



Trump Hopes for Peace on Earth in New Year

P8



Maruti Suzuki Sets New Export Record in 2025

P9

P12 Yami Gautam Shares Hilarious Theatre Story From Early Days



Shah to review Manipur situation as President's rule nears end

High-level meeting to assess law, order and path to restoring democratic governance

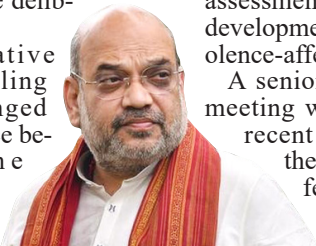
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will begin the New Year with a high-level review meeting today to assess the security and administrative situation in Manipur, where President's Rule is scheduled to end on February 13. The meeting assumes significance as the Centre weighs the possibility of facilitating a political process in the violence-hit state.

Sources said the review will be attended by Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, state

government advisor Kuldiep Singh, Chief Secretary PK Goel, Director General of Police Rajiv Singh and senior officials from the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. The Governor and key state officials have already arrived in the national capital for the deliberations.

With relative calm prevailing after prolonged ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo



communities, the Centre is keen to assess whether conditions are conducive for a transition towards elected governance. According to officials, the agenda will focus on law and order, coordinated security deployment, intelligence assessment, and progress on development initiatives in violence-affected areas.

A senior official said the meeting would also review recent developments on the ground and the effectiveness of security arrangements

put in place over the past months. "Ensuring a stable and secure environment will be critical if the Centre decides to facilitate a political process in the state," the source added.

Manipur was placed under President's Rule following the resignation of former Chief Minister N Biren Singh amid sustained ethnic unrest. Since then, the state has been administered by the Governor with support from central security forces. Parliament has approved multiple extensions of

Central rule, the most recent in August 2025, extending it until mid-February 2026.

Sources indicated that the outcome of the January 2 meeting could set the tone for restoring democratic governance. Any decision on government formation, they said, would depend on sustained peace, improved security conditions and consensus among political stakeholders, aligning with the Centre's broader objective of long-term stability and development in Manipur.



DCM hails 2025 governance gains, promises Bengaluru mobility push in 2026

BENGALURU

Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar on Thursday described 2025 as a "successful year" for Karnataka, marked by decisive governance, infrastructure development, and resolution of long-pending issues, particularly in Bengaluru.

Speaking to the media, Shivakumar highlighted that the government had delivered on key promises, focusing on irrigation, investments, and urban development. He said traffic bottlenecks in the capital, such as at Hebbal, were finally addressed through long-pending works. "We have undertaken a difficult, long-pending work. Now there will be no blockage, and with the Hebbal Flyover, the long-pending problem has been sorted out," he said.

Looking ahead, Shivakumar promised a major push for mobility in Bengaluru in 2026. "As far as mobility is concerned, various initiatives will be implemented next year," he noted, expressing optimism for smoother commutes

Deputy CM says state delivered on promises, infrastructure expansion key highlight.

and improved urban transport. The Deputy CM also cited historic decisions in the Irrigation Department and the Cauvery water dispute, describing them as milestones for the state. He emphasized that Karnataka's governance achievements had earned national recognition, with even the Prime Minister reportedly praising the state's efforts.

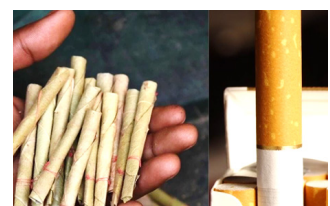
Shivakumar lauded the Home Department and police for maintaining law and order during New Year celebrations, congratulating Home Minister G. Parameshwara for ensuring security despite alleged threats.

Recalling his 35-year political journey, Shivakumar claimed that the government's initiatives in 2025 reflected an unprecedented level of administrative focus and commitment, laying the foundation for further transformation across Karnataka in 2026.

QUICK READ

Indo-Bangla Border Recorded Highest Infiltration Attempts

NEW DELHI: India recorded its highest number of infiltration attempts along the Bangladesh border in 2025, official data revealed. The Ministry of Home Affairs reported 1,104 instances in the first 11 months of 2025, with 2,556 people arrested. Between January 2014 and November 2025, 8,632 infiltration attempts on the India-Bangladesh border led to 21,407 arrests, the highest among all borders. By comparison, the India-Pakistan border saw 32 incidents in 2025, while India-Myanmar had 95, and India's borders with Bhutan and Nepal recorded 54 cases.



Sin Goods: Cigarette, Beedi, Pan Masala to Be Costlier

NEW DELHI: From February 1, pan masala, cigarettes, tobacco, and related products will become costlier as the government implements higher levies, officials said. Pan masala and tobacco will attract a GST rate of 40%, while beedis will face 18% GST. In addition, a Health and National Security Cess will apply to pan masala, and additional excise duty will be levied on tobacco products. These new levies replace the existing compensation cess. The Finance Ministry has also notified rules for packing machines for chewing tobacco, jarda, scented tobacco, and gutkha, effective from February 1, 2026.

The remarks come amid an ongoing political debate within the Karnataka Congress

‘Chief Ministership is for high command to decide’

BENGALURU

Karnataka Home Minister G. Parameshwara on Thursday clarified that any decision on the state's Chief Ministership lies solely with the Congress high command. Speaking to the media, he dismissed speculation linking him to a potential leadership change.

"There is no 'my team'. Some friends or well-wishers may express their views on their own. Even when I visit districts, some people say such things. It is their interest, but ultimately, the high command will make a decision," Parameshwara said.

The remarks come amid an ongoing political debate within the Karnataka Congress as the government reaches its halfway mark. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy CM D.K. Shivakumar, and Parameshwara himself are seen as central figures in the unfolding internal dynamics.

Earlier, the Home Minister extended New Year greetings to the people of Karnataka and praised the state police for ensuring peaceful celebrations. "I personally sat in the command centre, monitored the situation,



and issued instructions wherever large gatherings were reported. I am very happy that the celebrations were peaceful," he said.

Parameshwara also highlighted administrative progress in the police department, noting the completion of over 30 promotions, including officers moving from SP to DIG and DIG to IG ranks. He welcomed the Centre's allocation of Rs 352 crore for police modernisation, calling it a "significant development" after years of requests. Senior police officials met the Home Minister at his Bengaluru residence earlier in the day to review law and order and security preparedness, reflecting the administration's proactive approach to maintaining public safety.

NY celebrations were peaceful across K'taka: Home Minister

New Year celebrations across Karnataka, including Bengaluru, passed off peacefully with no major untoward incidents, Home Minister G Parameshwara said on Thursday, crediting effective policing and responsible public behaviour. Extending New Year greetings, Parameshwara said people celebrated the occasion "responsibly", which helped law enforcement agencies maintain order despite large crowds. He noted that while over 10 lakh people were expected to turn out in Bengaluru, police estimates put participation at around seven to eight lakh. "I personally monitored the situation from the command centre till 1.30 am," he said. The minister said the city witnessed unprecedented security arrangements, with 20,000 police personnel deployed across Bengaluru. "For the first time, such a large force was deputed, and there were no major incidents, traffic jams or serious accidents," he said.

Blast near Nalagarh police station rattles area, no casualties reported

NALAGARH

Panic briefly gripped Nalagarh town in Himachal Pradesh's Solan district on Thursday after a blast occurred in a lane near the Nalagarh police station, officials said. No casualties were reported in the incident, which took place around 9.40 am.

The impact of the explosion was strong enough to shatter windows of nearby buildings, with locals saying the loud sound was heard from a distance of 400 to 500 metres. Eyewitnesses reported that even 16 mm-thick glass panes



broke and buildings shook following the blast.

Police rushed to the spot and immediately cordoned off the area to prevent public movement. Baddi Superintendent of Police Vinod Dhiman said a forensic team has collected samples from different loca-

tions and the exact cause of the explosion will be known after laboratory analysis.

Dhiman said no threatening calls or emails were received, and preliminary findings suggest no mischief involving explosives. CCTV footage from the surrounding area is being scanned as part of the investigation.

The SP added that a large quantity of scrap material was stored in the vicinity, and an explosion caused by paint or other chemical substances could not be ruled out. Scrap dealers have been instructed to strictly follow safety norms.

Russia claims Ukrainian drone attack killed 24

KHERSON

Russia on Thursday accused Ukraine of killing at least 24 people, including a child, in a drone attack on a hotel and café during New Year celebrations in a Russian-controlled part of Ukraine's southern Kherson region. Vladimir Saldo, the Russian-installed governor of Kherson, said on Telegram that three Ukrainian drones struck a hotel and café in the coastal village of Khorly, where civilians had gathered to mark the New Year.

India, Pakistan exchange lists of nuclear installations, prisoners

NEW DELHI

Continuing a longstanding practice, India and Pakistan on Thursday exchanged lists of nuclear installations and prisoners, the Ministry of External Affairs said.

Under the 1988 bilateral agreement prohibiting attacks on nuclear facilities, both countries are required to share details of atomic installations annually. Pakistan handed over a list of 257 Indian prisoners, including 199 fishermen and 58 civilians, to the Indian High Commission in Islamabad. India similarly shared its list of Pakistani prisoners with officials in New Delhi.

Foreign Office spokesman

Tahir Andrabi said the exchanges were consistent with treaty obligations, ensuring transparency despite strained bilateral ties following last May's four-day military hostilities. The prisoner lists are exchanged biannually, in January and July, through diplomatic channels.

The nuclear installations agreement, signed on December 31, 1988, and effective from January 27, 1991, requires both nations to inform each other of facilities covered under the pact at the start of each calendar year. The move reflects the continuation of dialogue on nuclear security and consular matters, even amid ongoing tensions.

CRANS-MONTANA, SWITZERLAND

Several dozen people were killed and around 100 others injured after a powerful explosion and subsequent fire ripped through a crowded bar in the luxury Alpine ski resort of Crans-Montana early Thursday, Swiss police said. The blast occurred as revelers were celebrating the New Year, turning a festive night into one of Switzerland's deadliest tragedies in recent years.

Police in the canton of Valais confirmed that the explosion took place at around

1.30 am local time at a popular bar named Le Constellation. While authorities declined to provide a precise death toll, Italy's foreign ministry, citing information from Swiss police, said approximately 40 people were believed to have been killed.

"There has been an explosion of unknown origin. There are several injured, and several dead," police spokesperson Gaetan Lathion told, adding that more than 100 people were inside the building at the time. Cantonal president Mathias Reynard said what should have been a

SKI RESORT BAR BLAST

‘Several dozen’ killed, 100 injured in explosion at crowded bar



moment of celebration "turned into a nightmare."

The injured were rushed to hospitals across the region, including facilities in Lausanne, Geneva and Zurich. Officials said several victims



could be foreign nationals, as Crans-Montana is a major international tourist destination.

Authorities sealed off the area and imposed a temporary no-fly zone as rescue and forensic teams worked

through the debris. Police commander Frédéric Gisler described the scale of loss as "devastating."

Officials said preliminary findings suggest the incident was accidental and not terror-related. While early reports mentioned an explosion, fire officials indicated the blast may have been caused by the blaze itself. Unconfirmed reports have suggested fireworks or pyrotechnics could be involved.

A reception centre and helpline have been set up for affected families as investigations continue into the exact cause of the disaster.



QUICK READ

**Strike Ban Shock for Transport Workers****Bengaluru**

Transport employees in Karnataka received a jolt ahead of the New Year after the state government issued a notification banning strikes for the next six months, effective January 1, 2026. The order directs transport workers not to resort to strikes under any circumstances during this period. The earlier notification restricting strikes expired on December 31, 2025, following which the government issued a fresh order extending the ban. Authorities warned that strict action would be taken if the directive is violated, including the possible invocation of the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA).

Teenage Girl Dies by Suicide Following Parents' Separation**Bengaluru**

A 17-year-old girl allegedly died by suicide in Bengaluru, reportedly distressed by her parents' separation, police said on Thursday. The deceased, identified as Lekhna, had recently failed her Class 10 examinations and was staying at home with her mother after her parents separated due to a family dispute. Her father was living separately. Police said Lekhna left a note stating that she felt lonely and deprived of parental love, and held herself responsible for her death. She was found hanging at her residence on Wednesday night. The body has been sent to the KIMS Hospital mortuary for post-mortem examination.

Metro Boom on NY Eve: 8.93 Lakh Passengers, ₹3.08 Cr Revenue**Bengaluru**

Namma Metro recorded a massive surge in ridership on New Year's Eve, with 8.93 lakh passengers travelling in a single day and generating ₹3.08 crore in revenue. In view of the New Year celebrations, the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BM-RCL) extended service hours on the Purple, Green and Yellow lines. On December 31, 2025, metro services operated from 5 am till 3:10 am the next day to accommodate late-night commuters. During the extended operations, a total of 8,93,903 passengers used the metro network. The three corridors together earned ₹3.08 crore in fare revenue in a single day, reflecting the growing dependence on metro services for safe and efficient travel during major city events.

28 IPS Officers Promoted, 20 SPs Transferred in Reshuffle

Karnataka state government announces promotions and transfers of 48 IPS officers for New Year

BENGALURU

The Karnataka government carried out a major administrative reshuffle in the police department, ordering the promotion of 28 Indian Police Service (IPS) officers and the transfer of 20 others across the state. The changes, announced are aimed at strengthening policing, administration and leadership across key departments.

Among the senior officers promoted to the rank of Inspector General of Police (IGP) are Dr M B Boralingiah (Southern Zone), Ramnivas Sepat (National Police Training School, Hyderabad), Anupama Agarwal (CRPF),

Ajay Hilori (Additional Commissioner of Police, CCB, Bengaluru), and Dr Rohini Katoch Sepat (National Police Training School, Hyderabad).

A large group of officers has been elevated to the rank of Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG). Those promoted include Dr Bhimashankar S Guled (CID, Economic Offences Wing), Nikam Prakash Amrit (Central Service), G Rabad (National Police Training School), Rahul Kumar Shahpurvad (NIA, Delhi), Dharmendra Kumar Meena (Central Service), Ilakiya Karunakaran (Nisthuntu Wing), Dr C B Vedamurthy (Intelligence Wing), K M Shantaraju (ISD, Bengaluru),



Hanumantharaya (Human Rights Commission), D Devaraj (Police Training), Dr D R Sirigouri (Karnataka Lokayukta), Dr K Dharanidevi (Intelligence Wing), S Savita (Home Guards), C K Baba (KSRRP), Abdul Ahad (BMTC Vigilance), S Girish (Anti-Narcotics Force), M Put-

tamadaiah (Principal, Police Training School, Kalaburagi), T Sreedhar (Police Headquarters), M Ashwini (UNMISS), A N Prakash Gowda (Special Task Force), Jinendra Khanagavi (Prisons), G K Rashmi (Railway Police), T P Shivakumar (SCRB), N Vishnuvardhan (Police Academy,

Mysuru), Dr Sajeew M Patil (Chief of Police), Kamchhari (Prison Security), H D Anand Kumar (Cyber Command), and Kala Krishnamurthy (Crime Division, Police Headquarters).

