Rifle Shooting, in recognition of his consistent performances, commitment to training, and disciplined approach to sport. Adding to this achievement, M. V. Rami Reddy, another BBA student, secured the Gold Medal in the 800-metre event for men at the Khelo India University Games 2025, held in Rajasthan. Further strengthening the institution's sporting record, Mogli Venkata Reddy earned a bronze medal in the 800-metre event at the 44th South Asian School Athletics Championships, bringing international recognition to the school's athletic prowess.



This momentum continued in tennis, where KJH GBS students delivered a commendable performance at the South Zone Inter-University Tennis Tournament 2025, a competition that drew participation from leading universities across South India and was conducted through a demanding knockout format. This team comprised KJH GBS students, along with students from the KL Vijayawada and

In the women's category, Muruga Sera Anjum, a third-year BBA student from KLH GBS, played a decisive role, while the men's competition witnessed impactful performances from Nashik Reddy, a third-year BBA student, and Dheeraaj Reddy, a second-year BBA student. Their collective efforts resulted in one Winner position and two Runners-Up finishes. In recognition of these performances, all three students have been selected for

the All-India Inter-University Team and the Khelo India University Games 2026, marking their progression to the national competitive stage.

Commenting on the achievement, Er. Koneru Lakshman Havish, Vice President, KL Deemed to be University, stated, "Inter-university competition demands sustained preparation, discipline, and mental resilience. The achievements recorded by our students—ranging from national nominations to podium finishes and team selections—reflect their commitment to excellence and their ability to balance academic responsibility with competitive sport."

LH Global Business School values these outcomes as a reflection of sustained sporting engagement and structured preparation. Beyond medals and selections, the achievements signify the fulfilment derived from disciplined effort, competitive integrity, as students progress to higher levels of representation while upholding the values associated with university sport.

Hyderabad: GITAM School of Architecture (GSA), Hyderabad, organised an engaging Open House Programme for students of DAV Public School, IIT Hyderabad Campus, offering an insightful introduction to the field of architecture and design. As part of the school's academic exposure initiative, 58 students from Classes 10, 11 and 12, accompanied by three faculty members, participated in the visit.

The programme featured interactive sessions, exhibition walkthroughs and curated displays of student projects, giving participants a firsthand glimpse into the academic environment and creative culture at GSA. Faculty members and student ambassadors introduced students to key aspects of architectural education, including studio-based learning, design thinking and interdisciplinary approaches.

A major highlight of the visit was a Mandala Workshop conducted by Assistant Professor Ar. Shruti Gawli. Conducted in a collaborative studio setting with rhythmic music, the workshop encouraged students to explore pattern-making, composition and visual expression, while also promoting mindfulness and creative engagement.

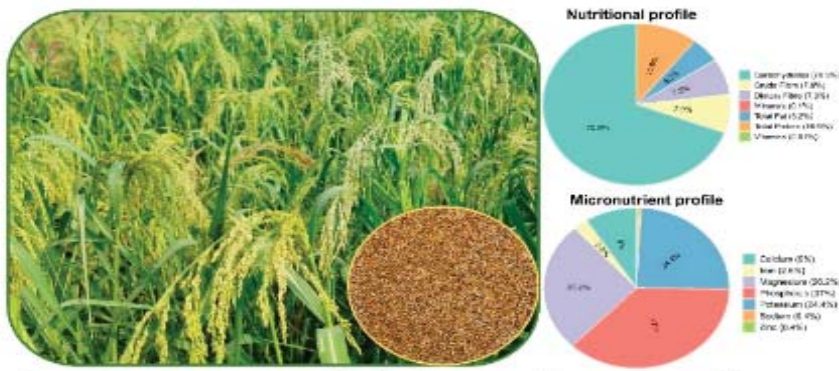
Assistant Professors Ar. Snigdha Roy and Ar. Shruti Gawli, along with student ambassadors Mounya, Vedhamsh Faith and Aritra, interacted with the visiting students, addressing questions on career opportunities in architecture, campus life and the role of creativity in problem-solving.

New Delhi, Jan 6: Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi is "absolutely stable" and responding well to treatment after being admitted to Sir Gangaram Hospital on Monday night, the hospital confirmed on Tuesday. According to a medical update, Sonia Gandhi was admitted around 10 p.m. following respiratory discomfort. Doctors noted a mild exacerbation of her bronchial asthma, attributed to cold weather and high air pollution in the national capital.

"Her condition is absolutely stable. She is responding well to treatment and is being managed with antibiotics and other supportive medications," said Sir Gangaram Hospital Chairman Dr Ajay Swaroop. The hospital added that her health parameters are being closely monitored and a decision on her discharge will be taken based on her clinical progress, likely within the next day or two.

The update comes as reassurance to Congress leaders and supporters following reports of her hospitalisation. Sonia Gandhi, who turned 79 last December, recently attended the 140th Foundation Day of the Congress party on December 28 and the Congress Working Committee meeting on December 27. During these events, she actively participated in party activities, including the flag-hoisting ceremony at Indira Bhawan and discussions on key legislative issues. In December, she had issued a statement criticising the government's proposed changes to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and other laws.

Hyderabad: In a major breakthrough for millet research, scientists at the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) have successfully decoded the world's first chromosome-scale genome of little millet, significantly strengthening India's scientific leadership in millet research. The achievement was accomplished by the Global Centre of Excellence on Millets (Shree Anna) at the ICAR-Indian Institute of Millets Research (IIMR), Hyderabad, in collaboration with the University of Saskatchewan, the National Research Council of



Canada, and the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru. Little millet, a climate-resilient

crop traditionally grown in dry and marginal regions, is known for its low water requirement, drought tolerance, pest resistance, and high nutritional value, especially iron and dietary fibre. Until now, limited genetic information had constrained efforts to improve the crop. The newly developed genome map reveals 18 chromosomes and more than 59,000 genes governing climate resilience, nutrition, yield, and grain quality. Researchers also analysed 300 little millet varieties from across India, identifying nearly 2.5 lakh SNP genetic

markers that explain variations in yield and nutrient content. The findings have been published in the international journal *Nature Communications*. This milestone paves the way for precision breeding, genomic selection, and gene editing, enabling the development of improved varieties for farmers and the health-food sector. As climate challenges and nutritional deficiencies persist, the breakthrough provides strong scientific support to India's millet mission, reinforcing the role of little millet in sustainable food and nutrition security.

EDITORIAL

Nature of religion: Service or selfishness?

For centuries, India has been considered a land of religion, faith, and spirituality. Here, religion has not been limited to worship or rituals, but has been a guiding force in every aspect of life. Faith has provided strength to individuals in difficult situations, keeping them connected to morality and humanity. However, with changing times, it is becoming clear that the very nature of faith is gradually becoming distorted. Religion, once a means of spiritual peace, is in many places becoming a tool of fear, superstition, and commerce. Today's reality is that a large part of religious traditions has deviated from their original purpose. Rituals that were meant to provide spiritual balance to humans have now become associated with financial transactions and ostentation. Pilgrimage sites, once centers of penance, sacrifice, and meditation, have often become mere commercial activities. The financial situation of the devotee is increasingly prioritized over his or her feelings. The foundation of faith is belief—in God, in life, and in oneself. This belief stems not from fear or greed, but from inner satisfaction. When faith becomes based on fear, it degenerates into hypocrisy. Unfortunately, many religious activities today are driven by this fear. People are led to believe that if they do not follow a particular tradition or donate a certain amount, disaster will occur. Thus, religion, which used to be reassuring, is becoming a source of fear. Traditions are the hallmark of any society. They evolve through experience and knowledge passed down from generation to generation. However, traditions are only useful as long as they are in keeping with the times, wisdom, and humanity. Accepting traditions as set in stone hinders social progress. Today, there is a need to reconsider traditions—to understand their purpose and their relevance in the present. Service has been an important aspect of religion. Service means selflessly helping others. However, when a price is attached to that service, its nature changes. Charity is only considered charitable when it is given voluntarily. When it is given out of pressure, fear, or social prestige, it loses its sanctity. Unfortunately, today, charity is being levied as a compulsory fee in many places. This situation affects ordinary and emotional people the most. In times of grief, sorrow, or crisis, a person is mentally vulnerable. Exploiting their faith during such times is not only immoral but also inhumane. The purpose of religion is to protect humanity from breakdown, not to burden it further. The greatest danger of hypocrisy is that it gradually breeds distrust of religion. When people are repeatedly deceived and their emotions exploited, they either turn away from religion or begin to view every tradition with suspicion. This situation is detrimental to society, as a healthy form of religion plays a vital role in maintaining social balance. In today's educated and aware society, it is expected that individuals should test everything through logic and reason. Faith and reason are not in conflict. True faith is that which is in harmony with reason. If a tradition goes against humanity, morality, and compassion, changing it should be considered a righteous step. The role of religious institutions and those involved in religion is also crucial. They must understand that their responsibility extends beyond simply performing rituals, but also guiding society in the right direction. If religious leadership itself is driven by greed and self-interest, it is futile to expect morality from the public. The need of the hour is to transform religion into a medium of service, not a business. Society's responsibility is no less. Hypocrisy will never end until people become self-aware. Asking questions isn't unrighteous. Understanding and reflecting on the purpose of every tradition is a sign of intellectual maturity. Blindly accepting everything is neither faith nor religion. The role of the media and educational institutions is also crucial in this context. A balanced, rational, and sensitive discussion of religious issues will increase social awareness.

