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Lionel Messi's GOAT Tour Set to Enthrall India Across Four Cities



SC questions Madras HC over Karur stampede probe



The Karur stampede, which occurred on September 27 during a TVK rally, claimed 41 lives and injured over 60.

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday expressed serious concerns over the Madras High Court's handling of the Karur stampede case, stating, "Something wrong is happening in the High Court." The bench of Justices J.K. Maheshwari and Vijay Bishnoi reviewed a report from the Registrar General of the Madras High Court, questioning the procedures followed in listing and hearing petitions related to the case.

The court rejected the Tamil Nadu government's plea to modify its earlier October 13 order suspending a one-man inquiry commission and the Special Investigation Team (SIT) probe, insisting that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) continue its independent probe. Justice Maheshwari emphasised, "We want everything to be fair and impartial," while refusing to change the directive that Supervisory Committee members monitoring the CBI investigation should not be na-

Key Takeaways

- The bench refused to modify its earlier order, insisting CBI probe continues with Supervisory Committee members being non-natives of Tamil Nadu.
- The court made the Madras HC Registrar General a party and emphasised a fair, impartial investigation to restore public trust.
- TN government sought recall of the CBI order and continuation of SIT probe, claiming no malafide or bias in the state police investigation.

tives of Tamil Nadu.

During proceedings, senior advocates P. Wilson and Siddharth Luthra sought copies of the HC report to file a reply. The top court noted that prior media statements by police officers could undermine public trust in the investigation and reiterated that citizens' rights demand an impartial, independent inquiry. The Supreme Court's orders aim to restore faith in the criminal justice process and ensure a fair, transparent investigation into the tragic incident.

Pending Gruhalakshmi Scheme funds will be released soon: CM

Amid Assembly uproar over pending Gruhalakshmi scheme installments and allegations of misinformation by Minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar, CM Siddaramaiah assured immediate release of funds

BELAGAVI

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah assured the Karnataka Assembly on Friday that the government will take immediate steps to release the pending installments of the Gruha Lakshmi scheme. Responding to an issue raised by Leader of the Opposition R. Ashoka, he clarified that while payments had been made up to August, the dues for February and March would be verified and released without delay. He noted that an incorrect statement made earlier by Women and Child Development Minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar in the House did not mean there was a breach of privilege, and the matter would be rectified.

The controversy arose after Minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar told the Assembly that Gruhalakshmi scheme payments were cleared till August, implying February and March installments were included. However, opposition leader R. Ashoka presented official documents showing these two installments were never released, accusing the minister of giving false informa-



tion and undermining the House's dignity.

Siddaramaiah countered Ashoka's allegation that the opposition existed only "to expose lies," stating that the government had no reason to lie and that any inaccura-

cies would always be corrected once noticed.

During the discussion, Ashoka also urged Congress leaders to suspend their political dinner meetings until the Legislature Session concluded. He criticised ministers for

Mahadevappa denies misuse of SCSP, TSP funds

Belagavi: Social Welfare Minister Dr. H. C. Mahadevappa clarified in the Legislative Council that SCSP and TSP funds have not been misused. Over the past 2.5 years, the government has spent ₹25,909 crore from SCSP funds and ₹11,273 crore from TSP allocations. He informed the council that these funds were utilised for various guarantee schemes, responding to a query raised by BJP member Hemalatha Nayak.

attending late-night political gatherings and arriving in the Assembly without proper preparation, leading to inaccurate responses and misinformation being presented in the House.

Supporting Ashoka, BJP

MLA Sunil Kumar argued that the core issue was not just the delay in Gruha Lakshmi payments, but that the House had allegedly been misled, raising concerns of breach of privilege. In response, Congress MLA Shivalingegowda accused BJP members of opposing guarantee schemes while simultaneously questioning delays in payments.

Concluding the debate, Siddaramaiah reiterated that during his tenure as Leader of the Opposition, he had always spoken based on facts and would continue to ensure transparency and accountability while addressing concerns related to welfare schemes.

OPPOSITION

BJP calls Siddaramaiah govt 'Karnataka's most unpopular'

Belagavi: The BJP in Karnataka launched a strong offensive against the Siddaramaiah government, calling it the most unpopular administration in the state. Opposition leader R. Ashoka claimed, "Compared to the Siddaramaiah of 2013, the 2025 Siddaramaiah is the worst. This is the worst term in Karnataka's history — completely unpopular."

BJP leader CT Ravi accuses Congress of 'vote chori'

Belagavi: BJP leader CT Ravi on Friday criticized the Congress, alleging a history of "vote theft" and holding the party responsible for North Karnataka's underdevelopment. Ravi further accused the Congress of neglecting the region, claiming that the lack of development in North Karnataka is a direct consequence of the party's misgovernance.