In addition, officers including Dr Anoop Shetty, Harish Pandey, Sumana D Pannekar, Divya Sara Thomas, Dika Kishore Babu, C B Rishyant, Nisha James, Madhura Veena and M V Chandrakanth (SP, Bengaluru Rural) have also been promoted.

The government has also ordered the transfer of 20 IPS officers, including Mohammed Sujitha (Southeastern Division, Bengaluru), M Muthuraj (Chamarajanagar), Sara Fatima (Railways),

Arunangashu Giri (Raichur), Mithun Kumar (Northeastern Division), N Yatish (Western Division), Saidullah Adawat (Whitefield Division), Mallikarjun Baladandi (Mysuru), Pawan Nijjar (Ballari), Dr V J Shobharani (Mandya), Dr B T Kavita (CID), Nikhil (Shivamogga), Hariram Shankar (Udupi), A Srinivasulu (Kalaburagi), Ranjith Kumar Bandru (Chitradurga), K Ramarajan (Belagavi), K V Ashok (Tumakuru), Kannika Shikarival (Kolar), Shubanvita (Hassan) and Vikram Amte (Eastern Division, Bengaluru).

The reshuffle is expected to take effect immediately and play a key role in policing and governance in 2026.

OC Rule Relaxed for 30x40 Plots in Rural Karnataka

BENGALURU

In a major relief to farmhouse owners and newly built property owners in rural Karnataka, the state government has relaxed the mandatory Occupancy Certificate (OC) requirement for certain categories of houses constructed under gram panchayat (GP) limits.

According to officials from the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (RDPR) department, the exemption applies to newly constructed residential buildings built on 30x40 sq ft plots in rural areas falling within gram panchayat jurisdiction. The relaxation has come into effect immediately.

As per the RDPR notification, any residential building comprising ground floor plus two floors (G+2) or stilt plus three floors (Stilt+3), constructed on a 30x40 sq ft plot in rural areas, will be exempted from obtaining a mandatory OC. Significantly, the exemption applies even if the construction was carried out without prior approval or plan sanction from the concerned authorities.

Until now, owners of newly



A few weeks ago, the government had issued a similar exemption for newly built properties within the jurisdiction of the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) and other local bodies, waiving the mandatory OC requirement.

built houses in rural areas were required to undergo a detailed inspection process before an OC was issued. This involved site visits by gram panchayat officials along with jurisdictional town planning authorities, verification of certificates

issued by recognised engineers and architects, and scrutiny of building plan approvals.

The government noted that these procedures were adding to the workload of staff at local bodies, many of which are already understaffed and overburdened. The existing process often resulted in delays in the disposal of files and slowed the delivery of various government services.

To ease administrative pressure and ensure faster service delivery, the government decided to relax the rules and exempt residential buildings constructed on 30x40 sq ft plots from the OC requirement, the order said.

Investigate Illegal Entry into Kogilu Layout, Demands MLA Suresh Kumar

BENGALURU

Former minister and senior BJP MLA Suresh Kumar on Thursday demanded a thorough investigation into how people allegedly entered and settled illegally in Kogilu Layout, criticising the state government's move to regularise unauthorised houses in the area.

Suresh Kumar said the government must first establish how the settlements came up, who facilitated them and for how long they had existed before taking any decision on regularisation. "The government itself admits that these houses are illegal. Then the first question is — how did these people enter the layout and who allowed them to stay there?" he asked.

Targeting Congress leader Venugopal, the MLA alleged that the entire issue was being handled with political motives. He claimed the Kogilu



Layout decision was being driven by sympathy politics linked to electoral considerations in neighbouring Kerala. "Venugopal is defending himself for political reasons. This is competitive politics, where elections are being prioritised over justice," he alleged.

Suresh Kumar accused the state government of pursuing vote-bank politics by offering houses without proper verification. He said claims that the settlements had existed for 15-20 years were questionable and needed verification. "Legalising something illegal is itself an illegal policy. This move causes injustice to the real victims of Karnataka," he said.

Referring to reports that around 300 houses were affected, the MLA said the number of people living there could be much higher. He warned that offering alternative housing without a proper probe would set a dangerous precedent.

Car Hits Cab, Driver Attacked by Youths after Questioning

BENGALURU

A cab driver was assaulted by a group of intoxicated youths after he questioned them about their car hitting his vehicle near Corporation Circle in the early hours of Thursday. The incident, which occurred around 3.16 am, caused panic among motorists in the busy central business district.

According to police, the cab was parked near Corporation Circle when a car carrying several youths rammed into it from behind. When the cab driver objected and questioned the driver of the car, the youths allegedly began abusing him using obscene language in Hindi. The verbal altercation soon escalated into a violent confrontation. Eyewitnesses said the youths, numbering more than ten, turned aggressive and attempted to attack other drivers who tried to intervene and defuse the situation.

Illegal Immigrants Will Be Deported: G Parameshwara

BENGALURU

Karnataka Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara asserted that the state government will not provide alternative housing or any other facilities to illegal Bangladeshi immigrants if they are identified during police verification and that such individuals will be deported in accordance with the law.

Responding to allegations by the BJP that people displaced during the Kogilu Layout demolition drive were illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, Parameshwara said the opposition should refrain from making "passing comments" without evidence. He added that the BJP was free to protest if it had objections but should avoid politicising sensitive administrative matters.

The Home Minister said the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) would prepare a detailed list of people who lost shelters during the demolition drive at Kogilu Layout. This list would then be handed over to the police for verification. "The police will examine the background of each individual, including their origin, how long they have been in Bengaluru and the duration of their stay at the site," he said.

"If any illegal Bangladeshi immigrants are

found, the police will secure them and deport them to their country. Those involved in criminal activities will be arrested," Parameshwara said, making it clear that the government would not extend any benefits, including alternative housing, to foreign nationals staying illegally in the state.

Parameshwara criticised Leader of the Opposition R Ashoka for making what he termed politically motivated statements, pointing out that Ashoka himself had served as Home Minister and was well aware of the legal procedures involved in such cases. "Despite this, he is making such comments purely for political reasons," he said.

The Home Minister said identifying illegal Bangladeshi immigrants was an ongoing process across Karnataka. He noted that police have already directed coffee estate owners to verify the credentials of their labourers and submit details to jurisdictional police stations. Police teams are also conducting periodic visits to coffee estates to check for illegal immigrants, he added. On Wednesday, Ashoka had accused the Congress government of creating a "mini Bangladesh" in Karnataka through appeasement politics.



Woman killed in accident on return from temple

BENGALURU

A tragic accident claimed the life of a woman as her family was returning from a temple on the New Year. Ashwini, a resident of Thore Mudalapalya, died after being hit by a car near Lakkenahalli on the Nelamangala-Mangalore National Highway on Thursday morning.

Ashwini and her husband Ramesh were riding their bike with their second son after performing puja at a temple near Gudemaranahalli hand post. An overspeeding Eco car reportedly lost control, overturned, and struck the divider, which in turn hit the bike.

Ashwini suffered severe head injuries and died due to heavy bleeding, while Ramesh and their son Yavan escaped unharmed. The couple had been married for eight years and had two children. Police have registered a case, and the vehicle involved has been seized for further investigation into the incident.

Everyone in Kogilu Layout is from B'desh: Ashwath Narayan

BENGALURU

Former Deputy Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Ashwath Narayan on Thursday alleged that all residents of Kogilu Layout are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, demanding an immediate investigation into the matter. He claimed the presence of over 25 lakh Bangladeshis in Karnataka posed a serious challenge to law and order in the state.

"Let the government clarify whether this is true or not. The state is witnessing a massive

racket. Those living in Kogilu Layout are not our countrymen at all," Ashwath Narayan said, urging authorities to identify and deport illegal immigrants. He added that these individuals had entered Karnataka via West Bengal, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh, highlighting what he described as a "mini Bangladesh" being created in Bengaluru.

The former Deputy CM criticised the government's plan to provide housing to the residents, calling it illegal and unconstitutional.

Yatnal Slams Govt over Housing Allotment Controversy

BENGALURU

BJP MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal on Thursday launched a sharp attack on Housing Minister B Z Zameer Ahmed Khan and the Congress government, alleging that the allotment of houses in Bengaluru was being carried out with political and demographic motives rather than public welfare.

Reacting to reports of the government providing houses to alleged illegal residents at Kogilu Layout, Yatnal

claimed that the minister was not working in the interest of the state or the country. "He does not want a country or a state. He wants his population and voters to increase," Yatnal alleged, accusing the government of appeasement politics.

The Vijayapura MLA further claimed that the issue was being projected along religious lines and alleged that the Congress leadership was prioritising minority appeasement in the

name of secularism. He said such decisions were being taken without understanding the concerns of local residents and long-time settlers in Karnataka.

Yatnal alleged that appeasement politics had reached its peak in the state, claiming that houses were being allotted to "non-locals" instead of "original residents and Kannadigas". He further alleged that the government was acting under pressure from the Con-



gress high command and ignoring the interests of people who have lived and worked in Karnataka for decades.

He demanded that the state government conduct a thorough verification of beneficiaries before allotting houses, alleging the presence of illegal immigrants, including Bangladeshis and Rohingyas, in the state. "The government should first investigate who they are and which country they belong to before resettling anyone," he said.

QUICK READ

Mayor Pays Floral Tribute at Kala Bhavan

Dharwad
Dharwad Municipal Corporation Mayor Jyoti Patil offered floral tributes to the portrait of Dr. Mallikarjuna Manasura at Dharwad Kala Bhavan on Thursday. The tribute was paid as a mark of respect to Dr. Manasura's contributions, with civic leaders and members of the public in attendance. Mayor Jyoti Patil recalled Dr. Manasura's service and commitment, stating that his work continues to inspire the community. Officials said the event reflected the city's tradition of honouring individuals who have played a meaningful role in public life and social development. The programme at Kala Bhavan concluded with brief remarks highlighting the importance of remembering exemplary personalities and drawing inspiration from their values.

Government Plans Law Against Honour Killing: H.C. Mahadevappa

Hubballi
Amid growing concerns over crimes committed in the name of honour, the Karnataka government is actively considering bringing in a separate law to curb honour killings, said H.C. Mahadevappa. Speaking to the media in Inamveerapur, the minister stated that discussions have already been held with the Chief Minister and that the proposal would be examined once it is formally placed before the government. Mahadevappa made it clear that honour killings are a gross violation of fundamental rights and will not be tolerated under any circumstances. He stressed that marriage is a personal choice and should be carried out strictly according to the wishes of the woman involved. There is a complete violation of fundamental rights in such cases. Our government will not tolerate such incidents, and strict action will be taken against those involved, he said.

Town to Host Two-Day Sports Festival on January 3 and 4

KALAGHATAGI
Kalaghatagi town in Dharwad district is all set to host a vibrant two-day sports festival on January 3 and 4, aimed at promoting physical fitness, unity, and sportsmanship among youth and residents. The event is expected to draw enthusiastic participation from students, local sports clubs, and young athletes from Kalaghatagi and surrounding villages, transforming the town into a hub of sporting energy and community celebration.

The sports festival will be inaugurated in the presence of Nagaraj Chhabbi, a senior leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), who will be visiting the town during the programme. His presence has added significance to the event, with organisers stating that the initiative reflects a commitment to encouraging youth engagement through sports and constructive activities.

According to the organising committee, a wide range of competitions have been planned to cater to different age groups and interests. These include traditional athletic events such as running races, kabaddi, kho-kho, volleyball, and cricket, along with indoor games and recreational activities. Special emphasis has been placed on ensuring participation from school and college students, as well as providing equal opportunities for young women athletes to showcase their talent.

Speaking ahead of the festival, local BJP leaders and organisers said the objective of the event is not only to identify and encourage sporting talent at the grassroots level, but also to instil discipline, teamwork, and healthy lifestyles among the youth. They added that sports play a vital role in keeping young people away from negative influences and in building confidence and leadership skills.

The two-day programme will also feature brief motivational interactions with players, prize distribution ceremonies, and cultural activities to mark the festive atmosphere. Winners and outstanding performers will be awarded trophies, medals, and certificates as recognition of their achievements.

Residents of Kalaghatagi have welcomed the initiative, noting that such events help strengthen community bonds and provide a platform for rural and semi-urban youth to express their abilities. Adequate arrangements have been made for safety, refreshments, and smooth conduct of events, with volunteers assisting participants and spectators throughout the festival.



New Year Celebration Turns Tense as Youths Clash on Gokul Road

New Year festivities in Hubballi briefly turned chaotic after a scuffle broke out among youths on Gokul Road

HUBALI
While New Year celebrations were held with enthusiasm and cheer across the country, an unfortunate incident marred the festive spirit in Hubballi during the early hours of 2026. A scuffle broke out between a group of youths on Gokul Road shortly after the New Year celebrations concluded, creating a tense situation in the area.

According to eyewitnesses, people in Hubballi welcomed 2026 with great excitement, cutting cakes, bursting crackers, and celebrating with friends and family in various parts of the city. Gokul Road, one of the prominent stretches in Hubballi, witnessed a large gathering of youngsters celebrating the arrival of the New Year. However, what began as a festive gathering soon escalated into a confrontation.

The clash reportedly erupted over a trivial issue, though the exact cause of the argument remains unclear. In the heat of the moment, youths



were seen grabbing each other by neck straps and engaging in a physical fight. Some of them were also seen holding hands tightly and pushing one another, adding to the chaos on the busy road.

The incident was captured on mobile phone cameras by bystanders, and the visuals quickly spread, drawing attention to the brief breakdown of order amid celebrations. As the altercation threatened to escalate further, police personnel who were deployed in the area as part of New Year security arrangements intervened promptly.

The police acted swiftly to separate the two groups and calm the situation, preventing

any serious injuries or further disturbance. Their timely intervention helped restore normalcy on Gokul Road, and the crowd gradually dispersed after the situation was brought under control.

Police sources stated that heightened security arrangements had been put in place across the city anticipating large gatherings for New Year celebrations. Officers were patrolling sensitive and crowded areas to ensure public safety and to respond quickly to any untoward incidents.

Fortunately, no major injuries were reported in the scuffle. The incident serves as a reminder of the importance of maintaining restraint and responsibility during public celebrations, especially during large-scale events like New Year festivities. Authorities have urged citizens, particularly youngsters, to celebrate responsibly and cooperate with law enforcement to ensure peaceful and joyful occasions for everyone.