SURESH KALMADI: THE MAN BEHIND THE LEGENDARY 5-STAR DINNER THAT UNNERVED EVEN SONIA GANDHI

Suresh Kalmadi treated loyalty not just as a virtue, but as a business model. He died as he had lived: complicated, controversial, and utterly irreplaceable. In over four decades of political journalism, few figures have generated as much fascination as Kalmadi. Here was a man who wore several hats: sports organiser, event manager, party animal, media baron, and politician - sometimes, in the same evening. We can't talk about Kalmadi without talking about Sharad Pawar. Their relationship is perfectly captured in a joke Pawar once told at a Pune rally, "What happened when Suresh Kalmadi tried to hang himself from the ceiling? The ceiling came down!" Even when they were feuding, there was an undeniable fondness between them - the kind reserved for family, who know too much about each other to ever truly part ways.

A Lot Happened Over Coffee

Their story began at the Pune Coffee House in 1974. Kalmadi, fresh from his stint as an Indian Air Force pilot, had bought a stake in the establishment and would man the cash counter. It was amidst the aroma of filter coffee and the chatter of Pune's emerging elite that he first encountered Pawar, then rising as Yashwantrao Chavan's heir apparent in western Maharashtra. What followed was a masterclass in political symbiosis. When Pawar helped appoint Kalmadi as Pune's Youth Congress president in 1977, it was the beginning of a partnership that would reshape Delhi's treacherous corridors of power. Kalmadi understood something that many regional politicians didn't: Delhi required a different skill set. "Kalmadi spoke English fluently, had good social networking skills and, above all, was a smart lobbyist," the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Prakash Javadekar once



observed. But it was after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in 1991 that Kalmadi truly came into his own. As the Congress scrambled to find a new leader among PV Narasimha Rao, Sharad Pawar, Arjun Singh, and Shankar Dayal Sharma, Kalmadi took it upon himself to "manage Delhi" for his Maratha strongman. Delhi witnessed the transformation of Maharashtra Sadan into Pawar's campaign headquarters, with Kalmadi orchestrating operations with military precision. He ordered food from the nearby Taj Mansingh, ensuring a steady supply of grilled chicken and paneer tikka even at odd hours. The proximity to Pandara Road market meant those preferring 'liquid embellishments' were thoroughly entertained whereas Intelligence Bureau officials trying to update their masters wrote rather exaggerated notes while braving the heat and their hunger.

When Narasimha Rao Kept The Guest List

The centrepiece was a legendary dinner at a five-star hotel. Kalmadi invited 64 newly-elected Congress MPs and Rajya Sabha members, offering them the best wine and food money could buy. The event sent shockwaves through the party, even unnerving Sonia Gandhi at 10, Janpath. Narasimha Rao was so shaken that for the rest of his tenure, he kept a copy of the guest list just to ensure that none of them got any position of influence. Kalmadi's relationship with Rajiv Gandhi was equally telling. Rajiv, always in a hurry and constantly scouting for talent, appreciated Kalmadi's out-of-the-box thinking. When Kalmadi suggested a Pune Marathon to create awareness for sports way back in 1982, Rajiv was impressed enough to induct him into the Rajya Sabha. The irony of Kalmadi's career was that managing rela-

tionships was both his greatest strength and his greatest weakness. His relationship with Pawar embodied this complexity perfectly. In 2001, when Sonia Gandhi decided to inaugurate Ganesh Utsav celebrations in Pune - a move orchestrated by Kalmadi and Govindrao Adik to snub Pawar on his home turf - it was political theatre. Yet, by 2009, Pawar was doing six-day campaigns for Kalmadi's Pune Lok Sabha bid, making emotional appeals to his supporters.

The CWG Saga

The Commonwealth Games saga revealed another facet of Kalmadi's character. As corruption allegations mounted, Pawar maintained a safe distance. But even in those dark days, there was something oddly admirable about Kalmadi's resilience and optimism. When sports minister Margaret Alva wondered why she got constant bad press while Kalmadi didn't, an official replied that it was due to "high spirits", capturing Kalmadi's approach to both life and politics.

The recent image of an ailing Kalmadi in a Pune hospital being visited by Pawar was both poignant and fitting. Two old warriors, who had travelled impossible distances together, fell apart, reconciled, and ultimately understood that some bonds transcend political convenience. In an era where political relationships are increasingly transactional, Kalmadi represented a bygone world where personal chemistry mattered as much as ideology. He proved that in Indian politics, the man who controls the guest list often controls more than those whose names appear on it. Suresh Kalmadi didn't just manage Delhi. He understood it. And in understanding it, he helped others navigate its labyrinthine ways. That, perhaps, is the most fitting epitaph for a man who made a career out of making things possible for others.

ROAD ACCIDENT COMPENSATION AND THE CONSTITUTION: THE SEARCH FOR HUMAN DIGNITY BEYOND INCOME

- Dr. Priyanka Saurabh

Road accident compensation is not limited to a technical system; it is deeply intertwined with the fundamental philosophy of the Indian Constitution—equality, dignity, and a welfare state. Millions of road accidents occur in India every year, resulting in the loss of life or permanent disability of thousands of people. In such circumstances, compensation is not merely financial relief, but also an attempt by the state to recognize the value of life and restore dignity to the victim. The current compensation system under the Motor Vehicles Act is primarily income-based, which may seem logical at first glance, but upon closer examination, it raises serious questions about constitutional values. The "multiplier method" adopted in the Motor Vehicles Act determines compensation based on the victim's income, age, and number of dependents. Its objective is to restore a family's pre-accident financial situation, as much as possible. However, the biggest problem with this method is that it ties a person's life to their marketability. The death or disability of a highly paid individual is met with compensation of lakhs or crores of rupees, while the amount for a daily wage laborer, rickshaw puller, or worker in

the unorganized sector is meager. Thus, the law inadvertently conveys that a person's life is more or less valuable in proportion to their income. This approach directly challenges the principle of "equality before the law" enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution. Article 14 not only calls for equal treatment, but also prohibits arbitrary and inconsistent classifications. When two citizens are victims of road accidents under similar circumstances, but their lives are valued differently based solely on their income, it creates a constitutional contradiction. On the one hand, the state treats all citizens as equal, while on the other hand, it discriminates between them based on their economic status in the level of compensation. This system has the most severe impact on those whose income is not formally recorded or who are not considered 'earners' at all. Housewives, children, the elderly, and students often receive compensation based on 'notional income.' This notional income does not reflect their actual social contribution. A homemaker's labor remains invisible within the home, but she plays a central role in maintaining the economic structure of the family and society. The Supreme Court has clarified in cases such as Kirti v.

Oriental Insurance (2021) that a homemaker's work has not only emotional but also economic value. Despite this, in practice, this contribution is still not adequately reflected in compensation calculations. Another constitutional dimension of the income-based compensation system relates to Article 21, which guarantees the "right to life and personal liberty." The Supreme Court has time and again clarified that life does not mean mere physical existence, but a life with dignity. When the value of a person's life, after death or disability, is reduced to mathematical formulas and income slabs, it appears to undermine their inherent dignity. Viewing life solely through the lens of economic loss ignores the profound suffering, mental trauma, and social insecurity that the victim's family faces. In this context, it is also noteworthy that the concept of "just compensation" has been interpreted broadly by the Supreme Court itself. The Court has recognized that compensation should not only compensate for loss of income, but also for emotional damage, mental anguish, and uncertainty about the future. However, the current legal framework does not adequately address these intangible aspects. As a result, the compensa-

tion process often becomes a mechanical calculation, lacking human sensitivity. This disparity becomes even more pronounced when compared to other transport laws. The Railway Act and aviation laws provide for uniform, fixed compensation in case of an accident, regardless of the victim's income or social status. For example, a fixed amount is paid for death in railway accidents. This system recognizes that the right to safety and the value of life are equal for all citizens. The lack of such uniformity in the road transport sector raises the question of whether the 'right to safety' in India varies depending on the mode of transport. In a welfare state, the state's role should not be limited to resolving disputes through courts, but should actively ensure that every citizen receives a minimum degree of protection in life and death. In this regard, reform of the road accident compensation system is the need of the hour. First, a high and mandatory minimum compensation amount should be established, based on the principle of no-fault liability. This will ensure that every affected family, regardless of income, receives a respectable basic level of support. Additionally, the contributions of non-earning groups must be realistically assessed.

China's "Core Interests": What It Means, And Why Arunachal Is Now A Part Of It

The US Department of War's annual report to the Congress, which notes that China's conceptualisation of 'core interests' has expanded to now include Arunachal Pradesh, should be a matter of concern for India. The formulation of 'core interests' is said to have entered Chinese diplomatese around the 2000s. In 2003, the then Chinese Foreign Minister, Tang Jiaquan, had told his US counterpart that Taiwan was China's core interest and that it was important to handle this since it would have implications for the broader Sino-US relations. Later, reacting to a decision by the US to sell a radar system to Taiwan in 2004, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said that China would not tolerate actions of foreign powers that would damage its core interests. It also evoked the tenet of 'core interest' after then French President Nicolas Sarkozy met the Dalai Lama in 2008, asserting that Tibet concerned Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity. In the 2010s, Japanese media outlets interpreted China as expanding its ambit of 'core interests' to include the Diaoyu-Senkaku islands.

An Old Controversy

The Chinese began to up the ante on Arunachal in the mid-2000s. The then Chinese envoy to India asserted that the entire state belonged to China. A bureaucrat serving in Arunachal was denied a visa in 2006, and following this, the practice of granting travel approvals issued on a piece of paper stapled to the passport began. In 2009, China even opposed a loan by the Asian Development Bank for a water project in Arunachal, questioning India's sovereignty



over the state.