Naidu rules out annual fare cap amid IndiGo-led price spike

NEW DELHI

Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu informed the Lok Sabha on Friday that it is not practical for the government to cap airfares throughout the year, emphasizing that a deregulated aviation market ultimately benefits passengers. He noted that ticket prices naturally rise during peak demand periods, such as festive seasons, and these seasonal fluctuations are a normal outcome of supply and demand.

The minister highlighted that the deregulation of the sector was intended to encourage growth, attract more players, and foster competition, allowing market dynamics to determine pricing. Responding

to a private member's bill seeking airfare regulation amid

the recent IndiGo crisis, Naidu reiterated that deregulation remains crucial for the civil aviation sector's expansion, though the government retains the authority to intervene in extraordinary circumstances. Under the Aircraft Act, the Centre can cap fares when necessary to prevent opportunistic pricing, as seen during events like the Covid-19 crisis, the Maha Kumbh, the Pahalgam terror attack, and the recent IndiGo disruption.

Initiatives such as the 'Fare Se Fursat' scheme, covering 25 routes in the Northeast and South India, illustrate the government's targeted intervention approach.

Naidu also pointed out that, when adjusted for inflation, airfares in India have decreased by 43% over the years, making travel more affordable compared to countries like the US and China. Additionally, the government has issued a tariff sheet mandating airlines to display upper and lower fare limits.



Airfares usually rise during the festive season because of increased demand on specific routes and at particular times. These fluctuations are seasonal.

—Ram Mohan Naidu, Union Aviation Minister

External expert to conduct flight disruption probe

NEW DELHI

IndiGo announced on Friday that its Board has approved the engagement of Chief Aviation Advisors LLC, led by veteran aviation expert Captain John Illson, to carry out an independent review and assessment of the airline's recent operational disruptions and the factors that

contributed to them. Captain Illson, who has over 40 years of experience spanning the FAA, ICAO, IATA, and major international carriers, brings extensive expertise in aviation strategy, safety management, global standards, consulting, and new aircraft technologies.

The review aims to perform a root cause analysis of the op-

erational challenges IndiGo recently faced and to identify potential areas for improvement. This move comes following recommendations from the airline's Crisis Management Group (CMG), which advised commissioning an external expert assessment to thoroughly examine the situation.

DIGITAL CENSUS 2027

Cabinet approves ₹11,718-cr budget for digital census 2027

NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Friday approved an ₹11,718-crore budget for the National Census 2027, marking India's first fully digital census. Described as the world's largest statistical exercise, Census 2027 will be conducted in two phases.

Union Minister for Information & Broadcasting Ashwini Vaishnaw explained that the first phase, the House Listing and Housing Census, will run from April to September 2026, while the second phase, Popu-



lation Enumeration, is scheduled for February 2027. The Population Census in Ladakh, snow-bound areas of Jammu & Kashmir, and the hill states of Himachal Pradesh and Ut-

tarakhnad will be conducted in September 2026. Approximately 30 lakh field personnel will be deployed, generating over 1.5 crore human-day employments. As

India's first digital census, it will enable efficient, user-friendly data dissemination. Census-as-a-Service (CaaS) will provide ministries with clean, machine-readable, actionable data. A dedicated Census Management and Monitoring System portal will ensure real-time monitoring of the process, and a secure self-enumeration option will be available to the public.

The Cabinet had earlier approved including caste enumeration in Census 2027. This data will be captured electronically during the Population Enumeration phase.

Indian Census 2011 – Key Statistics

Total Population: 1,210,854,977

Males: 623,724,248

Females: 586,469,174

Literacy Rate: 74.04%

Sex Ratio:

➤ **Overall:** 940 females per 1,000 males

➤ **Child Sex Ratio (0–6 years):** 914 females per 1,000 males

QUICK READ

Govt to establish Defence Corridor in North K'taka

BELAGAVI Karnataka's government is pushing to establish a defence corridor in North Karnataka, covering Belagavi, Vijayapura, and Dharwad, said M.B. Patil, Minister for Large & Medium Industries and Infrastructure Development. The state contributes 65% to India's aerospace and defence sector and is a leader in aerospace. Patil noted that the Chief Minister and state officials met Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, receiving positive feedback, with all-party support for the project. Belagavi already hosts a successful aerospace SEZ, while Dharwad is developing a 3,000-acre industrial zone under the Bengaluru-Mumbai Industrial Corridor.