Basava Utsava Silver Jubilee Grandly Celebrated Shiraguppi

HUBBALLI
The silver jubilee celebrations of Basava Utsava, organised by the Lord Basava Rural Education Society, were held with great enthusiasm and splendour at Shiraguppi village in Hubballi taluk. The landmark event marked 25 years of the revered festival and drew participation from devotees, scholars, social leaders, and members of the local community. The celebrations were formally inaugurated by Dr. C.H.V.S.V. Prasad, Owner of the Swarna Group of Companies, who presided over the programme as the chief guest. The occasion was highlighted by the grand unveiling of the statue of Lord Basava, followed by a ceremonial procession of the statue through the village.

Old Hubballi police station. The body of the deceased was sent for post-mortem examination to ascertain further medical details related to the cause of death. Police officials stated that further investigation is underway to gather more evidence, including statements from neighbours and relatives, to reconstruct the sequence of events. The incident has once again highlighted concerns over domestic violence and the tragic consequences of unresolved marital conflicts. Residents of the area expressed shock and sorrow over the incident, noting that such acts of violence deeply affect community safety and harmony.

Police have urged citizens to report domestic disputes early and seek timely intervention to prevent such tragic outcomes. Further details are expected as the investigation progresses.

Leopard Sighting Triggers Village Fear

HUBBALLI
The sighting of a leopard on the airport road connecting Tarihal Bridge and Gamanagatti last week has triggered widespread fear among residents of nearby villages. Following the sighting on Dec 23, many villagers said they

were afraid to step out of their homes. Despite intensified efforts by the forest department, the leopard has not yet been captured. Officials have installed three cages and set up 11 CCTV cameras in the area. Although the animal has been spotted on CCTV footage, it has so far avoided the cages.

Police Organise Anti-Drug Awareness Bike Rally to Protect Youth

HUBBALLI
In today's fast-changing modern era, while innovation and technology are transforming lives, a growing concern is the increasing vulnerability of young people to the harmful effects of drugs at an early age. Recognising the seriousness of this social issue, the Hubballi Police Commissionerate organised a large-scale awareness campaign against drug abuse by conducting a bike rally across the city.

The rally was flagged off from Nehru Maidan in Hubballi and witnessed active participation from officers and staff of all police stations within the city limits. The initiative aimed to educate the public, especially youngsters, about the dangers of drug consumption and the legal consequences associated with drug-related offences.

As part of the campaign, police personnel rode through major roads and busy junctions of the city, including Channamma Circle, Koppikara Road, and Gokul Road, drawing the attention of pedestrians, motorists, shopkeepers, and residents. Slogans and messages displayed during the rally highlighted the ill effects of drugs on physical health, mental well-being, families, and society at large.

Senior police officials stated that drug abuse not only destroys the future of youth but also contributes to an increase in crime and social instability. Through this rally, the police



Hubballi Police launched a citywide bike rally to spread awareness against drug abuse among youth.

sought to send a strong message that consumption, sale, and transportation of narcotic substances are serious crimes under the law and will invite strict legal action.

The campaign also emphasised the role of parents, teachers, and the community in identifying early signs of drug addiction and guiding young people towards positive and healthy lifestyles. Police urged citizens to cooperate with law enforcement agencies by reporting any information related to drug peddling or illegal activities in their neighbourhoods.

Members of the public appreciated the initiative, stating that such visible and proactive efforts by the police help create awareness and instil fear among those involved in the drug trade. The rally concluded peacefully after covering key parts of the city, reinforcing the commitment of the Hubballi Police to safeguard the future of youth and maintain a drug-free society.

Study Tour Sparks Controversy During General Body Meeting

HUBBALLI
A 51-member team of officials and elected representatives of the Hubballi-Dharwad Municipal Corporation (HDMC) used the platform of the corporation's general body meeting to clarify details surrounding their recent study tour to Indore. The meeting, which was expected to focus on pressing civic issues of the twin cities, largely revolved around explanations for the tour, triggering criticism and public disappointment. Sources said the general body meeting was curtailed primarily to address questions about the Indore visit, which reportedly cost around ₹2 crore. The mayor and the commissioner's failure to disclose the tour plan in advance and provide a clear justification for the expenditure raised suspicion among several corporators and observers. While routine matters were briefly touched upon, the dominant focus remained the controversial study tour.

At the outset of the meeting, senior corporator Thippanna Majjagi questioned the

rationale behind the visit. He sought clarity on how much money was spent on the Indore tour, the source of the funds, and the specific purpose of sending such a large delegation. These questions need clear answers from the mayor or the commissioner, he stated, reflecting concerns shared by several members.

Residents of the Hubballi-Dharwad had expected that a study tour involving a large team would result in tangible takeaways and immediate initiatives to address civic challenges. Many hoped the delegation would study multiple best practices in urban governance, sanitation, traffic management, and infrastructure, and implement at least some of them locally.

However, the meeting reportedly failed to provide satisfactory responses to the issues raised. While the commissioner and the mayor acknowledged that arrangements for the tour were in place, they did not outline any concrete proposals or action plans based on the findings of the Indore visit.

AADHAAR CENTRE REOPENS

Aadhaar Seva Kendra Reopens at New Location for Public Convenience

HUBBALLI
In a major relief to residents, the Aadhaar Seva Kendra in Hubballi, which had remained closed for a few days, has now been shifted to a new location and reopened for public services. The newly relocated centre was formally inaugurated by Divya Prabhu, Deputy Commissioner, marking an important step towards enhancing citizen convenience and service delivery.

The relocation comes after the completion of the five-year lease period of the earlier Aadhaar centre located on Club Road in Hubballi. Following the closure of the old facility, a new Aadhaar Seva Kendra has begun functioning at Keshavpur. The centre is strategically located opposite the Railway Officers' Rest House and adjacent to the SBI Bank at Jold Building in Bha-



vani Nagar, making it easily accessible to the public.

Officials said the new location has been chosen keeping in mind better connectivity and space to accommodate the growing number of Aadhaar applicants. With Aadhaar being mandatory for availing almost all government services, the demand for Aadhaar-related

crowding and limited facilities, especially when seeking amendments or applying for new Aadhaar cards.

The opening of one of the largest Aadhaar Seva Kendras in the region is expected to address these challenges and significantly reduce waiting times for applicants. The centre is equipped to handle a high volume of requests and aims to provide faster and more efficient services to citizens.

Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Commissioner Divya Prabhu stated that the administration is committed to improving public service infrastructure and ensuring hassle-free access to essential services. She, along with officials, Managers, and Heads of Aadhaar Seva Kendras, appealed to the public to make full use of the newly opened facility.



QUICK READ

Taluk Planning Development Committee Meeting on January 9

Kanakagiri

The Taluk Planning and Development Committee (TPDC) meeting of Karatagi taluk has been scheduled to take place on January 9 at 11 a.m. at the Taluk Panchayat meeting hall in Kanakagiri. The meeting is being organised to review ongoing development works, assess departmental progress, and discuss future plans for the overall growth of the taluk. According to an official release issued on January 1, the meeting will be chaired by Shivaraj Tangadagi, who serves as the Minister for Backward Classes Welfare and Kannada and Culture Department, as well as the District In-charge Minister of Koppal. He is also the President of the Taluk Planning and Development Committee.

Canara Bank Deshpande RSETI Invites Skill Applications

Haliyal

The Canara Bank Deshpande Rural Self Employment Training Institute (RSETI), Haliyal, has invited applications from unemployed women for specialised skill development training programmes aimed at promoting self-employment and financial independence. The announcement was made on January 1, highlighting opportunities for rural women from Koppal and surrounding areas to gain livelihood-oriented skills. According to the official release, the training will focus on Hand Embroidery and Fabric Painting, trades that offer strong potential for home-based and small-scale entrepreneurial ventures. The programme is exclusively designed for unemployed rural women aged between 18 and 50 years. The training will be conducted for 31 days, from January 19 to January 31, at the institute run by Canara Bank Deshpande RSETI in Haliyal.

Gold Chain Theft Accused Arrested

Bagalkote

In a case highlighting the dangers of blind faith and deception, the Bagalkote police have arrested a man who allegedly stole a gold chain by pretending to rectify vastu dosha through a ritual. The incident took place in Bagalkote town, where the accused gained the trust of residents by projecting himself as a knowledgeable spiritual practitioner. According to police sources, the accused approached a household claiming that negative energies and vastu-related defects were affecting the family's peace and prosperity. He reportedly convinced the family that a special pooja was necessary to eliminate the vastu dosha and bring positive results.

GTTC Invites Applications for Temporary Guest Lecturer Posts

DADEGAL

The Government Tool Room and Training Centre (GTTC) has issued a notification inviting applications for temporary guest lecturer positions at its facility located in Dadegal village of Koppal taluk. The announcement was released on January 1, calling upon qualified and interested candidates to apply for vacancies across several technical and academic disciplines.

According to the notification,

Municipality Invites Applications for Construction of Individual Toilets

Mundaragi Municipality has invited applications from eligible SC and ST beneficiaries for individual toilet construction assistance.

GADAG

In a move aimed at improving sanitation infrastructure and ensuring inclusive development, the Mundaragi Municipality has invited applications from eligible Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) beneficiaries for the construction of individual household toilets under the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) 2.0 scheme for the financial year 2025–26.

According to an official notification issued by the Chief Officer of Mundaragi Municipality, a total target of 22 individual toilets has been fixed under the State Finance Commission (SFC) fund allocation for the current year. Of these, 17 toilets have been earmarked for beneficiaries belonging to the Scheduled Caste category, while five



toilets are reserved for Scheduled Tribe beneficiaries. The scheme is intended to promote cleanliness, public health, and dignity by ensuring access to sanitation facilities for all households.

Under the scheme, each eligible beneficiary will receive financial assistance of ₹23,333, strictly as per the prescribed rules and guide-

lines. The assistance is meant exclusively for the construction of individual toilets on the beneficiary's own land. The municipality has clarified that only those households that do not currently possess an individual toilet and have not availed any previous financial assistance from the municipality for toilet construction will

be considered eligible.

The municipality has called upon interested and eligible residents within the Mundaragi municipal limits to submit their applications along with all necessary supporting documents. Applications must be submitted in person during office hours at the Mundaragi Municipality Office on or before January 17. Officials have emphasized the importance of attaching complete and accurate documentation to avoid rejection or delays in processing.

The initiative is part of the broader objectives of Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0, which focuses not only on toilet construction but also on sustaining open defecation-free (ODF) status, improving hygiene practices, and strengthening urban sanitation systems.

DSS Stages Protest Condemning Murder of Seven-Month Pregnant Woman

BAGALKOTE

Strong condemnation and public outrage marked a protest organised by the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti (DSS) in Bagalkote against the shocking murder of a seven-month pregnant woman in Hubballi. The demonstrators demanded swift justice for the victim and strict punishment for those responsible for the heinous crime.

The protest was held in the heart of Bagalkote city, where DSS activists gathered in large numbers holding placards and raising slogans condemning violence against women. The demonstrators described the incident as

deeply disturbing and inhuman, stating that the murder of a pregnant woman reflects a grave failure of law and order as well as societal conscience.

Addressing the gathering, DSS leaders said that crimes against women, especially pregnant women, are on the rise and that such incidents instil fear and insecurity among the public. They alleged that delays in investigation and lack of deterrent punishment often embolden criminals. The activists urged the government and police authorities to ensure a fast-track investigation into the Hubballi murder case and deliver justice without delay.



Everyone Must Strive to Realise Gandhiji's Dream of Gram Swaraj D.R. Patil

KOPPAL

Vice-Chairman of the Karnataka State Decentralisation Planning and Development Committee, D.R. Patil, said that everyone must work together to realise the dream of Gram Swaraj envisioned by the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi.

He was speaking on Thursday at a Gram Sabha organised in the premises of Halavarti Gram Panchayat in Koppal taluk, in collaboration with the district administration, Zilla Panchayat, Taluk Panchayat Koppal, and Halavarti Gram Panchayat, in connection with the preparation of the draft annual development plan of the Gram Panchayat for the year 2026–27.

D.R. Patil said that Gram Sabhas should be conducted regularly to prepare action plans for the year 2026–27, and development plans must be framed by giving priority to the needs and demands of the people. By holding Gram Sabhas periodically, people's problems can be heard and solutions provided. When a sense of our participation is created among the public, decentralisation of power becomes possible and the true spirit of the Panchayat Raj system can be realised. Hence, people's participation should be given utmost importance.

Collective effort and people's participation are essential to realise Mahatma Gandhi's dream of true Gram Swaraj, said D.R. Patil.

He further stated that development is possible only when everyone is treated equally. Efforts should be made to link resources to all rural families. Rural products should be encouraged by providing proper market facilities. The law has empowered Gram Panchayats to function as village governments, and all should commit themselves to realising Gandhiji's vision of Gram Swaraj and village self-governance.

Highlighting social responsibility, he said that no human being is perfect and everyone has shortcomings. These should be reduced year after year while cultivating good qualities. Priority should be given to village cleanliness by organising monthly cleanliness drives with collective voluntary labour. He also called upon people to support prohibition and stressed the need to promote organic and natural farming in an era of excessive chemical use in agriculture. Koppal Assembly Constituency MLA K. Raghavendra Hittal said that residents remember leaders like Siddaramaiah and H.K. Patil for facilitating.

Notification Issued for New Fair Price Shops; Applications Invited Across District

KOPPAL

The Department of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs has issued an official notification inviting applications for the establishment of new fair price shops in select villages across Koppal district. The move aims to strengthen the public distribution system (PDS) and ensure easier access to essential commodities for residents in both rural and urban pockets of the district.

According to the notification released on January 1, applications are being invited for opening new fair price shops in specific locations across three taluks. In Yelburga taluk, a new fair price shop has been proposed for Lingabandi village under the Scheduled Tribe (ST) reservation category. In Koppal ta-



luk, applications have been invited for Budagumpa village-2 under the general category. Similarly, in Gangavathi taluk, a new fair price shop is proposed at Eidga Colony, Gangavathi, also under the general category.

The department has clarified that eligible applicants

must submit their applications within 30 days from the date of issue of the notification. Applications should be submitted in the prescribed format along with all required documents to the office of the concerned Deputy Director, Department of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Af-

fairs, Koppal.

Officials stated that the selection process will be carried out strictly in accordance with existing rules and reservation norms, ensuring transparency and fairness. Preference will be given to applicants who meet eligibility criteria related to residency, financial stability, and capability to manage a fair price shop efficiently in the interest of beneficiaries.