The issue of Arunachal has also increasingly been in focus since China's military standoff against India began in 2020. In 2021, Beijing had raised objections to then-President Venkaiah Naidu's visit to the state. A year later, in December 2022, things came to a head after China tried to militarily change the status quo in the Yangtse area in Arunachal's Tawang sector. The Chinese have also started using the term 'Xizang' for Tibet, and consequently refer to Arunachal Pradesh as 'Zangnan', meaning south Tibet. Over the last couple of years, they have resorted to a series of renaming of places in Arunachal Pradesh, and giving them Chinese names. Official Chinese maps, too, show China as subsuming large parts of Arunachal.

Delegitimising Indian Nationality

In November last year, when an Arunachal woman living in the UK was harassed and detained at Shanghai airport during her transit, the officials

reportedly told her that her Indian passport was not valid and asked her to obtain a Chinese travel document. Surprisingly, the woman had had a smooth run during her travel to China in October 2024. On this issue, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has asserted that Zangnan (Arunachal) belongs to China, and that it has never recognised the "so-called Arunachal Pradesh". The Chinese ambassador to India, too, has backed this stance, saying that it was important to address the issue of the contentious Line of Actual Control (LAC). In another case that received less media attention, an Indian-born Tibetan who was visiting China for tourism was meted out similar treatment again at Shanghai airport in December 2025. During his detention, he was repeatedly quizzed about how he obtained Indian citizenship and if he had any relatives in China. Officials went through his personal belongings, social-media accounts and even his cellphone. The tourist also claimed the Chinese

authorities took photographs of his family members. He then booked himself a plane ticket to Bangkok and was escorted by Chinese law enforcement officials on the flight. New Delhi has been firm with its position that Arunachal Pradesh is an inalienable part of India and that its residents are within their rights to travel on Indian passports. This assertion has been followed by the government seeking reassurances from the Chinese authorities that Indian nationals, regardless of their place of birth, will not be selectively targeted as they travel or transit through China. The government has also cautioned Indian nationals to exercise "discretion" whenever travelling through China, although a formal travel advisory has not been issued. The expansion of Chinese core interests to include Arunachal does not augur well for India, since tying it to sovereignty and territorial integrity will make the resolution of the LAC issue even more protracted and complicated.

Instamart and Young India Skills University (YISU) Team Up to Create over 5,000 Opportunities in Quick Commerce for Telangana Youth

Hyderabad, January 06, 2026: With quick commerce reshaping the Indian retail landscape and how consumers shop for everyday essentials, the demand for skilled talent in supply chain, logistics and retail operations has surged. Today, Instamart and Young India Skills University (YISU), established under the Young India Skills University Telangana Act 2024 by the Government of Telangana to boost industry- aligned skill development, signed a Memorandum of Understanding to launch a skill-based academic programme for youth to build careers in the growing quick commerce industry. The multi-year collaboration is expected to train over 5,000 youth in Telangana, preparing them for meaningful career opportunities in the sector. The MoU was signed in the presence of Mr V.L.V.S.S. Subba Rao, Vice Chancellor of Young India Skills University (YISU), Telangana, and Girish Menon, Chief Human Resources Officer at Swiggy Ltd. As part of this collaboration, Scootsy, a wholly owned subsidiary of Swiggy and its logistics arm, and YISU will introduce a three-month learning programme designed to build job-relevant operational and managerial skills for the quick commerce sector, with a strong focus on dark store operations. The programme responds to the growing need for standardised operational and managerial capabilities in high-velocity



retail environments, covering areas such as quick commerce operating models, dark store and supply chain execution, customer promise and SLA-driven service delivery, and emerging trends in retail logistics. Delivered through a combination of classroom instruction and structured field exposure, this collaborative programme between YISU and Instamart will equip participants with a practical, systems-level understanding of store execution, last-mile coordination, and the performance metrics required to operate quick com-

merce at scale. Successful completion of the course and internship will fast-track students into roles as Store Manager Trainees, preparing them for leadership responsibilities in quick commerce fulfilment and operations. Instamart, India's pioneering quick commerce platform, serves consumers across the country from its growing network of over 1000 dark stores and megapods across India. Through the platform, merchants offer tens of thousands of products, ranging from everyday essentials to electronics and home living items, supported by a strong

supply chain and technology-driven operations. Speaking about partnership, Mr V.L.V.S.S Subba Rao, Vice Chancellor of Young India Skills University (YISU), Telangana, said "We are proud to partner with Instamart, one of India's leading quick commerce platforms, to address the evolving needs of the sector and equip young talent with job-relevant skills. This programme is a testament to YISU's commitment to industry-aligned skilling and to Instamart's leadership in shaping the future of quick commerce through meaningful workforce development in Telangana state." Sharing his thoughts on the collaboration, Girish Menon, Chief Human Resources Officer at Swiggy Ltd, said, "India's demographic advantage is both an opportunity and a responsibility for the industry to invest in building job-ready capabilities at scale. As quick commerce evolves from a convenience-led model into a core part of India's retail and supply chain ecosystem, the demand for skilled operations and management talent is growing rapidly. Our collaboration with Young India Skills University focuses on creating practical industry-aligned learning pathways that prepare graduates for real-world roles in supply chain and quick commerce operations. This is a long-term investment in India's skilling ecosystem, not a short-term hiring initiative."

Galaxy Book6 Brings AI-Powered Productivity and Advanced Performance in a Sleek New Form



Featuring Intel's Core Ultra Series 3 processors built on Intel 18A, long-lasting battery life and an ultra-slim profile, Samsung's Galaxy Book6 series elevates what users can expect from a PC. Samsung Electronics today introduced Galaxy Book6 Ultra, Galaxy Book6 Pro and Galaxy Book6 during CES 2026. The most advanced Galaxy Book series yet, these devices feature robust performance that elevates AI-powered productivity through precise engineering in a perfectly balanced slim profile. "At Samsung, we believe true innovation starts with getting the fundamentals right," said Won-Joon Choi, President,

Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Head of the R&D Office, Mobile eXperience (MX) Business at Samsung Electronics. "Performance defines the PC experience. With the Galaxy Book6 series, we combine unparalleled speed and power with dependable AI to deliver the exceptional productivity and creativity capabilities users expect from Samsung." Engineered for Unmatched Performance Pairing cutting-edge hardware with immersive visuals and audio in a slim and portable design, the Galaxy Book6 series delivers Samsung's most advanced PC performance yet. Powered by Intel® Core™ Ultra Series 3

processors — the first client system-on-chips (SoCs) built on Intel 18A — Galaxy Book6 delivers efficient, high-speed CPU, GPU and ddiia NPU1 performance, enabling lightning-fast processing, seamless multitasking and more responsive AI. With the latest NVIDIA® GeForce RTX™ 5070/5060 Laptop GPU, Galaxy Book6 Ultra unlocks next-level creativity and entertainment experiences with high-speed AI image generation, super-smooth video playback and editing and deeply immersive gaming. To maximize performance, powerful hardware must be supported by an equally advanced thermal system.

Car giant Hyundai to use human-like robots in factories

Hyundai Motor Group says it will roll out human-like robots in its factories from 2028, as major companies race to use the new technology. The South Korean firm showed off Atlas, a humanoid robot developed by Boston Dynamics, at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas on Monday. Hyundai says it "plans to integrate Atlas across its global network", including a plant in the US state of Georgia that was involved in a massive immigration raid in 2025. Other firms that have said they will use humanoid robots in their operations include Amazon, Tesla and Chinese car making giant BYD. The Atlas robots will gradually take on more tasks, said Hyundai. The firm owns a majority stake in Boston Dynamics, the technology company famous for Spot the robot dog. Atlas, which is designed for general industrial use, is being developed to work alongside people and autonomously manage machines.



Hyundai said the robots will help ease physical strain on human workers, handle potentially dangerous tasks and pave the way for wider use of the technology. The firm did not say how many robots it would initially deploy or how much the project will cost. Speaking at CES, Hyundai's vice chair, Jaehoon Chang, acknowledged concerns that human workers could lose their jobs to robots. But he said people will still be needed to train the robots,

among other roles, the news agency Reuters reported. Monday's announcement came after Hyundai said in 2025 that it would invest more than \$20bn (£15.5bn) in the US, supporting President Donald Trump's plans to boost manufacturing in the country. The firm said it would expand car production in the US and invest in autonomous driving technology and artificial intelligence (AI). Elon Musk's electric carmaker Tesla has also invested heavily

in its humanoid robot, Optimus. Hyundai's battery plant in Georgia, which it operates in partnership with electronics giant LG, is one of its key facilities in the US. In September 2025, US immigration officers raided the plant and arrested hundreds of workers, including at least 300 South Korean citizens. The workers had their legs shackled in scenes that sparked outrage in South Korea. President Lee Jae Myung and Hyundai's chief executive José Muñoz warned that the raid could deter foreign investment in the US. Later that month, Washington and Seoul reached an agreement to release the detained workers. Trump said he opposed the raid and that the US had an "understanding" with the world on the need to bring in experts to set up specialised facilities and train local workers. Muñoz said in November that the White House had phoned him personally to apologise for the raid.