The initiative is expected to benefit ration card holders by reducing travel distances, easing overcrowding at existing fair price shops, and improving timely distribution of subsidised food grains and essential commodities. Residents of the notified areas have welcomed the decision, noting that additional fair price shops will help address long-standing issues related to accessibility and convenience.

HEALTH OFFICE INAUGURATED

Inauguration of Renovated Administrative Office

GADAG

The renovated administrative office of the District Health and Family Welfare Department was formally inaugurated on Thursday by C. N. Sri-dhar, Deputy Commissioner of Gadag district. The inauguration marks an important milestone in strengthening the administrative framework of the district health system and improving the working environment for officials and staff involved in public healthcare delivery.

The upgraded office infrastructure has been developed with the objective of enhancing efficiency, transparency, and coordination in the implementation of various health and family welfare programmes. Officials said that the renovation will help streamline administrative processes and provide better facilities for planning, monitoring, and execution of health



initiatives across the district. The improved workspace is also expected to contribute to faster decision-making and improved service delivery to the public.

Speaking informally on the occasion, the Deputy Commissioner appreciated the efforts of the Health Department and the agencies involved in completing the renovation work. He stressed the need for effective administration to support frontline healthcare services and ensure

that government health schemes reach the intended beneficiaries, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Several senior district-level officials were present during the inauguration. Among them were Zilla Panchayat Deputy Secretary C. R. Mundaragi, District Health and Family Welfare Officer Dr. S. S. Neelagund, and District Leprosy Control Officer Dr. Rajendra Basarigadd. Their presence underlined the importance of coordinated

functioning among various wings of the health administration.

Also present were District Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) Officer Dr. Meenakshi K. S., Zilla Panchayat Chief Accounts Officer J. C. Prashant, Zilla Panchayat Chief Planning Officer A. A. Kam-balimath, and DRDA Project Director M. V. Chalagari.

Representatives from the Nirmithi Kendra, including G. V. Shirole, along with officers and staff members of the Health Department, also attended the programme. They noted that the renovated building would provide a more conducive environment for administrative work, meetings, and coordination with other departments. The inauguration of the renovated administrative office reflects the government's continued focus on strengthening healthcare governance and institutional capacity.

To place a classified ad
contact: **080-41209042**

QUICK READ

Tobacco Makers Must Install CCTV From February

NEW DELHI

The government has directed that all manufacturers of chewing tobacco, gutkha, and similar products must install functional CCTV systems on every packing machine starting February 1. Footage must be preserved for at least 24 months. Manufacturers must also report the number and capacity of machines to excise authorities. If a machine is non-functional for 15 or more consecutive days, they can claim duty abatement. The rules apply to pouch-packed products, while other forms like tins will attract duty on assessable value.

India, Pakistan Exchange Prisoner And Fishermen Lists

NEW DELHI

India and Pakistan on Thursday exchanged lists of prisoners and fishermen in each other's custody, under the 2008 Consular Access Agreement. India shared details of 391 civil prisoners and 33 fishermen, while Pakistan listed 58 prisoners and 199 fishermen, including 167 Indians who have completed their sentences. India urged Pakistan for their early release, consular access to 35 detainees, and ensured safety and welfare. Since 2014, 2,661 Indian fishermen and 71 civil prisoners have returned, including 500 fishermen and 13 civilians since 2023.

Family Conflicts Turn Deadly In Uttar Pradesh

LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh witnessed several tragic cases where family disputes ended in death rather than separation. Police and court records show trust breaking down within households, with private disagreements turning fatal. A chilling case in Sambhal involved Vishal Singhal, who allegedly killed his parents years apart and his ex-wife to claim over Rs 50 crore in insurance. His parents' deaths, in 2017 and April this year, were initially treated as accidents. Experts say such cases highlight how internal family conflicts can spiral into violence.

VP Radhakrishnan, Leaders Extend Warm New Year Wishes

Delhi CM Rekha wished citizens a New Year, urging hope, unity, active participation, and commitment to a prosperous, inclusive, and well-governed capital in 2026

NEW DELHI

Vice President C.P. Radhakrishnan met President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday, exchanging warm greetings for the New Year 2026. He also wished citizens peace, health, and prosperity, hoping the year strengthens India's growth and unity.

Radhakrishnan's greetings follow similar messages from other leaders. Prime Minister Narendra Modi wished the nation a happy and prosperous 2026, praying for societal peace, good health, and success in personal and professional lives. Modi highlighted the importance of collective progress and fulfillment for all citizens.

Union Minister for Agriculture



and Farmers' Welfare and Rural Development Shivraj Singh Chouhan extended special greetings to farmers, workers, labourers, women, and rural communities. He emphasised the government's efforts to strengthen agriculture, improve rural infrastructure, and raise farmers' incomes under PM Modi's leadership.

Chouhan described farmers as the nation's food providers and workers as the backbone of India's economy, stressing that their welfare remains a top priority.

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta also conveyed New Year wishes, calling for hope, positive energy, and steady progress for the capital's citizens.

She highlighted the importance of citizen trust and participation in achieving development and good governance. Gupta expressed commitment to public welfare and building an inclusive, strong, and prosperous Delhi in the coming year.

The collective greetings by India's top leaders reflect a shared aspiration for national growth, social harmony, and the well-being of all citizens. The messages emphasise unity, development, and renewed determination to make 2026 a year of progress and prosperity for India. Leaders encouraged citizens to participate actively in nation-building while cherishing hope, health, and happiness in personal and public life.

Rajnath Singh Pays Homage To Khaleda Zia's Legacy

NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday visited the Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi to pay tribute to former Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia. During the visit, he signed the Condolence Book and expressed India's sorrow over her passing. Bangladesh High Commissioner Riaz Hamidullah welcomed Singh and highlighted India's condolences on social media. Singh also shared a post, offering thoughts for Zia's family and the people of Bangladesh.

The tributes come as Bangladesh continues to mourn the veteran leader. On Wednesday, thousands gathered at the Namaz-e-Janaza held at the South Plaza of Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban to offer their final respects. The funeral prayer was led by the khatib of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, with BNP



Standing Committee member Nazrul Islam Khan supervising proceedings. Khaleda Zia was laid to rest beside her husband, former President Ziaur Rahman, in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

Her passing drew attention from across South Asia, with multiple countries sending senior officials to Dhaka. India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar also attended the funeral, demonstrating India's support during the period of mourning.

Earlier, Acting BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman thanked supporters, government officials, and visiting dignitaries

who attended the funeral, expressing gratitude for their presence during the family's time of loss.

High Commissioner Hamidullah expressed optimism about the future of India-Bangladesh ties, noting discussions with Rahman and highlighting opportunities for co-operation based on shared interests, pragmatism, and mutual interdependence.

Singh's visit underscores India's engagement with Bangladesh during the nation's period of mourning and reflects the deep historical and diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Pakistan's Textile Industry Faces Severe Economic Crisis

NEW DELHI

Pakistan's textile industry, once a key driver of economic growth, is facing a severe crisis, with factories shutting down due to rising production costs. According to a report, the sector is struggling with structural, economic, and logistical challenges, including collapsing cotton production, high energy tariffs, policy missteps, and a nationwide transport strike. The Pakistan Textile Exporters Association (PTEA) reported that textile exports have fallen for the fourth consecutive month. PTEA General Secretary Azizullah Goheer said exports, which reached \$19.3 billion in FY2021, have slipped to \$18 billion, then \$17 billion, with a 6.39 per cent drop between July and November 2025 alone. High production costs are making Pakistan less competitive compared to regional rivals such as Bangladesh, India, China, and Vietnam.

Jaishankar's Dhaka Visit Signals Restoring India-Bangladesh Ties

NEW DELHI

Former diplomat Suresh K. Goel on Thursday said External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to Dhaka for former Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's funeral is a key step towards normalising India-Bangladesh political dialogue. Goel noted that while the visit may appear as protocol, it carries

deeper significance given Zia's role in Bangladesh's political history and India's past engagement with her government. Goel highlighted that India and Bangladesh previously shared a "pleasant and effective relationship," which periodic irritants had strained. He said Jaishankar's remarks during the visit, expressing hope that Zia's vision continues to guide bilateral relations,

reflected New Delhi's intent to rebuild a stable and constructive partnership. "We are talking about really establishing a normal political regime and dialogue between the two countries," he said.

Referring to recent political developments following the ousting of Sheikh Hasina, Goel said engagement has become difficult due to rising violence and jihadist influ-

ence. He stressed the importance of restoring a political government through free and fair elections and ensuring the safety of all citizens, including people of Indian origin.

During his four-hour visit, Jaishankar met Khaleda Zia's son and BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, handing over a condolence letter from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

OPERATION SINDOOR

Op Sindoor Sets New Military Deterrence Benchmarks

NEW DELHI

India displayed military strength, advanced technology, indigenous platforms and zero tolerance to terrorism after the Pahalgam attack. Under Operation Sindoor on May 7, Indian forces struck terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. They also repelled Pakistan's escalation and hit key airbases without crossing borders. Experts said the operation showed India will respond forcefully to every proven cross-border terror attack. It marked a shift from limited strikes to assured deterrence.

Retired Lieutenant General Kanwal Jeet Singh Dhillon said air defence has become the main weapon of modern warfare. He said Pakistan continues to support terrorism to hide its internal political and economic failures. He noted Pakistan ignored India's rise as a strong economy, democracy and military power. He warned that any future provocation would invite stronger military, economic and diplomatic costs. Lt Gen Dhillon

Experts say Operation Sindoor marked a decisive shift in India's military doctrine and counter-terror posture.

said Operation Sindoor created new global benchmarks in fighting terrorism. For the first time, two nuclear nations fought without crossing the Line of Control. Air defence systems stopped enemy aircraft, missiles and drones using modern technology. He said future wars will be non-contact, driven by cyber, space, electronic and information warfare. Economic disruption and narrative battles will also play major roles. He called for strong information systems and a clear counter-terror policy. India's doctrine, he said, treats terrorists, their groups and sponsors as one. Experts said Operation Sindoor reflects a new India with firm resolve against terrorism. They said it sends a strong message to hostile neighbours and reinforces national security through decisive, measured action across multiple strategic domains.

India, Pakistan Exchange Prisoner And Nuclear Facility Lists



NEW DELHI

India and Pakistan on Thursday exchanged lists of prisoners, fishermen, and nuclear installations through diplomatic channels in New Delhi and Islamabad, under the 2008 Consular Access Agreement. India urged Pakistan to release and repatriate 167 Indian fishermen and civil prisoners who have completed their sentences and provide consular access to 35 detainees believed to be Indian.

India shared details of 391 civil prisoners and 33 fishermen in its custody who are Pakistani or believed to be Pakistani. Pakistan provided lists of 58 civil prisoners and 199 fishermen who are Indian or believed to be Indian. The MEA emphasised that India requested Pakistan to

ensure the safety, security, and welfare of all Indian and believed-to-be-Indian prisoners and fishermen pending their return.

Since 2014, 2,661 Indian fishermen and 71 civil prisoners have been repatriated from Pakistan, including 500 fishermen and 13 civilians since 2023. The exchanges are part of annual procedures held every January 1 and July 1 to maintain dialogue and transparency between the two neighbours.

In addition, the two countries exchanged lists of nuclear installations and facilities under the Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities, originally signed on December 31, 1988. This marks the 35th consecutive exchange since the first in January 1992.

Guyana Eyes India's Support To Become Healthcare Hub

NEW DELHI

Guyana is aiming to become a healthcare hub in the Caribbean, relying on Indian expertise to strengthen its medical infrastructure, said Guyanese High Commissioner to India Dharamkumar Seeraj. He praised India's robust healthcare system and highlighted growing cooperation between the two countries. Seeraj said that when specialised care is unavailable in Guyana, the government facilitates treatment abroad, with India emerging as a preferred destination due to high-quality medical services and competitive costs. The Ministry of Health supports patients financially, ensuring access to necessary care. Several MoUs and agreements have been signed with Indian institutions, including the National Cancer Institute and other hospitals, offering medical training and sometimes full scholarships to Guyanese students. Seeraj noted that these collaborations are helping to build local expertise while providing options for patients to seek treatment in India. Guyana also plans to develop healthcare tourism, inspired



by India's model, and sees its partnership with New Delhi as crucial to this goal. "We expect this arrangement to continue as we build our own healthcare systems, and we want to become a healthcare hub of the Caribbean," Seeraj said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Guyana in November 2024 gave new momentum to bilateral ties. Several healthcare-focused MoUs were signed, covering cooperation in health and pharmaceuticals, regulation and supply of affordable medicines, and the establishment of a Jan Aushadhi Kendra in Guyana to provide access to low-cost medicines for citizens and other CARICOM countries.

Seeraj stressed that India's experience and support will be central to Guyana's vision of providing quality healthcare.

BANGLADESH ELECTIONS, ISI THREATS CHALLENGE INDIA'S NORTHEAST SECURITY

NEW DELHI

India's intelligence agencies have flagged Bangladesh elections and ISI-backed activities as major security challenges for the northeast this year. Reports from the Intelligence Bureau indicate that the deteriorating situation in Bangladesh, combined with election-related tensions, could affect India's border states, including Assam and West Bengal. Bangladesh

is scheduled to hold elections on February 12, with the Awami League barred from contesting. The main contest is between the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the ISI-backed Jamaat-e-Islami. Officials note that political rhetoric in Bangladesh portrays India as a key adversary, with anti-India narratives being used to win votes. The National Citizen Party (NCP) has also supported this messaging.

The Yunus government has reportedly been lenient toward terror groups like Harkat-ul-Jihad Islamic (HuJI) and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), which are alleged to have backing from the ISI to destabilise India's northeast. Officials point out that maps depicting "Greater Bangladesh" and references to the northeast as 'landlocked' suggest a strategic plan to influence the region.

AI SKILLS

President Murmu Launches Skill The Nation AI Challenge

NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday launched the Skill-TheNation AI Challenge and virtually inaugurated the IG-NOU Regional Centre and Skill Centre at Rairangpur in Odisha, highlighting artificial intelligence as a key driver of inclusive growth. Speaking at the Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre, she said AI is reshaping societies and economies worldwide, influencing how people learn, work, and access services. For India, a young and dynamic country,



AI represents an opportunity to drive positive change and inclusive development.