Nvidia unveils self-driving car tech as it seeks to power more products with AI

Nvidia has unveiled a new tech platform for self-driving cars as the world's leading chip-maker seeks more physical products to embed AI into. Speaking at the annual CES technology conference in Las Vegas, boss Jensen Huan said the system - called Alpamayo - would bring "reasoning" to autonomous vehicles. That would allow cars to "think through rare scenarios, drive safely in complex environments, and explain their driving decisions," Huang claimed. He said Nvidia was working with Mercedes to produce a driverless car powered by the tech, which would be released in the US in the coming months before being rolled out in Europe and Asia. Nvidia's chips have helped power the AI revolution, though so far attention has mostly been focussed on the software it powers, such as ChatGPT. However, leading tech firms are now increasingly looking for hardware - meaning physical products such as cars - that AI could be used in. Physical AI's 'ChatGPT



moment' Wearing his trademark black leather jacket, Huang told an audience of hundreds that the project has taught Nvidia "an enormous amount" about how to help partners build robotic systems. "The ChatGPT moment for physical AI is almost here," Huang said. "NVIDIA's pivot toward AI at scale and AI systems as differentiators will help keep it way ahead of rivals," said Paolo Pescatore, analyst at PP Foresight, from Las Vegas. "Alpamayo represents a profound shift for NVIDIA, moving from being primarily a compute to a

platform provider for physical AI ecosystems." Shares of the AI chip designer rose slightly in after-hours trading following Huang's presentation. It featured a video demonstration of the AI-powered Mercedes-Benz driving through San Francisco while a passenger, sat behind the steering wheel, kept their hands in their lap. "It drives so naturally because it learned directly from human demonstrators," Huang said, "but in every single scenario... it tells you what it's going to do, and it reasons about what it's

about to do." Alpamayo is an open-source AI model, with the underlying code now available on machine learning platform Hugging Face, where autonomous vehicle researchers can access it for free and retrain the model, Huang said. "Our vision is that someday, every single car, every single truck, will be autonomous," he told the audience. The project could pose a threat to companies like Elon Musk's Tesla, which offers driver assistance software called Autopilot. "Well that's just exactly what Tesla is doing," Musk posted on social media following the Alpamayo announcement. "What they will find is that it's easy to get to 99% and then super hard to solve the long tail of the distribution." Like Tesla, Nvidia also has plans to launch a robotaxi service by next year in collaboration with a partner, but has declined to name the partner or say where it will be. Nvidia is the world's most valuable publicly traded company, with a market cap of more than \$4.5tn (£3.3tn).

Government demands Musk's X deals with 'appalling' Grok AI deepfakes

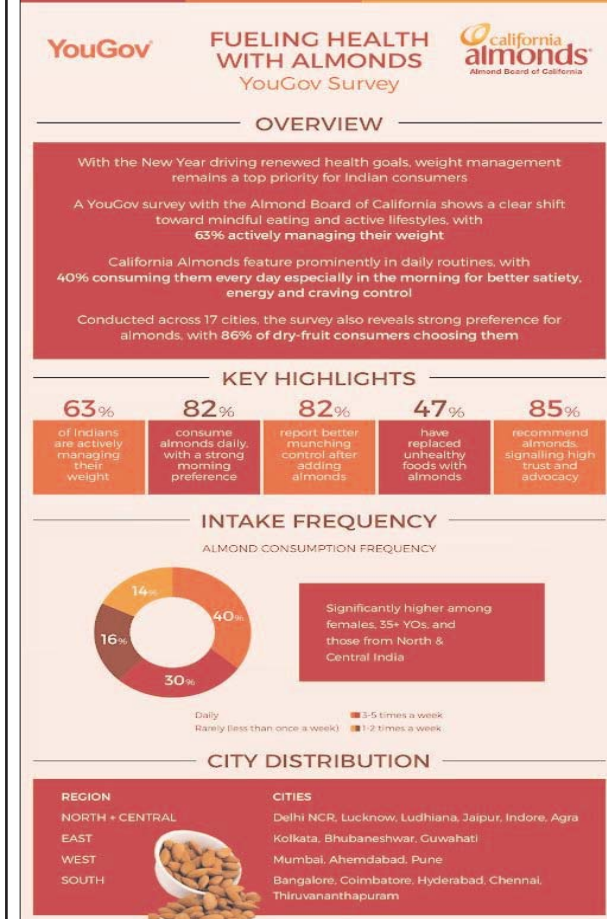


Technology Secretary Liz Kendall has called on Elon Musk's X to urgently deal with its artificial intelligence chatbot Grok being used to create non-consensual sexualised deepfake images of women and girls. The BBC has seen several examples on X of people asking the bot to digitally undress people to make them appear in bikinis

without their consent, as well as putting them in sexual situations. Kendall said the situation was "absolutely appalling", adding "we cannot and will not allow the proliferation of these degrading images." "It is absolutely right that Ofcom is looking into this as a matter of urgency and it has my full backing to take any enforcement action it

deems necessary." On Monday, regulator Ofcom said it had made "urgent contact" with Elon Musk's company xAI and was investigating concerns Grok has been producing "undressed images" of people. The BBC has approached X for comment. On Sunday, the platform issued a warning to users not to use Grok to generate illegal content including child sexual abuse material. In her statement Kendall said: "Services and operators have a clear obligation to act appropriately. This is not about restricting freedom of speech but upholding the law. "We have made intimate image abuse and cyber-flashing priority offences under the Online Safety Act - including where images are AI-generated. This means platforms must prevent such content from appearing online and act swiftly to remove it if it does."

New Year, New Habits: 7 in 10 Indians Say California Almonds Support Weight Management, Finds YouGov Survey



6 January, 2026: With the New Year underway and health goals taking centre stage, weight management often tops resolution lists. As people reset their routines and look for sustainable ways to feel fitter and more energised, mindful eating and balanced nutrition take on renewed importance. Reflecting this shift, a new YouGov survey conducted in association with the Almond Board of California reveals that Indian consumers are increasingly embracing healthier choices, from exercising regularly to choosing nutrient-dense foods that support everyday wellness. Among these, California Almonds continue to feature prominently in morning routines and breakfast habits, with many associating them with improved satiety, better control over cravings, and sustained energy through the day. The survey, conducted across 16 cities in India, also highlights a broader shift toward holistic, health-focused living. A vast majority (92%) show strong interest in health and

nutrition, with 51% reporting adoption of an active lifestyle with daily exercise. Additionally, 63% of respondents say they are trying to manage their weight - often through consistent practices like daily workouts, drinking more water, and reducing sugar consumption. This emphasis on mindful eating is reflected in almond consumption habits across India. Nearly 40% of respondents say they consume almonds daily, with about 30% eating them first thing in the morning and 22% including them with breakfast. Purchase frequency also remains strong as 43% purchase almonds monthly, while another 44% do so weekly or bi-weekly. Preferences vary, with 30% opting for soaked or soaked-and-peeled almonds and 25% consuming them raw. Among dry-fruit consumers, a remarkable 86% choose almonds, reinforcing their widespread popularity. The motivations behind almond consumption reflect a strong awareness of their nutritional benefits. More than half of

respondents (52%) associate almonds with overall health and wellness, while 41% link them to immunity, and 39% consume them to maintain protein intake. A significant 75% say almonds are part of their daily routine for essential nutrients. agree they are a healthy option. Nearly 40% even track calories or macros when consuming almonds, reflecting heightened nutrition awareness. This positive perception is grounded in almonds' natural nutrient density. California Almonds offer 15 essential nutrients, including healthy fats, dietary fibre, protein, magnesium, potassium, and zinc, making them a minimally processed, wholesome addition to daily diets. Weight management emerges as a key driver of almond consumption. 70% of respondents believe almonds support healthy weight goals, and 82% report improvement control over munching and weight after incorporating them regularly into their diets.

Security forces patrol Venezuelan streets as opposition calls for release of political prisoners

We've been speaking to people about what it's like in Venezuela since the US operation. Earlier we reported on the experiences of Wilmer* in Caracas and Angela* in Guayana City. Pedro*, in the north-western coastal city of Maracaibo, has been able to go outside and buy bread, but says already there is a price increase of about 30%. "It wasn't normal shopping," he told the BBC. "Initially people were happy, but now people are scared of what might happen, and nobody is talking about what happened." Agreeing with what Pedro said, Wilmer and Angela both said that, because of guards' presence in many places, people are not discussing what's going on. "We smile, you know; that's all we can do," says Wilmer. And Angela says that "people in the supermarket that I went to were quiet because everyone is scared to talk about what happened, and guards are



outside." *Names have been changed due to fears of a backlash from authorities. Donald Trump might keep insisting that the US is "in charge" of Venezuela, but in reality, the Venezuelan government is still very much in power. Delcy Rodriguez is the acting president, many of Nicolás Maduro's ministers are still in post, and the pow-

erful military is, so far, staying loyal to her. Trump has issued serious threats to Rodríguez - that if she doesn't do "the right thing" (i.e. what the US wants) she could face the same fate as Maduro, or worse. Many expected Trump to back the opposition to take charge, but in some ways the current set-up is more convenient for

him. The Venezuelan government will now undoubtedly be nervous about what could happen to them if they don't at least somewhat comply. Trump isn't in charge, but he does have a lot of influence. Tensions remain high in the capital, Caracas, where gunshots were reported overnight near the presiden-

tial palace. Yesterday Delcy Rodríguez was sworn in as Venezuela's interim president, but the security situation still remains unclear after the US seized President Nicolás Maduro and said it would run the country. Several videos posted on social media overnight show armed men on the streets as apparent gunshots are heard ringing out. We've verified one video filmed near Miraflores Palace in which you can hear gunshots, but it's not immediately clear what they were in response to. We've located another video to a plaza about 650m from the palace, in which you can hear someone ask in Spanish, "What happened?" A man who appears to be a security official replies: "Drones, drones". This suggests that the gunshots may have been in response to a drone sighting, although we can't independently confirm this was the case. The US

military intervention in Venezuela has resurfaced the issue of Greenland's future. Trump has repeatedly said the US "needs" the whole island for national security reasons (the US already has a military base there), while Greenland's leaders have repeated that it is not for sale. Earlier today BBC's Europe Editor Katya Adler described how European leaders are facing an increasingly "awkward" and "intense" atmosphere as they try to "manage rather than confront" Trump. After top Trump aid, Stephen Miller told CNN that "nobody's going to fight the US over the future of Greenland", European leaders issued a strongly-worded joint statement saying only Greenland and Denmark can decide its future. "Greenland belongs to its people. It is for Denmark and Greenland, and them only, to decide on matters concerning Denmark and Greenland.