The President expressed appreciation for students preparing themselves for an AI-driven

future and urged them to use their skills to serve society, solve challenges, and empower others. She also acknowledged Members of Parliament who completed AI learning mod-

ules, highlighting the importance of continuous learning and leadership in the digital era. President Murmu emphasised that AI will be crucial in boosting India's GDP, employment, and productivity over the coming decade. She highlighted the need for expertise in areas such as data science, AI engineering, and data analytics to build a strong national talent pool. She noted that the government, working with institutions, industry, and academia, aims not only to adopt advanced technologies but also to promote responsible and in-

clusive use of AI. President Murmu called for collective effort toward making India a knowledge superpower and achieving the goals of the National Education Policy.

The launch is part of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship's ongoing initiatives to equip India's workforce for an AI-driven future. The program reflects the government's focus on fostering innovation, skill development, and technology-led growth to ensure India's progress in the global digital economy.

QUICK READ



ACB Arrests Rajasthan Officials In Bribery Cases

JAIPUR
The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Thursday arrested two senior officials in separate bribery cases in Rajasthan. In Sawai Madhopur, Senior Assistant Suryaprakash Nama of the District Industries Centre was caught red-handed accepting Rs 25,000 from a complainant. He had demanded the bribe in exchange for depositing subsidy amounts under the Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar Dalit Incentive Scheme. In Sikar, Head Constable Rajesh Kumar was arrested accepting Rs 10,000 from a complainant. Both cases are under investigation under the Prevention of Corruption Act.



J&K Crime Branch Charges Accused In Fake Appointments

SRINAGAR
The Jammu and Kashmir Crime Branch has filed a chargesheet against two people involved in issuing fake appointment orders in the Agriculture Department. The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) submitted the chargesheet to the Judicial Magistrate 1st Class, Chadoora, Budgam, under IPC sections 420, 467, 468, 471, 511, and 120-B. The accused, Showkat Ahmad Hajam of Budgam and Irshad Ahmad Ahanger of Pulwama, allegedly tried to cheat job aspirants using forged appointment orders. The case began after a woman attempted to join with a fake order in 2019.

One Dies, Twelve Fall Sick After Party

MEDCHAL | MALKAJGIRI
A New Year's celebration in Bhavani Nagar turned tragic when one man died and 12 others were hospitalised after eating chicken and fish they had cooked themselves. The deceased, 53-year-old Pandu, and the others all belong to the same colony. According to police, after the party, several people fell ill due to suspected food poisoning. The hospitalised individuals are currently stable. Jagathgiri Gutta police have registered a case and are investigating the incident to determine the exact cause.

Indian Army Intensifies Winter Operations In Pir Panjal

POONCH
The Romeo Force of the Indian Army has stepped up search and surveillance operations in the Pir Panjal ranges of Poonch district, Jammu and Kashmir, amid heavy snowfall and extreme cold. Troops are operating at altitudes above 13,000 feet, navigating snow-bound mountains and challenging terrain while maintaining constant communication to monitor suspected areas. Army personnel, equipped with specialised winter gear, are conducting coordinated exercises along the border as a precautionary measure. Simultaneously, counterterrorism operations have been intensified in Kishtwar and Doda districts, with units patrolling frozen forests and mountain caves to neutralise potential threats before the harsh winter fully sets in. Despite the onset of Chillai Kalan, Kashmir's harshest winter phase from December 21 to January 31, the Army has maintained a proactive approach. Temporary bases and surveillance posts have been established deep within snow-covered areas to prevent terrorists from exploiting isolated mountain regions for concealment.

TMC Alleges Aggressive CEC Fails To Address SIR Issues

The EC told TMC that staff intimidation won't be tolerated and urged releasing BLO honorariums promptly

NEW DELHI

Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Abhishek Banerjee accused Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar of being "aggressive" and failing to answer queries on West Bengal's ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. After a meeting with the Election Commission (EC) on Wednesday, Banerjee said the TMC would not accept the final voter list if discrepancies remained and would challenge it legally. Banerjee alleged that most questions raised by the TMC regarding deletions, summoning of 1.36 crore voters, and



alleged "vote chori" were either ignored or redirected. He criticized the retroactive introduction of "logical discrepancies" and questioned the alleged targeting of West Bengal through claims of infiltration. The TMC delegation demanded clarity on the deletion of 58 lakh names and alleged a conspiracy to malign the state. The EC, however, informed the TMC that intimidation of electoral staff would not be tolerated and urged the West Bengal government to release enhanced honorarium to BLOs. Officials also said polling stations would be set

up in high-rises, gated communities, and slums to facilitate voting.

The meeting involved a 10-member TMC team, including Derek O'Brien, Saket Gokhale, Ritabrata Banerjee, and West Bengal ministers. Meanwhile, the West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer's office dismissed complaints against EC officials as "premeditated and unsubstantiated" after the death of an 82-year-old man, allegedly anxious over SIR notices. The office affirmed that election staff remain committed to performing their duties with integrity despite criticism.

"Akhilesh Yadav criticizes BJP as residents die from contaminated water despite Indore's award-winning status"

Akhilesh Backs Mamata, Slams BJP Over Election Conspiracies

LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday expressed confidence that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will win the 2026 Assembly elections by a large margin, dismissing any BJP "conspiracy" to influence results. Speaking in Lucknow, he said the BJP will first lose in Bengal and later in Uttar Pradesh in 2027.

Akhilesh also criticized UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, claiming he pressured Election Commission officials regarding discrepancies in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter lists. He emphasized that the EC must ensure credibility, warning that any mismatch between state data and SIR records could undermine the revision process.

The political temperature in West Bengal has risen ahead of next year's elections. Union Minister Amit Shah accused Mamata's government of promoting "fear and corruption" and questioned



her over alleged illegal immigrant infiltration. Mamata responded by calling Shah "Dushasana" and reaffirmed her commitment to the TMC's ideology of Ma-Mati-Manush.

As the SIR process unfolds in UP, the draft electoral roll will be published on January 6, followed by claims and objections until February 6. The final electoral roll will be released on March 6. Akhilesh's statements underline the growing electoral tensions in both Bengal and Uttar Pradesh as parties gear up for upcoming polls.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav sharply criticized the BJP-led Madhya Pradesh government over Indore's water contamination, questioning cleanliness awards and river rejuvenation claims, after multiple deaths and illnesses in Bhagirathpura. He called the tragedy shocking in a city lauded as India's cleanest, accusing the BJP of avoiding accountability.

Man Dies After SIR Hearing In Bengal's Swarnapuri

KOLKATA

A 60-year-old man, Sultan Sardar, died on Thursday following a heart attack, four days after attending a hearing related to the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process in Swarnapuri, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal. Sultan, a long-time resident of the area, had recently received a notice to appear at the Swarnapuri Block Development Office regarding discrepancies in his identity documents. His name was reportedly missing from the 2002 voter list of West Bengal. Family members said the elderly man became extremely anxious during the hearing when officials pointed out issues with his papers.

The incident occurred in Swarnapuri village under Swarnapuri police station limits. According to relatives, Sultan suffered a cardiac arrest at home on Thursday morning and was pronounced dead. His family expressed concern over the stress caused by the SIR process, highlighting the challenges faced by senior citizens when summoned for verification of voter documents.



Confusion Over Indore Water Contamination Deaths

INDORE

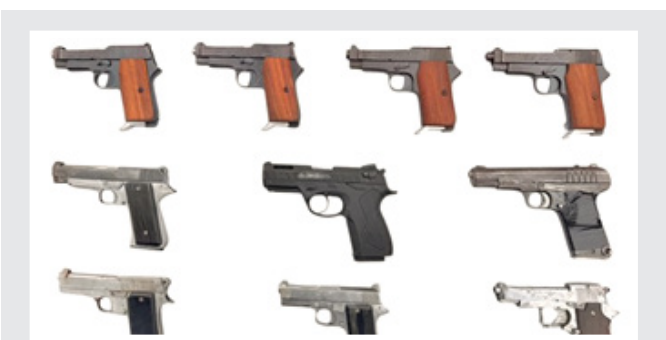
Indore is grappling with uncertainty over deaths caused by contaminated water in Bhagirathpura. Residents claim 13 fatalities, including a six-month-old, while Chief Minister Mohan Yadav confirmed four deaths, and Mayor Pushyamitra Bhargava cited seven. Cases of diarrhoea and vomiting were first reported a week ago, affecting around 1,400-1,500 people, with 200 hospitalised. Officials said all admitted patients are recovering and being discharged.

Preliminary investigation revealed that leakage allowed drainage water to enter the drinking water pipeline, triggering the outbreak. The area falls under the Indore-1 assembly constituency of Urban Development Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya, who stated that officials are verifying the actual death toll. He assured that financial aid would be provided to families if additional deaths are confirmed, as announced by CM

Conflicting reports emerge on the death toll from contaminated water in Indore, with locals, CM, and Mayor providing different figures. Authorities continue investigation and restore water supply.

Yadav. Additional Chief Secretary Sanjay Dubey visited the affected area with local officials to assess the situation. Authorities repaired the water pipeline and restored the supply on Thursday. Water samples were collected from households and sent for testing to ensure safety.

The conflicting death figures highlight gaps in information, with residents insisting more lives were lost than officially reported. Local administration continues to investigate and monitor the health of affected residents. Officials urge citizens to report symptoms promptly and ensure safe drinking water at homes.



Punjab Police Busts Organised Gang, Seizes Weapons, Arrests

CHANDIGARH

In a major breakthrough, Punjab Police has busted an organised crime gang, arrested nine accused involved in murder, extortion, and target killings, and recovered several weapons, officials said on Thursday. The accused are part of a well-structured criminal network and were allegedly planning a serious offence, Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav confirmed.

According to the DGP, Patiala Police recovered nine .32 bore pistols and one PX5 .30 bore pistol from the gang. An FIR has been registered, and further investigation is underway to unravel the gang's activities and connections. Authorities stressed that Punjab Police remains committed to dismantling organised crime networks to maintain peace and public safety

across the state. The arrests come amid a sustained campaign against narcotics in Punjab, part of the Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann-led "Yudh Nashian Virudh" initiative. On December 31, over 1,000 officers conducted multiple raids in a single day, persuading 46 individuals to undergo de-addiction treatment. In the 304-day campaign, 113 drug smugglers were arrested, 82 FIRs registered, and a total of 42,480 smugglers apprehended.

The operations also led to the recovery of 455 grams of heroin, 25 kg of poppy husk, 1,995 intoxicant tablets or capsules, and Rs 54,440 in drug money. The police emphasised that focused raids, search operations, and awareness initiatives remain ongoing to eradicate drugs and ensure law and order throughout Punjab.

Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor Assumes Vice Chief Air Staff

NEW DELHI

Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor SYSM, PVSM, AVSM, VM took charge as Vice Chief of the Air Staff of the Indian Air Force on Thursday, the Ministry of Defence announced. He succeeded Air Marshal Narmadeshwar Tiwari, who retired after 40 years of distinguished service.

A graduate of the National Defence Academy in December 1985, Air Marshal Kapoor was commissioned into the fighter stream of the Flying Branch on December 6, 1986. He is an experienced fighter pilot, qualified flying instructor, and Fighter Combat Leader. Over his career, he has flown all variants of the MiG-21 and MiG-29, accumulating over 3,400 hours

on combat and trainer aircraft.

Air Marshal Kapoor has served in operational, instructional, command, and staff roles.

His key operational tenures include commanding a fighter squadron in the Central Sector, serving as Station Commander of a Western Sector flying base, and Air Officer Commanding of a premier air base. His instructional roles include Chief Instructor (Flying) at the Air Force Academy and Director Staff at the Defence Services Staff College. He also contributed to the induction of the PC-7 Mk II aircraft into the IAF.

His diplomatic experience includes serving as Defence Attache to Pakistan. Senior staff roles include Assistant



Chief of Air Staff Operations (Strategy), Air Defence Commander at South Western Air Command, and Air Officer-in-Charge Personnel at Air Headquarters.

Prior to this appointment, he served as Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Training Command and

South Western Air Command.

In recognition of his distinguished service, he has been awarded the Vayu Sena Medal (2008), Ati Vishisht Seva Medal (2022), and the Param Vishisht Seva Medal and Sarvottam Yudh Seva Medal (2025).

FOOD SAFETY

FSSAI MANDATES SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE FOR FOOD

NEW DELHI

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has directed food producers to submit scientific evidence in a standardised format to support claims about their products. The move follows findings that many previous submissions lacked proper data or structure, making accurate risk assessments difficult.

Under the new guidelines, all stakeholders seeking food safety reviews or changes in standards must provide de-

tailed information, including domestic dietary consumption of the product, nutritional content, acceptable intake limits, allergy risks, and toxicology reports. Submissions must also outline testing methods and the laboratories used for analysis.

The FSSAI, which regulates food manufacture, storage, distribution, sale, and import, stated that the standardised format will help scientific panels and committees conduct risk assessments according to the 2016 regulations for its Scientific



Committee and Scientific Panel. This will ensure decisions on food safety are based on reliable scientific evidence.

Representations for new or existing food products will be reviewed by the FSSAI's Science and Standards Division. The regulator has as-

sured that all data submitted will remain confidential and used solely for scientific evaluation, standard-setting, and policy-making purposes.

This step aims to make the food safety review process more transparent, consistent, and reliable, helping ensure that consumers have access to safe and wholesome food.

By requiring comprehensive scientific documentation, the FSSAI hopes to prevent misleading claims and strengthen regulatory oversight across India's food industry.

QUICK READ



Afghanistan Hit by Series of Recent Earthquakes

KABUL

Afghanistan experienced another earthquake on Thursday, measuring 4.5 in magnitude at a depth of 113 km, the National Center for Seismology (NCS) reported. This follows quakes of magnitudes 4.1 and 4.0 on December 29 and 27, respectively. The country, especially the Hindu Kush region, lies in a highly active seismic zone. Repeated tremors worsen conditions for communities already affected by conflict and limited development. Past earthquakes, including a 6.3-magnitude quake in November, caused deaths, injuries, and significant damage.

Baloch Youth Disappears Amid Pakistan HR Crisis

BALUCHISTAN

Another case of alleged enforced disappearance has emerged in Balochistan's Kech district. Yasir, son of Nasir, was reportedly taken during a late-night operation in Gowak area of Mand between Tuesday and Wednesday. Family members lost contact after 3 am, and authorities have given no information about his whereabouts. Rights groups say such disappearances are becoming routine, leaving families in uncertainty. Meanwhile, Mir Zaman Kurd, missing since February 2024, was recently released, highlighting the ongoing human rights crisis.

Trump Hopes for Peace on Earth in New Year

US President Donald Trump celebrated New Year at his Florida resort, sharing his wishes publicly



WASHINGTON DC

US President Donald Trump hosted a grand New Year gala at his Florida resort on Thursday, attended by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife Sara, among others. When asked about his New Year wish, Trump said he hoped for "Peace on Earth," reported Fox News. In his address, he praised his government, claiming the US was "back and strong" and boasting about the hundreds of millions of dollars collected in tariffs. During the gala, Trump

auctioned a painting of Jesus Christ by artist Vanessa Horabuena. The artwork sold for USD 2.75 million, with proceeds going to St. Jude Children's Hospital and a sheriff's department.