Selfies and smiles: South Korea seeks 'new phase' in ties with China



South Korea's President Lee Jae Myung has called for a "new phase" in ties with China as he met its leader Xi Jinping in Beijing on Monday. Regional security and lifting Beijing's unofficial ban on Korean pop culture is high on Lee's agenda, as he continues his four-day trip in China. He is set to meet China's Premier Li Qiang and the chairman of parliament, Zhao Leji on Tuesday. It

marks the first visit by a South Korean leader since 2019. Bilateral ties had soured under Lee's predecessor, impeached ex-president Yoon Suk Yeol, who was very critical of China. Xi, meanwhile, has appeared keen to shore up ties with South Korea amid a diplomatic row between China and Japan. South Korea is a US security ally - like Japan - but also relies on China for trade.

Zelensky replaces Ukraine's powerful security service chief



President Volodymyr Zelensky has reshuffled the leadership of Ukraine's Security Service (SBU), replacing influential Vasyl Maluk and nominating Maj-Gen Yevhenii Khmara as acting head. The SBU is primarily concerned with internal security and counter-intelligence and, since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, it has also played a prominent role in assassinations and sabotage attacks deep inside Russia. Maluk, who had run the SBU since 2022, gained a reputation for overseeing successful operations against Russia and for purging the SBU from alleged Russian double agents. The latest reshuffles are the latest in a long series made by Zelensky since the start of the war. Maluk's name is known across Ukraine. After all, last June he co-ordinated the daring "Spider Web" attack, which saw more than 100

Ukrainian drones struck air bases deep inside Russian territory. Khmara, his replacement, was also involved in the preparation of that operation. So it did not come as a surprise that Maluk's dismissal earlier this week was widely criticised within Ukraine, including by several high-profile military commanders. The impression that the decision made by President Zelensky was short-sighted was cemented by reports that Maluk had initially refused to step down voluntarily. Although he has been dismissed from the position of SBU chief, he has been asked to continue leading special operations against Russia. Ukraine needed more "asymmetric operations against Russian forces", Zelensky said, adding that Maluk was "best at this". Khmara's appointment has gone some way in quelling fears about the SBU's future effectiveness.

Self-proclaimed hypnotherapist on trial in France for drugging and raping women



A man is on trial in southern France accused of drugging and sexually abusing women, as well as filming some of the assaults. Dance teacher and self-taught hypnotherapist Cyril Zattara is charged with raping 14 women over a decade, as well as allegedly secretly filming around 20 other women. Zattara, who has been held in detention awaiting trial since 2021, has admitted 10 rape charges.

The trial is being held behind closed doors in the city of Aix-en-Provence at the request of one of the alleged victims, and is due to last at least two weeks. Others had sought open proceedings, saying they wanted their voices to be heard by as many people as possible. Zattara would allegedly slip sleeping pills into women's drinks before sexually assaulting them, a police investigation found.

IRAN ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS SPREAD TO MAJORITY OF PROVINCES

Protests have broken out in at least 17 of Iran's 31 provinces, presenting the largest challenge to the country's clerical establishment since 2022, a BBC Verify and BBC Persian analysis has found. The BBC's analysis of protests includes only those for which we have verified video footage - the true number is almost certainly far higher. There are reports of protests in a further 11 provinces. The wave of protests has spread rapidly across Iran since 28 December, when anger initially broke out in the capital Tehran following a fresh and sharp devaluation of the country's currency against the dollar and other major foreign currencies. Verified footage from the last 10 days shows evidence



of anti-government demonstrations and gatherings in more than 50 towns and cities across the country, including in several regions previously perceived as being highly loyal to the state. More than 100 videos which we geolocated and checked for publication date paint a picture of the scale of the unrest, with people taking to the streets in many major cities in Iran

and presenting the largest challenge to the state since the Women, Life and Freedom protests in 2022. Footage has also shown protests in Qom in central Iran and Mashhad in the north-east, both of which have traditionally hosted populations extremely loyal to the Islamic Republic. Prof Sina Azodi, Director of Middle East Studies Program at George

Washington University, said that unrest in those cities was "very telling" and amounted to evidence that the government's "base of support is also suffering under the economic hardship". Authorities have traditionally used violence to crush unrest. During the 2022 protests - sparked by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a young woman who had been detained in Tehran for wearing "improper hijab" - more than 550 people were allegedly killed by security forces, according to human rights groups. While the latest response by police and security forces initially appeared to be more restrained, verified footage has shown officers ramping up the use of force since Saturday.

NESTLE ISSUES GLOBAL RECALL OF SOME BABY FORMULA PRODUCTS OVER TOXIN FEARS

Nestle has issued a global recall of some baby formula products over concerns they contain a toxin which can cause food poisoning. The food and drink giant said specific batches of its SMA infant formula and follow-on formula were not safe to be fed to babies. The batches were sold across the world, Nestle said, and they potentially contain cereulide, which can trigger nausea and vomiting when consumed. The company said there had been no confirmed reports of illness associated with the products, but was recalling them "out of an abundance of caution". "The safety and wellbeing of babies is our absolute priori-



ty," Nestle said. "We sincerely apologise for any concern or inconvenience caused to parents, caregivers, and customers." The company confirmed to the BBC that the recall was global. Affected products were sold in several European countries, including France, Germany,

Austria, Denmark, Italy and Sweden. It stressed that all other Nestle products and batches of the same products that have not been recalled are safe to consume. Nestle promised refunds for customers and said the problem was caused by an ingredient provided by one of its suppli-

ers. Nestle France said it was carrying out a "preventive and voluntary recall" of certain batches of its Guigoz and Nidal infant formulas. In Germany, the formula products are called Beba and Alfamino. Batch numbers of the affected products in the UK can be found on Nestle's UK website, or through food.gov.uk. Customers are advised to look for the corresponding code on the base of the tin or box for powdered formulas or the base of the outer box and on the side or top of the container for ready-to-feed formulas. Cereulide is a toxin produced by some strains of the *Bacillus cereus* bacteria that can cause food poisoning symptoms.

Swiss ski bar not inspected for five years before deadly fire, mayor says



The Swiss bar that was the scene of a fire which killed 40 people and injured 116 had not undergone safety checks for five years, authorities have said. The mayor of Crans-Montana, Nicolas Feraud, told a Tuesday news conference that he could not explain why Le Constellation bar had not been checked in so long, but that the council was "profoundly sorry". The venues should have been checked annually. "We regret that - we owe it to the families and we will accept the responsibility," he said. He added that sparklers - which are believed to have caused the fire when they were raised too close to the ceiling - will be banned in local venues. Local authorities will now bring in an external contractor to inspect and audit all 128 venues in the area. Feraud conceded there was a team of five people inspecting more than 10,000 buildings in Crans-Montana and could not explain why the bar had

not been inspected since 2019. Taking repeated questions on why the bar had not been checked in so long, Feraud said: "I have no answer for you today." "We're profoundly sorry about that and I know how hard that will be for the families." "I'm not resigning, no, and I don't want to," he later added. Feraud said it would be "down to the judges" to decide whether members of the local authority would be included in a criminal investigation that has been opened by Swiss prosecutors. When the fire occurred on New Year's Day, the bar seemed to have many more people in it than legally permitted, which Feraud said was the responsibility of the managers of Le Constellation to regulate. Swiss prosecutors have placed the two bar managers under criminal investigation, which local media have named as French couple, Jacques and Jessica Moretti.

Donald Trump claims US oil firms could be 'up and running' in Venezuela within 18 months

President Donald Trump says the US oil industry could be "up and running" with increased operations in Venezuela within 18 months, after a surprise military operation removed President Nicolás Maduro from power. Trump told NBC News that "a tremendous amount of money will have to be spent, and the oil companies will spend it, and the oil companies will spend it, and then they'll get reimbursed by us or through revenue". Representatives from major US petroleum companies planned to meet the Trump administration later this week, BBC's partner CBS News reported. Analysts previously told the BBC it could take tens of bil-

lions of dollars, and potentially a decade, to restore Venezuela's former output. Trump's remarks came days after he said the US would "run" Venezuela after the ousting of Maduro - who has now been brought to the US to face criminal charges. Speaking to NBC about his 18-month timeframe, Trump speculated that oil production could ramp up "in less time than that, but it'll be a lot of money". He has been explicit about his ambitions for American petroleum companies to scale up their operations in the country. "Having a Venezuela that's an oil producer is good for the United States because it keeps the price of oil down," Trump added. The analysts



who previously spoke to the BBC were sceptical that Trump's plans would have a major impact on the global supply - and therefore price - of oil. They suggested that firms would look for reassurance that a stable government was in place, and even when they did invest, their projects would not deliver

for years. Trump has claimed in recent days that American oil companies can fix Venezuela's oil infrastructure. The country has an estimated 303bn barrels, the world's largest proven reserve - but its oil production has been in decline since the early 2000s. The Trump administration sees signifi-

cant potential for its own energy prospects in Venezuela's reserves. Increasing the country's production of oil would be expensive for US firms. Additionally, Venezuelan oil is heavy and more difficult to refine. There is only one US firm, Chevron, currently working in the country. Asked for comment about Trump's plans for US oil production in Venezuela, Chevron spokesman Bill Turenne said the company "remains focused on the safety and wellbeing of our employees, as well as the integrity of our assets". "We continue to operate in full compliance with all relevant laws and regulations," Turenne added.

ConocoPhillips, a major US oil company that no longer has a presence in Venezuela, "is monitoring developments in Venezuela and their potential implications for global energy supply and stability", said spokesman Dennis Nuss. "It would be premature to speculate on any future business activities or investments," Nuss said. A third company, Exxon did not immediately respond to requests for comment. While justifying the seizure of Maduro from Caracas, Trump also claimed that Venezuela "unilaterally seized and stole American oil". Vice President JD Vance echoed those claims on X after Maduro was taken.

Khelo India Beach Games have expanded horizon of Indian sports, created new pathways for talent development: PM

The second edition of Khelo India Beach Games got off to a colourful start here at the Ghoghla Beach on Monday with a special message from the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi. The Games, featuring over 2100 participants from across the nation, will conclude on January 10. Diu is wearing a festive look with the Khelo India Beach Games mascot 'Pearl' – the happy and energetic dolphin – welcoming athletes, support staff, volunteers and all stake holders associated with KIBG 2026. The Khelo India Beach Games, organised by the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, is being held under the technical supervision of the Sports Authority of India and national sports federations. More than 1,100 athletes will compete in eight different sports – volleyball, soccer, sepak takraw, kabaddi, pencak silat, Open water swimming, mallakhamb and tug-of-war. The first six will be medal sports and 32 gold medals will be up for grabs. While wishing good luck to the athletes and congratulating the Union Territory for



hosting KIBG 2026, PM Modi said: “The Khelo India Beach Games occupy a special place in India’s sporting landscape. Beach and coastal sports demand physical endurance, mental strength and the ability to perform under constantly changing conditions. By bringing emerging disciplines to the forefront, these Games expand the horizons of Indian sport and create new pathways for talent to be discovered, recognised and nurtured.” PM Modi lauded the UT organisers for choosing Ghogla Beach as a venue. “The choice of Ghogla Beach, a Blue Flag certified

beach, as the venue is particularly noteworthy. Sport, when hosted in harmony with nature, becomes a powerful medium for both athletic achievements and environmental awareness. This setting reminds us that excellence and sustainability progress together." The Khelo India Beach Games 2026 were declared open by the Hon'ble Lt Governor, Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, Shri Manoj Sinha after the parade of athletes and the ceremonial torch relay by four athletes who have excelled in beach sports – Don Remedios (beach football), Pavl Parmar (beach

volleyball), Ajish Patel and Jalpa Solanki (both tug-of-war). The torch was officially placed by Shri Sinha and the Hon'ble administrator of DNH & DD and Lakshadweep, Shri Praful Patel. Shri Sinha highlighted how Jammu and Kashmir has found its prominence through the Khelo India Beach Games. Shri Sinha said: It gives me immense pleasure to inform you that the first Khelo India Beach Games 2025, held at this very beach, witnessed an exceptional performance by the players from Jammu and Kashmir. Competing in pen-

cak silat, our athletes brought great pride by securing a total of nine medals.” “Since 2014, the Union Territory Administration has undertaken remarkable development initiatives in Diu. These include the redevelopment of the INS Khukri Memorial, the achievement of Blue Flag certification for Ghoghla Beach, and significant progress in strengthening both urban and rural infrastructure. These efforts reflect the administration’s strong commitment to sustainable development and tourism promotion,” Shri Sinha said. PM Modi once again reiterated the transformative power of sports. “Today, India is witnessing a deep transformation of its sporting culture. Across the country a renewed emphasis on institutional outreach, grassroots participation and cultural change is reshaping how sporting talent is identified and supported. Modern infrastructure, scientific training methods and transparent competition platforms are increasingly accessible to young athletes, irrespective of background or geography.”

Virat Kohli Quit Instead Of Fixing His Flaws, Chose To Play 'Easiest Format': Sanjay Manjrekar



A sharp critic over the years, former India cricketer Sanjay Manjrekar revisited Virat Kohli's decision to hang up his boots in Test cricket, after seeing England star Joe Root smash his 41st hundred in the format. Together with Root, Steve Smith and Kane Williamson, Virat Kohli formed the 'Fab 4' in the longest format. But Kohli is the only player from the quartet to have quit Test cricket. Manjrekar, in a video on his Instagram account, questioned Kohli's decision to quit Tests instead of fixing his flaws, while continuing to play the 'easiest format' ODIs. "Well, as Joe Root attains new heights in Test cricket, my mind goes to Virat Kohli. He's walked away from Tests, and it's unfortunate that in the five years that he struggled before retiring, he didn't quite put his heart and soul into finding out the problems as to why he was averaging 31 for five years in Tests. That is for another time as to what he could

have done. But I just feel sad that people like Joe Root and Steve Smith, Kane Williamson are really making a name for themselves in Test Cricket," Manjrekar said on his Instagram handle. Explaining his stance, Manjrekar said that he had no problem if Kohli had quit all three forms of the game. But the fact that he chose to stick with the 'easiest format' ODIs but refused to fix the mistakes he was making in red-ball cricket baffled him. "It was okay, Virat Kohli just walked away from cricket

retired from all cricket. But that he's chosen to play one-day cricket actually disappoints me more, because this is a format which, for a top-order batter, I've said before as well, is the easiest format." "The format that really tests you is first, obviously, Test Cricket, and T20 cricket has its different challenges. The other thing is because he's so fit, supremely fit, you feel even more that he could have maybe continued his fight, you know, to get back into form, even if he was left out of a series

Mustafizur Rahman's Reaction To IPL Row Revealed: "Person Of Different Level"

It has been an eventful few days for Bangladesh cricket team fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman. He was excluded from the Kolkata Knight Riders squad ahead of the IPL 2026 on the advice of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). The decision led to a massive controversy and the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) decided to request the International Cricket Council (ICC) to shift their T20 World Cup 2026 games from India to Sri Lanka. While the topic has been dominating headlines, Mustafizur was in action for Rangpur Riders in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). He had a tough start to the season but played a big role in guiding the Riders to victory over Dhaka Capitals. Mohammad



Ashrafur, who is guiding Riders as assistant coach in the ongoing BPL, revealed that Mustafizur has been 'completely chill' despite the ongoing controversy. "He (Mustafizur) is completely chill. He is not worried at all about all the off-field talk - whether it's BCB, India, BPL or ICC," Ashrafur was quoted as saying by Cricbuzz. "Right

now he is focused on playing for Rangpur Riders and after this whatever assignment comes next, he will focus on that. He is a person of a different level," he added. Ashraful will also be working with Mustafizur in the national set-up as he is currently the batting coach of Bangladesh. "If you talk about Mustafizur in the first two matches his

performances were a bit below par but especially the way we won the last match against Dhaka was an outstanding victory. And the way Mustafizur bowled those last two overs - I think he is a world champion for this format, that's how important he is," he said. Mustafizur's national side teammate Mohammad Saifuddin also echoed similar sentiments by Ashraful. "We had our last match against Rangpur Riders and after the game we were having dinner together and I called him to sit with me. We thought he would be disappointed but that is hardly the case," Saifuddin told reporters following a practice session. "He was hearing music and seemed to be relaxed like the way he always does."

BANGLADESH RECEIVE 'T20 WORLD CUP REVENUE' WARNING AMID ONGOING CONTROVERSY

Former Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) general secretary Syed Ashraful Haque, who also served as CEO of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), weighed in on Bangladesh's decision to not travel to India for the upcoming T20 World Cup 2026. Bangladesh cited 'security concerns' as they requested the International Cricket Council (ICC) to shift their matches from India to Sri Lanka. The request came just after IPL side Kolkata Knight Riders released Bangladesh fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman following the request from BCCI. Haque explained that Indian government can assure 'head-of-state' level security for the Bangladesh cricketers and in that case, the ball will once again be in Bangladesh's



court. He added that if Bangladesh stick to their stance of not travelling to India and decided to opt out of the World Cup, they will miss out on the revenue share and may also get into a conflict with BCCI. "In this case, I believe the Indian government will say that they will provide 'head-of-state' level security for Bangladesh.

Then the ball will come again to our court. Then we will decide whether we will travel or not," Ashrafu'll told The Daily Star. "Based on my experience, with only one month remaining before the tournament, relocating venues is an extremely uphill task. Moreover, if Bangladesh does not play – or if the ICC refuses relocation

and Bangladesh opt out – the board is unlikely to receive its share of World Cup revenue. This could also lead to direct conflict with the BCCI," he explained. Meanwhile, Bangladesh banned the broadcast of IPL's upcoming season to protect pacer Mustafizur Rahman's ouster from the world's biggest T20 league on BCCI instructions amid a steady deterioration of the country's diplomatic ties with India. A statement from the information and broadcast ministry of Muhammad Yunus' interim government here stated that no "logical reason" was given by the BCCI while instructing IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders to release Rahman from its 2026 roster.