Trump also announced that the National Guard would be withdrawn from Chicago, Los Angeles, and Portland, citing reduced crime levels due to their presence. He noted federal forces might return if crime rises in the future, criticising local officials for opposing their deployment. Just a week earlier, the US Supreme Court had blocked the National

Guard's deployment in Chicago over objections from Illinois authorities.

Additionally, Trump claimed that tariffs had driven record investment into the US, encouraging businesses to establish factories domestically. In a Truth Social post, he said the country set a world record for investment, surpassing China, and emphasised that domestic products face no tariffs, boosting economic growth. Trump concluded by congratulating the nation for its "incredible achievement," underlining his vision of a strong and prosperous United States.

PAKISTAN ATTEMPTED TO HIGHLIGHT A HANDSHAKE BETWEEN EAM S. JAISHANKAR AND NA SPEAKER IN DHAKA

Pakistan Amplifies Handshake, Seeks Talks with India

ISLAMABAD

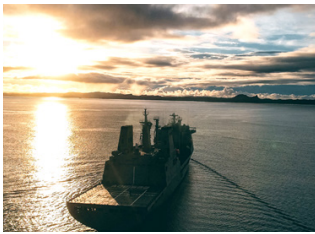
Pakistan's top leadership drew attention on Wednesday by attempting to magnify a brief handshake between Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Pakistan National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq. The exchange occurred at the funeral of former Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in Dhaka and was largely a courtesy gesture. Pakistan's National Assembly Secretariat issued a press release portraying the handshake as a sign of willingness for dialogue, proposing peace talks and cooperative measures to avoid escalation. The move comes amid strained India-Pakistan relations following the Pahalgam terror attack earlier this year, in which 26 Indian tourists were killed by groups India alleges are Pakistan-backed. India responded with calibrated



diplomatic and security measures, including suspension of participation in the Indus Waters Treaty, restricting cross-border transit, and scaling down bilateral engagement to protect national security.

In May 2025, India carried out Operation Sindoor, striking terror camps run by Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir. These precision strikes targeted terror infrastructure while repelling Pakistani escalation and safeguarding Indian interests.

India has repeatedly stated that engagement with Pakistan must be based on mutual respect, verifiable security assurances, and a terrorism-free environment. Analysts note that Pakistan's recent emphasis on the handshake and calls for talks reflect attempts to project diplomacy, even as past incidents continue to dominate bilateral ties. Despite Pakistan's overtures, India maintains that dialogue cannot coexist with terrorism, and any meaningful engagement will require concrete action against attacks targeting civilians.



China's Military Drills around Taiwan Spark Global Concern

TAIPEI

China's recent large-scale military exercises surrounding Taiwan have drawn widespread international criticism, raising fears of regional conflict and destabilisation. The two-day drills, which ended on December 31, involved naval fleets, fighter jets, bombers, drones, and amphibious units, including simulated port-seizure operations, according to The Epoch Times.

The European Union, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines expressed serious concern. The European External Action Service stressed that peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait are essential for global security and prosperity, warning against unilateral attempts to alter the status quo.

The Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC), comprising lawmakers from democratic countries, condemned the exercises as a deliberate escalation meant to normalise military intimidation.

The group called on democratic governments to adopt practical deterrence measures instead of symbolic responses, cautioning that Beijing's actions indicate growing readiness for conflict.

Zelenskyy Rejects Weak Peace, Seeks Strong Agreement

KYIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in his New Year address, stressed that Ukraine wants peace but will not accept any deal undermining its sovereignty. Speaking from his office with a New Year tree behind him, Zelenskyy acknowledged the fatigue of Ukrainians after nearly four years of war but said exhaustion should not be confused with defeat.

He stated, "Peace? Yes. At any cost? No. We want the end of the war but not the end of Ukraine." Zelenskyy warned that weak compromises would only prolong conflict, saying his signature would be placed only on strong agreements that ensure long-term peace.

He highlighted that recent US-led diplomatic efforts brought negotiations close to completion. "A peace agreement is 90 per cent ready; the remaining 10 per cent will decide the fate of Ukraine, Europe, and how people live," he said.

Zelenskyy reiterated that Russia's demand for territorial concessions, particularly in Donbas, is unacceptable, arguing that giving in would invite further aggression. He reinforced Ukraine's resili-



Ukraine's President Zelenskyy in his New Year address insists on ending the war without surrender, rejecting weak peace deals and demanding strong agreements that protect the country's sovereignty.

ence, noting Russia has consistently underestimated the country's character.

The president called for peace arrangements that include guarantees to protect independence and prevent future attacks. His address came as US officials held talks with Ukrainian and European advisers to push for a settlement. Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered his own New Year message, praising soldiers and warning of a tougher negotiating stance after alleging attacks near his residence.



Pakistan Sees Drop in Terror Attacks after Border Closure

ISLAMABAD

Since closing its border with Afghanistan on October 11 last year, Pakistan has recorded a noticeable decline in cross-border terrorist attacks and related deaths. The closure followed tensions with Kabul over allegations that Afghan soil was being used by terrorists, as per reports.

Data from the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) shows that terrorist attacks fell by nearly 17 percent in December, following a 9 percent decline in November. Fatalities among civilians and security officials also dropped by around 4 percent and 19 percent respectively during the last quarter of 2025.

Despite this short-term improvement, 2025 remained Pakistan's most violent year in a decade, with overall violence surging by roughly 34 percent. Fatalities rose from 2,555 in 2024 to 3,417 in 2025, an increase of 862 deaths. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

(KP) was the worst-hit region, with deaths climbing from 1,620 to 2,331, accounting for over 68 percent of nationwide fatalities and nearly 63 percent of violent incidents. Balochistan also saw a rise, with fatalities increasing from 787 to 956, contributing 28 percent of deaths and over 30 percent of violent incidents.

Violence in Punjab and Sindh remained comparatively low, with just 40 and 56 fatalities respectively, while Gilgit-Baltistan reported the least impact despite a minor increase from one to four deaths.

Experts note that while the border closure has helped reduce cross-border terrorism, long-term efforts are needed to address violence concentrated in northwestern and southwestern provinces. The drop in attacks suggests that stricter border control may be an effective tool, but sustained security measures are essential to improve nationwide stability.

Life-Threatening Bushfire Forces Evacuation near Perth Airport

SYDNEY

Authorities on Thursday morning issued an emergency warning as a life-threatening bushfire burned near Perth Airport in Western Australia. The WA Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) advised residents in Kalamunda, 15 km east of central Perth and 5 km from the airport, to evacuate immediately. The out-of-control fire was moving north, threatening lives and homes. Residents were instructed to leave



in a westerly direction if safe, Xinhua reported. DFES warned, "Do not wait and see; leaving at the last minute could put your life in danger." Those stuck in vehicles were advised to use a woollen blanket and stay on the floor to

protect against broken windows from intense heat.

People unable to leave were told to shelter in a room with running water and a clear exit, as extreme heat can be deadly even before flames arrive. The affected areas include Kalamunda and neighbouring suburbs Maida Vale and Forrestfield, with a combined population of roughly 25,000, according to the 2021 census.

Power lines in the warning area were down, and several roads were closed, although Perth Airport remained unaffected, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported.

Firefighters urged residents to act quickly to survive, emphasising that delaying evacuation could have fatal consequences. The DFES stressed that early action is critical, advising those in danger to follow evacuation or shelter guidelines without delay. Authorities continue to monitor the situation as fire crews battle the blaze and assist with evacuations, highlighting the ongoing risks posed by Australia's bushfire season.

Karachi Street Crime Remains High Despite Police Claims

KARACHI : Despite police claims of reduced crime, Karachi residents continued facing serious street crime threats in 2025, with more than 64,000 incidents reported and over 70 fatalities, as per reports. Official figures from FIRs show 64,323 cases of robbery, mobile phone snatching, and vehicle theft, though the actual number is believed higher as many victims avoid reporting crimes. Comparing with 2024, police data show a drop from 71,105 street crimes to 64,323, a decrease of 6,782 cases. Fatalities linked to such crimes fell from 99 in 2024 to 70 in 2025, while injuries dropped from 400 to 290. Mobile phone snatching declined from 19,353 to 17,706 cases, and vehicle hijackings fell from 8,370 to 6,683, including 302 cars and 6,381 motorcycles. Vehicle thefts also decreased from 43,382 to 39,934.

NEW MAYOR

ZOHRAN MAMDANI BECOMES NEW YORK MAYOR

NEW YORK

Zohran Mamdani, a 34-year-old democratic socialist, was sworn in early Thursday as New York City's 112th mayor, making history as the youngest mayor in over a century. He is also the city's first Muslim and first South Asian mayor. Mamdani, a former Queens-based state assemblyman, rose to prominence on a campaign focused on affordability. His platform included universal childcare, a rent freeze for nearly two million tenants, and making city bus-



es "fast and free," according to CNN. The private swearing-in ceremony took place shortly after midnight at the historic, disused City Hall subway station beneath City

Hall Park. Mamdani was joined by his wife, artist Rama Duwaji, and his parents, filmmaker Mira Nair and academic Mahmood Mamdani. New York State

Attorney General Letitia James administered the oath.

Speaking at the ceremony, Mamdani described the venue as "a testament to the importance of public transit" and announced Michael Flynn as the next commissioner of the city's Department of Transportation. Improving public transport, expanding bicycle lanes, and redesigning streets for pedestrians are central to his agenda. A public inauguration ceremony is planned later Thursday at City Hall Plaza, with thousands expected. Progressive leaders, in-

cluding Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Bernie Sanders, will participate, with Sanders administering the public oath. Supporters will also attend a block party called the "Inauguration of a New Era." While Mamdani's proposals energize progressive voters, plans to tax the wealthy require state approval. His victory comes amid national Democratic debates over affordability and the party's direction ahead of the midterm elections, highlighting his potential influence on shaping future policies.

SU DO KU

Brain-Bender: Can You Solve It?

4		5		6			8	
	8	2		7		4		3
1			8		4		6	
	2		1			3		7
	7	4		8			1	
	5			4			2	
5		9		2			7	
	4		9		7			6
7		3	4		8	2		9

1	2	3	6	7	8	9	4	5
5	8	4	2	3	9	7	6	1
9	6	7	1	4	5	3	2	8
3	7	2	4	6	1	5	8	9
6	9	1	5	8	3	2	7	4
4	5	8	7	9	2	6	1	3
8	3	6	9	2	4	1	5	7
2	1	9	8	5	7	4	3	6
7	4	5	3	1	6	8	9	2

Fill a 9x9 grid with numbers so that each row, column and 3x3 section contain all of the digits between 1 and 9.

Solutions to Yesterday's puzzle

2026: A Sports-Heavy Year Fuelling India's Big Aspirations



Packed calendar, continental Games, and Olympic pathways define a pivotal year ahead

CHENNAI

In sports, there is rarely a pause, and 2026 promises to be relentlessly action-packed for India. From marquee global tournaments to crucial continental Games, the year ahead will test depth, planning and ambition across disciplines. With the Asian Games and Commonwealth Games scheduled within the next 10 months, Indian sport enters a decisive phase that could shape preparations for the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028.

The year begins at full throttle with the Hockey India League, India Open badminton, the Men's T20 World Cup and the IPL, before seamlessly transitioning into football's grandest spectacle — the FIFA World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Add to that the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Asian Games in Nagoya, badminton World Championships, Formula 1, tennis Grand Slams and domestic leagues, and fans will barely have time to breathe.

For India, the Asian and Commonwealth Games carry special weight. The sports ministry, in consultation with

INDIA IN 2026: AT A GLANCE

- **Big Events:** Asian Games, Commonwealth Games, FIFA World Cup
- **Key Medal Sports:** Shooting, athletics, wrestling, boxing, archery
- **Strategic Goal:** Build momentum toward LA 2028
- **Domestic Boost:** Leagues and trials shaping elite depth
- **Expectation:** Strong continental showing, smarter Olympic pathway

the Indian Olympic Association, has decided to send a full-strength contingent to the Asian Games, recognising medal opportunities in both Olympic and non-Olympic disciplines. The truncated Commonwealth Games, featuring just 10 sports, will still offer India strong medal prospects in weightlifting, boxing, athletics, lawn bowls and judo — areas where the country has consistently delivered.

Shooting is expected to be one of India's biggest medal

earners. NRAI officials are targeting at least one medal in every Asian Games event, using 2026 as a crucial stepping stone toward LA 2028. Athletics, too, aims to consolidate continental supremacy, with focus on javelin throw and relay events, while expanding competitiveness across sprints, middle-distance and combined events.

Wrestling looks to rebound after a difficult 2025, with long national camps, foreign coaches and the revival of the Pro Wrestling League providing continuity. Badminton and boxing face their own challenges — rebuilding depth in the former and ensuring consistency, especially in men's boxing, in the latter. Archery, buoyed by sustained international success, enters the Asian Games with high expectations, particularly in compound events.

Beyond medals, 2026 will be about systems, maturity and honest assessment. With multiple federations aligning calendars, refining selection policies and strengthening high-performance programmes, the year could define India's sporting trajectory well beyond the immediate podium finishes.



Spin the Focus: Australia Pick Spin-Heavy Squad for T20 WC

MELBOURNE

Australia on Thursday named a spin-heavy 15-member squad for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, to be jointly hosted by Sri Lanka and India, underlining their strategy to adapt to sub-continental conditions. The defending champions have leaned heavily on slow bowling options, with Adam Zampa, Glenn Maxwell, Matthew Kuhnemann and part-time spin choices forming the core of their attack.

A notable omission is a left-arm pacer, following Mitchell Starc's retirement from T20 internationals late last year. Starc had featured in five of Australia's last six ICC T20 tournaments, missing only one. In his absence, selectors opted for variety in spin and all-round depth rather than outright pace.

The biggest surprise inclusion is young all-rounder Cooper Connolly, who has not featured in Australia's last 12 T20 Internationals. His selection signals a long-term view, especially for conditions expected to assist slower bowlers. Mitchell Marsh will lead the side, supported by experienced campaigners such as Marcus Stoinis, Travis Head and Cameron Green.