MI Cape Town Seek Revival Against In-form Joburg Super Kings



Game 15 of SA20 Season 4 will see two titans collide when MI Cape Town and Joburg Super Kings meet in the "El Clasico" at Newlands on Tuesday. The form of the two respective teams heading into this much-anticipated showdown could not be more contrasting. MI Cape Town's championship defence is hanging on by the barest of margins with Robin Peterson's team yet to claim a victory in five attempts thus far this season. In stark contrast, Joburg Super Kings have enjoyed a fairytale start to their season. Stephen Fleming's team have surged up the table, winning three matches on the bounce, with the sole blip being a rain-affected game last Saturday at the Wanderers. Their confidence is buoyed further by a thrilling Super Over victory against the Durban Super Giants. MI Cape Town captain Rashid Khan

has certainly not given up hope of his team reaching the playoffs and believes they still have time to get their campaign back on track, starting against the high-flying JSK. "We still have an opportunity to qualify," said Rashid Khan. "In T20, you can't think about the past. Individually everyone is experienced and they know how to manage themselves. We have to come with the right mindset and need to forget where on the table we are. I feel like if we can close four games in a row then we can win four in a row too." This season has seen the emergence of new heroes in the JSK camp, notably US international Shubham Ranjane, who has been nothing short of a revelation. With a remarkable average of 82.0 to his name and a maiden Betway T20 SA20 half-century, Ranjane has quickly made a name for himself in South African cricket.

'Ajit Agarkar Should Be Given 10/10': Harbhajan Singh's Stunning 'T20 World Cup' Take

Former Indian cricket team spinner Harbhajan Singh praised BCCI chief selector Ajit Agarkar for the decisions taken regarding the T20 World Cup 2026 squad. The BCCI selection panel stunned everyone with a number of controversial decisions including the call to exclude Shubman Gill. Wicket-keeper batter Ishan Kishan was also rewarded for his form in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy as he was included alongside Sanju Samson. Harbhajan said that he felt a bit bad for Gill before adding that Agarkar should be given full marks for picking a good side for the competition. "The team is really good. I had told that Ajit should be given 10/10 for the team. I felt a little bad for Shubman, but he will get more chances soon. All the players are match winners in their own right. Hope we can



win back-to-back World Cups because we have that team," Harbhajan Singh told ANI. The ex-India star also backed skipper Suryakumar Yadav to perform at the top level despite not enjoying a good run of form lately. He also weighed in on the performance on certain players and said that Abhishek Sharma, Hardik Pandya and Jasprit Bumrah can win matches on

their own. "Suryakumar has not made many runs, but when the WC comes, we will need big players to fire. He will shine bright in that big match. Abhishek (Sharma) can win you matches on your own. The form Hardik (Pandya) is in, he is a key player. We also have Arshdeep (Singh) and (Jasprit) Bumrah in pace." Harbhajan Singh opined on the split coaching in India fol-

"Never Seen That In My Life": England Great Stumped By Steve Smith's Bizarre Request To Brydon Carse In 5th Test

Steve Smith showed his class on Day 3 of the fifth Ashes Test in Sydney, remaining unbeaten on 129 as Australia stretched their first innings lead to 134 runs. However, it wasn't entirely smooth-sailing for the Australian stalwart. In a bizarre incident during the day, Smith was seemingly distracted by the sunlight deflecting off Brydon Carse's sunglasses and entering his eyes. This led to Smith asking Carse to turn his sunglasses around and wear them over the back of his head, a request which the latter accepted. "Carsey! Can you just turn your glasses around? On the back," said Smith, as could be heard over the stumps.



mic. Former England captain Michael Vaughan expressed his surprise at Carse obliging to Smith's request. "That's very nice of Brydon to do so. Don't think there's any regulation for the way you put on your glasses? I've never seen that before in my life. Brydon



Carse should just put them on. I can't believe he's actually said, 'Ok, no problem,'" Vaughan said, speaking on commentary. Smith, who was batting on 51 at that point, went on to pile further misery on the England bowling attack. The 36-year-old slammed 15 boundaries

lowing their poor performances in Test cricket under head coach Gautam Gambhir. India suffered two whitewashes at home in the last two years. The Asian Giants suffered a humiliating 0-3 loss to New Zealand in 2024, followed by a 0-2 thrashing at home by South Africa in 2025, under head coach Gautam Gambhir. New Zealand's 3-0 whitewash also marked the end of India's great Test empire, which had been well guarded by leaders like MS Dhoni, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma for over a decade. The NZ whitewash cost a once well-settled India a place in the ICC World Test Championship 2025 final, and the latest setback to the Proteas could also end up costing them a berth in the marquee one-off Test championship clash, depending on how further results go.

Battle of the Sexes 'brought eyes on tennis'



Aryna Sabalenka defended her 'Battle of the Sexes' match against Nick Kyrgios after she opened her 2026 season with a 47-minute victory against Cristina Bucsa. Women's world number one Sabalenka lost 6-3 6-3 to Kyrgios in a much-publicised exhibition match in Dubai last month. Belarusian Sabalenka, a four-time major winner, said it helped her fitness after she swept aside Spain's Bucsa, ranked 28th in the world, 6-0 6-1 in the second round of the Brisbane International. "When you play against a guy, the intensity is completely different," Sabalenka said. "Especially when there is Nick, who is drop-shotting every other shot, you move a lot, so there was a great fitness for me." The match was widely criticised, with Wimbledon champion Iga Swiatek saying this week that it did not have "anything to do with social change", following the original 'Battle of the Sexes' between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs in

1973. But Sabalenka said the match "brought so many eyes on tennis." "It wasn't about proving something to anyone. It was able to show that tennis can be really huge," she said. "That exhibition, it was fun. It was a great challenge." Sabalenka, who received a first-round bye in Brisbane, will face Romania's Sorana Cirstea in round three. The Australian Open starts on 18 January. GB's Boulter and Kartal win in Auckland British number four Katie Boulter started her season with victory over Ukraine's Yulia Starodubtseva at the ASB Classic in Auckland. Playing her first match since October - and her first under new coach Michael Joyce - Boulter triumphed 6-3 6-3 in the first round. Given a main draw wildcard for the WTA 250 tournament, she will face top seed Elina Svitolina of Ukraine next. Boulter missed out on a place in the main draw of the Australian Open after falling out of the world's top 100.

A Complete Sankranthi Family Entertainer with Vintage Chiranjeevi

We will see the vintage megastar in 'Mana Shankara Vara Prasad Garu'. This is a clean, full family fun film. Everyone will enjoy it with children and family: Producers Sahu Garapati, Sushmita Konidela Megastar Chiranjeevi and hit machine Anil Ravipudi are going to entertain the audience with the wholesome family entertainment 'Mana Shankara Vara Prasad Garu'. Adding to the excitement, Victory Venkatesh is playing a key role. Produced by Sahu Garapati and Sushmita Konidela under the banners of Shine Screens and Gold Box Entertainments, the film stars Nayanthara as the female lead, while Smt. Archana is presenting the film. The film's promotions are going on wonderfully. The trailer and songs have greatly increased the expectations on the film. 'Mana Shankara Vara Prasad Garu' will be released grandly worldwide on January 12 as a Sankranthi gift. On this occasion, producers Sahu Garapati and Sushmita Konidela shared the film's features in a press conference.

The censoring took place yesterday, didn't it? How is the report?

-A very good report was received. The movie was enjoyed a lot. Clean film. Full family fun. They said it was a movie that everyone can watch with their children and family.

It's a film made by two big stars together.. What kind of response is being received from fans after the trailer was released?

-Both fans are enjoying it. There is also a wonderful response from social media. Both Chiranjeevi and Venkatesh worked together very happily.

Sushmita garu. This is a very big project.. How did you enjoy this process?

-This is a milestone project. We feel very honored to do this project. Doing it in my father's core genre and Anil's taking on that genre is superb. The journey with Sahu garu is beautiful. This is a milestone project that I enjoyed a lot. I wish this combination continues again. With this movie, it seems like



Nanna has opened a new talent box. Fans say that it is like what they saw in the movie Rowdy Alludu. His performance in this movie is very fresh, reminiscent of vintage charm.-My father

focused on losing weight and fitness. He looked very charming. This made it easy for us to design costumes for him. Also, Anil wanted to show him in a certain style. He also gave a lot of input. We

all worked with the same vision.

Sahu garu.. There are many movies for Sankranti.. I hear that there will be trouble in theaters?

- We have running distributors. Our film has been in the pipeline since before Sankranti. However, when so many films are coming out, it is natural that one or two theaters will decrease. Otherwise, there has not been much of a problem with theaters until our film.

Sushmita garu.. What is Venkatesh garu's role going to be like?

-Venkatesh will be seen in a big impactful character. The fun will increase even more after his arrival. A very important character. A rich character with a lot of entertainment.

Sahu garu.. What will Chiranjeevi's role be like?

-The trailer has shown shades related to Chiranjeevi's character. His character has fun, action, emotion, and all the commercial elements. There are many wonderful comedy scenes between Venkatesh and Chiranjeevi.