Fitness, however, remains a concern for the Australians. A scan on Pat Cummins' back later this month will determine his availability for the tournament. Josh Hazlewood and Tim David are also on the comeback trail after hamstring injuries, though selectors remain hopeful of their recovery before the competition begins. Under

AUSTRALIA AT T20 WORLD CUP 2026

- **Captain:** Mitchell Marsh
 - **Spin options:** Zampa, Maxwell, Kuhnemann, Short
 - **Key fitness watch:** Pat Cummins (back)
 - **Tournament opener:** vs Ireland, Feb 11 (Colombo)
 - **Defending champions:** 2021 winners
- Australia squad:** Mitchell Marsh (captain), Xavier Bartlett, Cooper Connolly, Pat Cummins, Tim David, Cameron Green, Nathan Ellis, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Matthew Kuhnemann, Glenn Maxwell, Matthew Short, Marcus Stoinis, Adam Zampa.

ICC regulations, teams are permitted to make squad changes until January 31.

Australia will open their World Cup campaign against Ireland in Colombo on February 11, followed by Zimbabwe on February 13 at the same venue. They then face Sri Lanka in Kandy on February 16 before concluding the group stage against Oman on February 20. All group matches will be played in Sri Lanka, with travel to India scheduled if Australia progress to the Super Eights.

The squad will get match practice in a three-match T20 series against Pakistan later this month.

Ivory Coast, Cameroon Rally as Sudan Advances despite War

CASABLANCA

Defending champion Ivory Coast and five-time winner Cameroon both produced stirring comeback victories as the Africa Cup of Nations group stage concluded, while Sudan advanced to the knockout rounds despite defeat and the ongoing war in their homeland.

Bazoumana Touré struck deep into stoppage time as Ivory Coast overturned a two-goal deficit to beat Gabon 3-2, sealing top spot in Group F. Christopher Opéri delivered the decisive cross for Touré's header and had earlier assisted Evann Guessand's 84th-minute equaliser, with both players coming off the bench as coach Emerse Faé reshuf-



fled to counter Gabon's early dominance. Cameroon also rallied from behind, beating Mozambique 2-1 to finish second in the group. Both Ivory Coast and Cameroon ended on seven points with a goal difference of plus two, but Ivory Coast claimed first place by scoring five goals to Cameroon's four. Mozambique progressed as one of the four best third-placed teams, while Gabon bowed out.

Paris hosts historic derby as PSG meet Paris FC after decades apart



Paris Derby Returns After 36 Years as PSG Face Paris FC

PARIS

After a wait of 36 years, French men's league football finally welcomes back a capital city derby when Paris Saint-Germain host Paris FC on Sunday. It is a uniquely local rivalry too, with PSG's Parc des Princes and PFC's Stade Jean-Bouin separated by just 44 metres, making it one of the closest stadium pairings in top-flight football.

Paris FC earned promotion last season and moved into Stade Jean-Bouin, traditionally a rugby venue, setting the stage for a long-anticipated Parisian showdown. The contest, however, appears mismatched on paper. PSG are the defending French and Eu-

ropean champions, while PFC are battling to stay afloat in their debut Ligue 1 campaign, sitting 14th in the 18-team table after losing half their matches.

PFC's attacking spark has largely come from midfielder Ilan Kebbal, their leading scorer with six goals, but he will miss the derby while on Africa Cup of Nations duty with Algeria. PSG, meanwhile, have had to navigate injuries to key forwards Ousmane Dembélé and Désiré Doué. That disruption has shown in the standings, with PSG second behind surprise leaders Lens and already matching last season's total of two league defeats.

The gulf in history and silverware is stark. PSG boast a

record 13 French league titles and 16 French Cups, while Paris FC's men's team has never won a league or a major cup. Financial backing reflects that divide too. PSG have been owned by Qatar Sports Investments since 2011 and posted club-record revenue of 837 million euros last season.

Paris FC's recent takeover by the Arnault family of luxury giant LVMH promises intrigue for the future. Antoine Arnault's investment could eventually turn neighbours into genuine rivals. The rivalry will be renewed quickly as well, with the two sides set to meet again in the French Cup on January 12 — proof that Parisian football is finally stirring again.

Real Madrid Star Mbappé Sidelined With Injury

PARIS

Real Madrid forward Kylian Mbappé has been ruled out after suffering an injury to his left knee, the Spanish club confirmed. In a brief statement, Madrid said the France international has been diagnosed with a knee sprain, though the club stopped short of providing a clear timeline for his return.

According to reports, Mbappé is expected to miss at least three weeks of action. The report said the 25-year-old had been managing discomfort for several weeks due to a problem with the lateral ligament in his knee. An MRI scan conducted on Wednesday morning reportedly revealed a lesion that now requires treatment and a period of rest.

The injury comes at an unfortunate time for both player and club, with Mbappé enjoying a prolific run of form. Earlier this month, he scored his 59th goal of 2025 for Real Madrid, equalling the club record for most goals in a calendar year — a mark previ-

ously held by Cristiano Ronaldo. Since joining Madrid from Paris Saint-Germain in the summer of 2024, Mbappé has been a central figure in the team's attack.

This season alone, Mbappé has already netted 29 goals in all competitions, including a league-leading 18 in La Liga, underlining his importance to Carlo Ancelotti's side. His absence is likely to be keenly felt as Madrid look to maintain momentum on multiple fronts.

Despite carrying the knee issue, Mbappé was recently seen attending Africa Cup of Nations matches, including the opening game between hosts Morocco and Mali on Friday, followed by the Cameroon versus Ivory Coast clash on Sunday.

Real Madrid's immediate concern will be their upcoming La Liga fixture against Real Betis on Sunday. With Mbappé sidelined, Madrid may need to reshuffle their attacking options as they await further updates on the extent of their star forward's recovery.



Mbappé faces spell on sidelines after MRI reveals knee ligament lesion.

Defiant Kramnik Sues FIDE for Defamation in Swiss Civil Court

NEW DELHI

Russian chess great Vladimir Kramnik has filed a defamation lawsuit against world governing body FIDE in a Swiss civil court, escalating an extraordinary dispute that has rocked the global chess community. The former world champion said he was forced to seek legal remedy after what he described as relentless attacks by fellow players and FIDE officials over his allegations of on-line cheating. Kramnik became



the subject of an ethics inquiry by FIDE following his public claims against several players, including American Grandmaster Daniel Naroditsky, who died last year at age of 29. While the exact cause of Naroditsky's death remains unknown, he had spoken in his final livestream about intense mental stress said to be linked to the accusations. Czech Grandmaster David Navara has also stated that similar allegations by Kramnik left him distressed and suicidal.

END OF BAZBALL?

McCullum, Stokes Face Test after Melbourne 'Lottery' Win

MELBOURNE

Former England captain Michael Vaughan has delivered a blunt warning to head coach Brendon McCullum and skipper Ben Stokes, cautioning that England's Ashes victory at Melbourne should not mask deeper issues within the team. Vaughan described England's Boxing Day Test win at the Melbourne Cricket Ground as a "lottery", insisting the final Test in Sydney will be crucial for the continuation and credibility of the Bazball era.

England's triumph at the MCG was historic, ending a drought of more than 5,000 days without a Test win on Australian soil, their last success coming in 2011. However, the victory came on a highly bowler-friendly surface that produced 36 wick-



ets, all falling to pace, and saw the match conclude inside two days. England had already lost the Ashes after defeats in the first three Tests of the series.

Pacer Josh Tongue emerged as the standout performer, claiming match figures of 7 for 89, including a five-wicket haul in the first innings. He became the first

England bowler in the 21st century to take a five-for in a Boxing Day Test at Melbourne.

Vaughan argued that while the win was morale-boosting,

it did not represent a "proper Test match", stressing that England must now prove themselves in Sydney by winning a full, competitive contest. He warned that a heavy defeat in the fifth Test would spark serious internal discussions within English cricket, even though McCullum and Stokes are expected to continue in their roles.

Under McCullum, England have won 25 and lost 17 of their 45 Tests, redefining their approach with aggressive batting and bold tactics. Vaughan urged the team to show greater maturity, accept mistakes from the tour, and avoid stubbornly blaming bad luck. According to him, honest self-reflection, rather than constant changes, will determine whether Bazball truly has a sustainable future.

AIFF Requests ISL Clubs to Confirm Participation

All India Football Federation seeks clarity on clubs, format as ISL season faces mounting delays

BENGALURU

With uncertainty continuing over operational costs and the structure of the upcoming Indian Super League (ISL) season, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) has formally asked clubs to confirm their participation and preferred format. The move comes as the federation races against time to meet adminis-

trative, legal and regulatory deadlines.

In a letter addressed to ISL clubs, AIFF said it must submit the outcomes of meetings held between the clubs and the federation's Clubs Coordination Committee from December 24 to 30 to the Union sports ministry by January 2. The letter also noted that the Supreme Court is set to resume after its vacation on January 5, 2026,

and stakeholders may be required to file documents based on legal advice.

While Jamshedpur FC have already confirmed their participation, Odisha FC remain hesitant, citing sponsor-related challenges. The club has earlier stated that it would not consider taking part without securing an eligible commercial partner, a task made difficult by the limited time available.



Concerns have also intensified following discussions that clubs may need to contribute Rs 2.5 crore each for the season, significantly high-

er than the Rs 1 crore earlier proposed under AIFF's 20-year plan. Club officials have questioned whether even increased contributions would meaningfully bridge the financial gap. "Even with all the clubs putting in Rs 2.5 crore, we are nowhere close to covering operational costs," said a senior club official.

AIFF has pegged the annual operational budget at Rs 70

crore, but estimates during recent meetings suggested the Goa leg alone could cost around Rs 42 crore. Meanwhile, the federation is preparing to float a revised tender for a new commercial partner after the earlier process failed to attract bidders.

AIFF has also sought confirmation on the competition format to approach the Asian Football Confederation for a

possible one-time relaxation on the minimum match requirement for continental eligibility. Most clubs have broadly agreed on a two-conference format with centralised venues in Goa and Kolkata, potentially followed by playoffs to increase matches.

With deadlines looming, clarity from clubs is now crucial for the ISL's revival.



Smriti Mandhana-led India Women visit Mahakaleshwar Temple

UJJAIN

The Indian women's cricket team, led by star batter Smriti Mandhana, began 2026 on a spiritual note by visiting the Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga Temple in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh. Fresh from their historic ICC Women's World Cup 2025 triumph, several members of the squad attended the sacred Bhasm Aarti, a revered ritual dedicated to Lord Shiva.

Mandhana, along with Shafali Verma, Renuka Singh Thakur, Sneha Rana, Radha Yadav, and Arundhati Reddy, participated in the early morning prayers, seeking blessings for health, success, and a strong year ahead in international cricket. A video shared on social media captured the team seated quietly, deeply immersed in devotion, while temple priests offered their blessings as per tradition.

The Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga Temple, one of the twelve sacred Jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva, holds immense religious significance. The Bhasm Aarti, performed at dawn, draws devotees from across India, and on January 1, the temple saw a large gathering seeking peace and prosperity.

India Women ended 2025 on a high, completing a dominant 5-0 T20I series sweep against Sri Lanka at Thiruvananthapuram. The year also marked a historic milestone with India, under Harmanpreet Kaur's leadership, winning their first-ever ICC Women's ODI World Cup on home soil. Following the triumph, the team maintained momentum, winning series against West Indies, England, and Sri Lanka. Looking ahead, India prepares for a busy 2026, including a T20 World Cup starting June 12.

3 Indians Join FIFA Referees List for 2026

NEW DELHI

Indian football officiating received a significant boost as three more referees, including a woman, were added to the FIFA International List of Match Officials for 2026, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) confirmed. The inclusion takes India's total representation on the elite FIFA list to 19 match officials for the coming year.

Rachana Hasmukhbhai Kamani from Gujarat has been inducted into the FIFA list of women referees, marking another milestone for women officials in Indian football. In the men's category, Ashwin Kumar from Puducherry and Aditya Purkayastha from Delhi earned their places after completing the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Referee Academy course in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Kamani is



currently undergoing the same AFC programme, which is designed to prepare referees for international assignments.

In addition to the three referees, two Indians — Muralitharan Pandurangan of Puducherry and Peter Christopher of Maharashtra — have been named as FIFA Assistant Referees, further strengthening India's presence among global match officials.

According to AIFF, the ex-

panded list reflects sustained efforts to improve refereeing standards through structured education, fitness benchmarks and exposure to high-level competitions. Being part of the FIFA list enables officials to be appointed to international matches, including AFC tournaments and FIFA competitions, subject to

selection.

For 2026, India will have eight referees on the FIFA list. They include Venkatesh R. Harish Kundu, Senthil Nathan Sekaran, Crystal John, Ashwin Kumar, Aditya Purkayastha, Ranjita Devi Tekcham and Rachana Kamani. The assistant referees list features Vairamuthu Parasuraman, Sumanta Dutta, Arun Sasidharan Pillai, Ujjal Halder, Muralitharan Pandurangan, Dipesh Manohar Sawant, Sourav Sarkar, Christopher Peter, Riiohlang Dhar and Elangbam Debala Devi. Vishal Mahendrabhai Vaja has been named as India's FIFA futsal referee.

The development underlines India's growing footprint in international football officiating and opens new opportunities for its referees on the global stage.



Kohli, Rohit Power ODI Revival, Spur Irfan Pathan's Call for Tri-Series

NEW DELHI

Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma's selective presence in international cricket has breathed fresh life into the ODI format, prompting former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan to call for longer series and the return of multi-nation tournaments to capitalise on the renewed buzz.

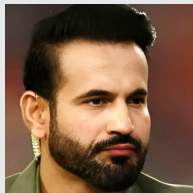
With both stalwarts stepping away from T20Is and Tests, their ODI appearances have become rare, high-value events. Recent bilateral series against Australia and

we have a triangular or quadrangular series?" Pathan said. "Why can't we arrange that, because these two greats play only one format? If a lot of interest has returned to ODI cricket, these two have brought it."

Kohli and Rohit have not only drawn crowds but delivered consistently on the field. Rohit currently leads the ICC ODI batting rankings, with Kohli close behind in second, underlining their enduring dominance in the format. Pathan also urged Indian cricket to maximise the remaining window before the next World Cup. He suggested regular match exposure—both internationally and domestically—to maintain rhythm and sustain interest.

"The biggest thing is that they are also performing," Pathan said. "The World Cup is far away. The more we get to see them representing India, and even playing domestic cricket when not on national duty, the better it is."

As ODI cricket searches for relevance in a crowded calendar, Kohli and Rohit's star power may be its strongest asset—and, as Pathan argues, one that needs smarter scheduling to fully harness.



Young Shanvi Satish Wins Bronze At National Championship

RAMANAGARA

Ramanagara celebrated a proud moment as 8-year-old Shanvi Satish won a bronze medal at the National Sub-Junior Taekwondo Championship held in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, from December 27 to 31. Representing Karnataka in the 25–30 kg weight category for 8–10-year-olds, Shanvi impressed in the sparring event, demonstrating skill,

courage, and determination.