HONORING A LEGEND - REMEMBERING BA RAJU ON HIS 66TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

Today, January 7th, marks the 66th birth anniversary of BA Raju, a man who was truly the well wisher of the Telugu film industry. For 40 years, he was not just a person working in cinema, he was an institution in himself. Whether acting as a journalist, a Public Relations Officer (PRO), a publisher, or a producer, he remained at the top of his game. What made him truly special was his nature. In an industry that can be very competitive, he was a friend to everyone. From top stars and directors to newcomers, he treated everyone with equal respect and love, often acting as a mentor to help shape the careers of many heroes and heroines. BA Raju's professional journey was nothing short of amazing. He began his career looking after publicity for Superstar Krishna and eventually became the publicity in charge for over 1,500 films, playing a massive role in their success. His legacy in journalism is equally impressive. After working for several daily papers, he launched his own magazine, Super Hit Weekly, in 1994 with his wife, B. Jaya. His dedication was so immense that he ran the magazine for 27 years without ever missing a single issue until his last breath. In 2001, he expanded his horizons by establishing the Superhit Friends and RJ Cinemas banners with his wife. Together, they moved their operations to Hyderabad and produced successful, lovely movies such as Premalo Pavan Kalyan, Chantigadu, Lovely, and Vaisakham. Beyond production, he was known as the "Knowledge Bank" of the industry. He did not need a computer to find facts, he had release dates, theater runs, and box office collections right at his fingertips. As a leader, BA Raju served as the president of the



Film Critics Association, where he was always there to protect and help fellow journalists. If anyone faced financial trouble or needed emotional support, he was the first to offer a helping hand. While he maintained close relationships with everyone, he shared a very special bond with Evergreen Superstar Krishna and Superstar Mahesh Babu. Although BA Raju is no longer with us, his work continues to thrive. He established the popular web portal IndustryHit.com, and his famous X (Twitter) account continues to provide updates to nearly 7 lakh followers. His son, Shiva Kumar B, is now carrying the torch forward and is revamping the Superhit Friends and RJ Cinemas banner to announce new films with popular stars soon.

Audience Acceptance in Strong Roles Is My Biggest Success: Deepshikha Chandra

Deepshikha Chandran, who starred as the heroine in the blockbuster Mark, has become the talk of the town. Deepshikha, who impressed everyone with her excellent performance and impressive screen presence, has become everyone's favorite. She recently shared the highlights of the film in a press conference. Your performance in the movie 'Mark' is getting a super response. How does it feel to be recognized as a mass heroine at the beginning of your career?

achievement in my career. I want to move forward by choosing roles that challenge me.

A film with Kiccha Sudeep is a big opportunity. How was it working with him?

-I feel really honored. Working with Kichcha Sudeep garu is like a learning school. His discipline, focus, and the respect he gives to his co-artists are amazing. His presence on the set is very motivating. Being such a big star, he gets along with everyone. He encourages me a lot when it comes to acting. Even though you have a Chennai background, you are working in Tamil, Kannada and Telugu films. Don't you feel any difficulty in terms of languages?

-It felt a bit challenging in the beginning. But language is



Shikhar

Who is Sophie Shine? Shikhar Dhawan's soon-to-be wife

Dhawan, the former Indian cricketer, is set to marry his long-time girlfriend, Sophie Shine, in February 2026. The wedding will take place in the third week of February in the Delhi-NCR region. The event is expected to be a grand celebration with many famous people from the cricket and film industries attending. Although most of the wedding details are being kept private, sources say that Dhawan is personally involved in the planning process.

● **Who is Sophie Shine?**

Sophie Shine was born in 1990 in Ireland. She has a strong academic background, having earned a degree in Marketing and Management from the Limerick Institute of Technology. Sophie previous-

ly worked as a product consultant and also held the position of second vice president at Northern Trust Corporation in Abu Dhabi. She is currently the Chief Operating Officer of the Shikhar Dhawan Foundation, the charitable arm of Dhawan's company, Da One Sports.

● **How Dhawan and Sophie Met**

Shikhar Dhawan and Sophie Shine first met a few years ago at a restaurant in Dubai. They became friends, and their relationship grew over time. They started sharing their love story with the public during the 2024 IPL season when Sophie accompanied Dhawan to the stadium. The couple has

been living together for over a year now and is committed to building a future together. They made their relationship official on social media in 2025, sharing photos and videos with their fans.

● **Dhawan's Previous Marriage**

Before Sophie, Shikhar Dhawan was married to Ayesha Mukherjee, an Australia-based kickboxer. Dhawan and Ayesha were married in 2012 and have a son, Zoravar, born in 2014. However, the couple separated in 2021 and got divorced in 2023. Dhawan has spoken about his past relationship, calling it a learning experience and saying he is now ready for a fresh start with Sophie.

Charming Star Sharwa, Sakshi Vaidya's Lovely Number Bhalle Bhalle From Nari Nari Naduma Murari Unveiled

Charming Star Sharwa's upcoming wholesome family entertainer Nari Nari Naduma Murari, directed by Ram Abbaraju, will be gracing the theatres in 8 more days on January 14th, and the promotional activities are already in full swing. Produced by Ramabrahmam Sunkara under the AK Entertainments banner in association with Adventures International Pvt. Ltd., the film stars Samyuktha and Sakshi Vaidya as the female leads. The makers begin the musical promotions. The first single, Bhalle Bhalle, composed by Vishal Chandrashekhara, is out now, and it instantly captures the joyful essence of young love. Sung by Haricharan and penned by Ramajogayya Sastry, the track blends playful lyrics with a soulful melody, perfectly reflecting the chemistry between Sharwa's charming, verbose hero and Sakshi's traditional, heart-warming character. Visually, the song is a treat. Set against the lush landscapes of Kerala, the vibrant frames highlight the couple's blossoming romance, with every gesture and smile amplifying the festive,



chooda-muchataina vibe of the track. The combination of rich visuals, melodic instrumentation, and expressive vocals makes Bhalle Bhalle a memorable musical moment. As the first glimpse of the film's soundtrack, this song sets a high bar. King Of Entertainment Sree Vishnu played a special role in the movie co-starring Satya, Sunil, and Sudarshan in important roles. Coming to

the technical crew- cinematography is handled by Gnanasekhar VS and Yuvaraj, while Vishal Chandra Shekar scores the music. Bhanu Bogavarapu provided the story, with Nandu Savirigana contributing dialogues. Art direction is managed by Brahma Kadali. Ajay Sunkara takes on the role of co-producer, and Kishore Garikipati is the executive producer.

Ram Charan wishes A.R. Rahman on his birthday



Mumbai: Actor Ram Charan extended warm birthday wishes to music maestro A.R. Rahman, expressing gratitude for the musical magic the composer has brought to his upcoming film Peddi. Ram took to Instagram, where he shared a picture with Rahman, who turned 59 on Tuesday. Ram Charan shared a heartfelt note for the Oscar-winning composer, wishing him good health, happiness and "endless music". "Wishing @arrahan sir a very Happy Birthday. May this year bring you great health, happiness and endless music. #ChikiriChikiri was just the beginning. Can't thank you enough sir...for the magic you've woven for #Peddi," he wrote. Talking about "Peddi", the film is directed by Buchi Babu Sana. Filmed under the working title of RC16, it was officially announced as "Peddi" in March 2025. Ram Charan in

the titular role is paired with Janhvi Kapoor in an ensemble cast featuring Shiva Rajkumar, Jagapathi Babu and Divyenndu. The original score and soundtrack album are composed by A. R. Rahman. The film is scheduled to release on 27 March 2026. Meanwhile, Rahman, who is nicknamed "Isai Puyal" and "Mozart of Madras", is a recipient of six National Film Awards, two Academy Awards, two Grammy Awards, a BAFTA Award, a Golden Globe Award and the Padma Bhushan. With his in-house studio Panchathan Record Inn, Rahman's film-scoring career began during the early 1990s with the Tamil film Roja. Following that, he went on to score several songs for Tamil language films, including Mani Ratnam's politically charged Bombay, the urban Kaadhalan, Thiruda Thiruda, and S. Shankar's debut film Gentleman.

Rukmini Vasanth unveiled as the Mellisa from Yash's Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups

Yash's Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups continues to establish itself as an evolving extravaganza that grows darker, deeper, and more daring. The saga of its intrigue takes an exciting turn as the big ticket action drama unveils Rukmini Vasanth as the graceful, commanding and unflinching Mellisa. This film marks her striking collaboration with Yash under the distinctive cinematic gaze of Geetu Mohandas. Known for her intelligence-driven performances and emotional depth, Rukmini's introduction signals a performance that finds space within Geetu's layered, atmospheric storytelling, and Yash's ambition to make an Indian film that matches global standards in scale and offers a universal resonance in its storytelling. Following the unveiling of the arresting first looks of Kiara Advani as Nadia, Huma Qureshi as Elizabeth, Nayanthara as Ganga, and Tara Sutaria as Rebecca, Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups deepens its immersive realm with the introduction of Rukmini Vasanth as Mellisa. Set against the backdrop of a vibrant, hazy party in the late 1960s, Mellisa moves with an air of absolute self-assurance. Her expression is focused—a sharp, determined gaze that pierces through the surrounding festive chaos. While the world around her is fluid and drifting, she is focused, navigating the room with a stride that commands the floor. With each reveal, the film sharpens its edge, expanding its emotional terrain and cinematic scale, cementing Toxic one of the most anticipated Indian films of 2026. Geetu Mohandas says, "What I admire most about Rukmini is her intelligence as an actor. She doesn't just perform, she processes. She asks questions, not out of doubt but out of curiosity. It pushes me to think deeper and sometimes even my



own choices as a director. Watching her work reminds me that intelligence on screen often lies in what is left unsaid. Between shots, I often see her quietly writing in her journal, capturing thoughts, small anecdotes from the set.