Over 450 young athletes from states including Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Delhi, Gujarat, Odisha, and Kerala participated in the competition. Shanvi advanced confidently through the opening rounds, facing tough bouts in the semifinals before securing the bronze medal. Her achievement is remarkable given her age and experience, especially competing

against older opponents, including the 10-year-old gold medalist.

Currently studying in Class 3 at Netaji School, Shanvi has already earned medals internationally, with victories in Dubai, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, and at the Asian Championship, signaling her rising profile in taekwondo. She trains under Indian team coaches Pradeep and Balarajan, who have guided her consistent growth in the sport.

Daughter of Satish, District President of the Government Employees' Association, and Chaitra, Shanvi's success has brought pride to her family and the Ramanagara community. Local officials, including District Commissioner Yashwant Gururkar, Zilla Panchayat CEO Anmol Jain, Superintendent of Police Srinivas Gowda, Additional Deputy Commissioner Chandraiah, and association leaders, congratulated her and wished her continued success in future tournaments.



British boxing star released from hospital after accident that killed two teammates

Anthony Joshua Discharged After Fatal Road Crash in Nigeria

ABUJA

British boxer Anthony Joshua has been discharged from hospital after being involved in a fatal road crash near Lagos that claimed the lives of two of his close associates, Nigerian authorities said.

The two-time former heavyweight world champion and Olympic gold medalist was injured in the accident on Monday, December 29, while travelling on a major highway close to Nigeria's commercial capital. Joshua had been admitted to Lagoon Hospital in Lagos and placed under observation while recovering from minor injuries, according to his promoter Eddie Hearn's Matchroom Boxing.

Lagos State Commissioner for Information Gbenga

Omotoso said in a statement posted on X that Joshua was released late Wednesday afternoon after doctors deemed him clinically fit to continue recuperating at home. Omotoso added that Joshua and his mother later visited a funeral home in Lagos to pay their final respects to the two victims ahead of arrangements for repatriation.

The crash killed Sina Ghami, Joshua's long-time strength and conditioning coach, and Latif "Latz" Ayodele, a trainer who was part of the boxer's inner circle. Just hours before the ac-

cident, Joshua and Ayodele had shared videos on social media of themselves playing table tennis, highlighting the closeness of the group.

Eddie Hearn earlier paid tribute to the victims, saying their energy, loyalty and dedication would be deeply missed. The vehicle carrying Joshua and his team struck a stationary truck on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, a key artery linking Ogun State with Lagos. Footage circulating on social media showed Joshua being pulled from the wreckage in visible pain.

The tragedy has reignited concerns over road safety in Nigeria, where traffic accidents remain a major issue. According to the Federal Road Safety Corps, 5,421 people were killed in 9,570 road accidents in 2024, an increase of 340 deaths compared to the previous year.

Nigeria is the homeland of Joshua's parents, and the boxer has maintained strong ties with the country.

Neymar Set to Extend Santos Stay until End of 2026: Reports

SAO PAULO

Brazilian forward Neymar is set to renew his contract with Santos until December 31, 2026, according to sources close to the negotiations. The announcement follows a cryptic social media post by Santos, showing an aerial view of their Vila Belmiro stadium with the date "December 31, 2026" and the text: "The time is coming," fueling speculation about the superstar's future.

Neymar, 33, returned to his boyhood club at the start of the season but faced interruptions due to injuries. Despite this, he scored four goals in Santos' final three games, helping the team avoid relegation on the last day of the season in December. Following the campaign, Neymar underwent a successful operation on his left knee to repair a damaged meniscus. The surgery, performed by Brazil's national team doctor, was confirmed by Santos on December 22. The Brazilian star is expected to make a full recovery before the start of the 2026 season.

Vengsarkar questions selectors as Sarfaraz Khan's domestic excellence continues to be overlooked

Vengsarkar Slams Selectors over Sarfaraz Snub, Calls Omission a 'Real Shame'

NEW DELHI

Former India cricketer and ex-BCCI chief selector Dilip Vengsarkar has strongly criticised the national selection committee, led by Ajit Agarkar, for repeatedly overlooking Mumbai batter Sarfaraz Khan despite his consistent domestic performances and credible returns at the international level.

Sarfaraz's journey with the Indian team has been anything but smooth. After piling on runs across multiple Ranji Trophy seasons, he finally earned his maiden Test call-up against England in 2023. While his opportunities were limited, the right-hander made the most of them, scoring 371 runs in six Tests at an average of 37.10, including a century and three half-centuries. Yet, following the 2024–25 Border-Gavaskar Trophy — in which he did not feature in a single match — Sarfaraz was dropped from the Test side.

What has baffled Vengsarkar



further is Sarfaraz's continued exclusion despite visible efforts to address past concerns. The Mumbai batter has worked extensively on his fitness, shedding significant weight, and has remained prolific on the domestic circuit. He was also ignored for recent home Test series against the West Indies and South Africa.

"You know, it's really baffling for me why he's not picked in any format," Vengsarkar told. Recalling Sarfaraz's impactful debut series, he highlighted a crucial partnership with Devdutt Padikkal against England in Dha-

ramshala that played a decisive role in India's Test victory. "They batted beautifully under pressure," he said.

Sarfaraz's current form only strengthens Vengsarkar's argument. In the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy, he has amassed 220 runs in just three innings, including a blistering 157 off 75 balls against Goa.

Despite touring Australia for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, Sarfaraz was again left on the sidelines. "Such a talent has been ignored and neglected," Vengsarkar said. "He is good enough to play all formats. It's a real shame."



Prabhas' Spirit Poster Sparks Comparisons

Filmmaker Sandeep Reddy Vanga unveiled the first look poster of his upcoming cop drama Spirit at midnight on New Year's Day, bringing 2026 with a bold image starring Prabhas and Triptii Dimri.

The poster instantly grabbed attention online, drawing praise from fans while also sparking debate over its similarity to Vanga's earlier hit, Animal.

In the visual, Prabhas appears shirtless, his back turned to the camera, with visible injuries and bandages across his body. He is seen holding a liquor bottle and smoking, suggesting a dark and intense character.

Triptii Dimri, wearing a grey sari, is shown lighting a cigarette for him, adding to the gritty mood.

Many fans praised Prabhas' lean and muscular look, comparing it to his Baahubali-era fitness.

At the same time, critics felt the poster closely resembled scenes from Animal, especially those showing a wounded hero being cared for by Triptii's character.

Some viewers said the casting of Triptii worked better than Deepika Padukone, who exited earlier due to scheduling issues.

Spirit also stars Vivek Oberoi in a key role, reportedly as the villain. Produced by T-Series and Bhadrakali Pictures, the film is expected to release later this year.

Mark Completes First Week With Rs 21.14 Crore Collection

Kannada star Kichcha Sudeep's latest action thriller Mark has completed one week in theatres with a total box office collection of Rs 21.14 crore. Released on Christmas, the film opened to strong numbers but saw a steady fall during weekdays. As per industry tracker Sacnilk, Mark earned more than Rs 8.6 crore on its opening day. The film collected around Rs 3.2 crore each on Friday and Saturday, followed by Rs 3.5 crore on Sunday. Weekday business slowed, with collections of Rs 1.15 crore on Monday, Rs 90 lakh on Tuesday, and an estimated Rs 69 lakh on Wednesday.

On the attendance front, the film recorded an overall Kannada occupancy of 16.03 percent on Wednesday. Morning shows saw 9.43 percent occupancy, which rose to 16.81 percent in the afternoon. Evening shows touched 19.74 percent, while night shows closed at 18.14 percent. Directed by Vi-



jay Karthikeyaa, Mark features Sudeep as a suspended police officer racing against time to solve the kidnapping of 18 children. The story unfolds in Mangaluru and involves a drug racket, political links, and clashes between criminal gangs. The film also stars Naveen Chandra as villain Bhadra and Shine Tom Chacko as politician Adikeshava, with

Yogi Babu, Roshini Prakash, and Archana Kottige in key roles. Music by Ajaneesh Loknath has received praise. While fans appreciated Sudeep's screen presence and action scenes, some felt the storyline was familiar. Overall, the film continues attracting audiences and maintains stable collections across Karnataka theatres statewide.



Producer Soundarya Rajinikanth's With Love Set February 6 Release

Producer Soundarya Rajinikanth's upcoming romantic film With Love will release in cinemas worldwide on February 6, the makers announced on New Year's Day. The film is directed by Madhan and stars Abishan Jeevinth and Anaswara Rajan in the lead roles. The announcement created interest as the film is produced by Soundarya Rajinikanth along with Magesh Raj Pasilian. Soundarya shared the release date on social media, saying the new year brings new emotions and love to the big screen.

Superstar Rajinikanth released the film's title teaser and wished the team success. Soundarya thanked her father, calling his support her biggest blessing. The teaser introduced Sathya, played by Abishan Jeevinth, and Monisha, played by Anaswara Rajan. It hinted at their contrasting personalities through light-hearted moments. Sathya is shown as possessive and impulsive, while Monisha calmly explains the difference between suspicion and care.

The film has already completed shooting. Sources said the entire movie was filmed in Chennai and Trichy. Post-production work is progressing at a fast pace.

With Love has drawn attention as it marks the acting debut of Abishan Jeevinth, who earlier directed the hit film Tourist Family. That movie, made on a modest budget, earned over Rs 90 crore and won praise from audiences and critics. The film features music by Sean Roldan, cinematography by Shreyas Krishna, editing by Suresh Kumar, art direction by Raj Kamal, and costumes by Priya Ravi. Expectations are high for the film overall.



Yami Gautam Shares Hilarious Theatre Story From Early Days

Bollywood actress Yami Gautam recently shared a funny incident from her early theatre days that left her schoolmates in splits. During the promotions of her latest film Haq, Yami recalled a moment when she delivered a line in an unusual way that unexpectedly amused everyone. She said, There was a new theatre teacher at school, and theatre was just being introduced. I had to say the line, 'Keep still, you little devil, or I will slit your throat.' There were 35 students, and everyone had to say their lines differently. When it was my turn, I said it in a very weird way. Everyone burst out laughing, even though I was being serious. The teacher said, 'You sounded like a street, like a pocket man.' I replied, 'I don't know what else to do, but at least you remember my lines. I gave it a shot.'

Yami also reflected on the actor-director dynamic, explaining that actors help bring the director's vision to life. The director guides the story. You can perform a character in many ways, but we are illustrations of the director's vision. That's the fun, she said. Currently promoting Haq, Yami spoke about the film, which is inspired by the landmark Shah Bano case. The story explores issues of justice and women's rights, focusing on a Muslim woman seeking maintenance after divorce. Haq highlights legal reforms under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code, emphasizing that maintenance applies to all citizens regardless of religion. The film, coupled with Yami's engaging stories from her early acting days, continues to spark interest among audiences nationwide.



Anurag Kashyap Recalls Painful Phase After Bombay Velvet Failure

Anurag Kashyap has spoken candidly about the difficult period he faced after his 2015 film Bombay Velvet failed at the box office. Starring Ranbir Kapoor and Anushka Sharma, the ambitious project did not meet expectations and deeply affected everyone involved. In a recent interview, Kashyap admitted that the failure strained his relationship with the lead actors, especially Ranbir Kapoor, who was reportedly very upset. Kashyap shared that Ranbir often asked him not to mention Bombay Velvet again and wanted to move on from the experience.

The director said he felt guilty and awkward facing both Ranbir and Anushka after the film's release, as they had trusted him completely. While they continued to greet each other when they met, the initial period after the failure was emotionally heavy. Kashyap was also dealing with personal struggles at the time and chose to step back, focusing instead on making the smaller, darker film Raman Raghav. This phase led to a gradual distance between him and the actors.

Pawan Kalyan Signs New Film With Surrender Reddy Director



Actor-turned-politician Pawan Kalyan surprised his fans at the start of 2026 by signing a new Telugu film directed by Surrender Reddy and written by Vakkanntham Vamsi.

The announcement was made on Thursday, January 1, by producer Ram Talluri, who shared the news on social media.

Talluri said the project is his dream launch as Production Number One under JaithraRamaMovies, adding that the film title was named with the blessings of Pawan Kalyan.

Writer Vakkanntham Vamsi also confirmed the collaboration and said the new year became special because of the chance to work with the Power Star.

For months, fans believed Pawan Kalyan had stepped away from films after becoming the Deputy Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh.

Though he completed his pending movies in

2025, no fresh projects were announced until this development.

The actor had earlier agreed to work with Surrender Reddy, but that film did not take off.

With this announcement, the long-pending combination has finally come together, raising excitement among his supporters.

Over the years, Pawan Kalyan has balanced cinema and politics, returning to films occasionally.

His recent releases include Hari Hara Veera Mallu, They Call Him OG, while Ustaad Bhagat Singh is yet to reach theatres.

The new film, expected in 2026, has already renewed hopes of seeing the Power Star back in a strong action role that blends mass appeal with commercial storytelling. Fans now eagerly await further details about the cast, schedule, and storyline, hoping the project lives up to expectations nationwide.

Demonte Colony 3 First Look Raises Expectations For Horror Franchise

The makers of director Ajay Gnanamuthu's much-awaited horror thriller Demonte Colony 3 released the film's first look poster on Thursday, marking the New Year with excitement among fans. The film stars Arulnithi and Priya Bhavani Shankar in the lead roles and is the third part of the successful Demonte Colony franchise.

With the first two films performing strongly at the box office, expectations for the third instalment are high. The film is scheduled for a worldwide theatrical release later this year.

Producer Sudhan Sundaram said beginning 2026 with Demonte Colony 3 feels promising. He praised director Ajay Gnanamuthu for maintaining discipline and completing work on time



without compromising on quality. He added that Arulnithi continues to be the backbone of the franchise, while several actors from the second part return with stronger character arcs and higher emotional stakes.

Director Ajay Gnanamuthu said sharing the first look at the start of the year felt spe-

cial for fans. He thanked the producer for offering full creative freedom while ensuring the film remains complete and engaging. The director also said the new film pushes Arulnithi to explore deeper layers of performance.

Written and directed by Gnanamuthu, the film reunites Arulnithi and Priya Bhavani Shankar, along with Meenakshi Govindarajan, Archana Ravichandran, Muthukumar and others in important roles. Production began in July 2025 and the project is now in post-production.

Produced by Passion Studios on a grand scale, Demonte Colony 3 promises stronger supernatural elements and aims to be a major chapter in Tamil cinema's growing horror genre for audiences worldwide.