Red Fort blast: Court sends 3 doctors to 12 days JC

NEW DELHI A Delhi court on Friday remanded three doctors and a preacher arrested in connection with the November 10 Red Fort blast to 12 days of judicial custody. The accused—Dr Muzammil Ganai, Dr Adeel Rather, Dr Shaheen Saeed, and Maulvi Irfan Ahmed Wagay—were produced before the Principal and Sessions Judge Anju Bajaj Chandra, along with Dr Bilal Naseer Malla, whose voice sample was being authenticated. The case, linked to a sophisticated 'white-collar' terror module busted by Jammu and Kashmir Police, has seen eight arrests so far by the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

QUICK READ



Poor Greater Bengaluru Authority's work exposed again

BENGALURU
The poor work done by the officials of the Greater Bengaluru Authority has once again been exposed. It has come to light that the road has been paved with asphalt leaving the parking lot of vehicles on the road. The old cars were not removed. Residents have been outraged by the move of the GBA officials who have asphalted the entire road and left the car-sized space unoccupied. There has been criticism of the GBA on social media.



Leather industry boost: LIDCOM signs agreement with LIDKAR

BENGALURU
Italian company Prada, LIDCOM (Sant Rohidas Leather Industries and Tannery Development Corporation) and LIDKAR (Dr. Babu Jagjivan Ram Leather Industries Development Corporation) have entered into an agreement to promote Indian leather industry and the heritage of Kolhapuri chapals. The agreement was signed at the Italy-India Business Forum. As per the agreement, Prada will conduct local training. The LIDCOM and LIDKAR collection will be launched globally in February 2026 in 40 selected Prada stores and on Prada's e-commerce platforms.

Students visit Greater Bengaluru Authority office

BENGALURU
Students of Deccan International School visited the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) office and received information about the city's administration and environmental management. As part of an educational tour in collaboration with the Reap Benefit Team, 40 students visited GBA along with teachers Chaitra Kashyap and N Asha. The students visited the GBA control room, helpline, and war rooms and learned about the process of receiving and resolving complaints from the public. They received information from Ramachandran, Special Commissioner, Forest, Environment, and Disaster Management, about the important work of the Environment Department staff and the initiatives they undertake in the city.



Rowdy sheeters can't be verbally summoned, detained without any reason: High Court

The HC has said that until the rules are formulated, rowdy sheeters cannot be summoned verbally on suspicion, even if they are not involved in criminal acts, just because their names are on the list

BENGALURU

The High Court has held that verbally summoning rowdy sheeters to the police station and detaining them for a long time would violate an individual's personal freedom, and said that the government cannot justify such developments.

A bench headed by Justice R Nataraj passed this order while hearing a petition filed by rowdy sheeter Silent Sunil seeking an appropriate order from the Home Department regarding the verbal summoning of rowdies to the police

stations. It also directed that appropriate rules should be framed in this regard. In addition, until the rules are framed, rowdy sheeters cannot be summoned verbally on suspicion even if their names are on the list of names and they are not involved in criminal acts.

Instead of verbal summons, they can be summoned by sending an SMS or WhatsApp message.

The bench said that the petitioners should provide their mobile numbers to the Subrahmanya Nagar, Yelahanka Sub-district, Rajajinagar and



Amruthahalli police stations where cases have been registered against them. Also, if the investigating officers do not appear at the station even after sending a mobile message, they can visit their homes for questioning. The

bench said that if the alleged rowdy sheeter is involved in a criminal act, this order will be automatically cancelled.

When Alok Kumar was the Additional Commissioner, Silent Sunil was called to the police station and warned. Those scenes went viral on social media.

Therefore, Silent Sunil approached the High Court seeking appropriate directions.

Out of the 24 cases registered against him in various police stations, all the cases have ended in acquittal and those cases have been

quashed by the court. Except for rowdy sheeter, there are no pending cases against him. However, under the pretext of keeping an eye on him, he is being arrested without any reason and summoned and verbally abused.

There is no procedure in the Karnataka Police Manual or the Indian Penal Code 2023 that prescribes the manner in which a person whose name is on the rowdy list is summoned.

However, the petitioner had approached the court alleging that the respondents were summoning him orally.

Businessman fired at with an air gun

BENGALURU

An unidentified assailant fired an air gun at a businessman in the city. A case has been registered at Basavanagudi police station in this regard. Businessman Rajagopal has filed a complaint with Basavanagudi police station alleging that a shooting took place near Krishnarao Park in Basavanagudi. Police said they are searching for the air gun shooter. Rajagopal is a dancer from Basavanagudi and the owner of Kargil Bar and Restaurant. He was injured in the neck due to an unexpected attack and has been admitted to a private hospital in Jayanagar for treatment. As soon as the information about the incident was received, Basavanagudi police rushed to the spot and recorded Rajagopal's statement.

Action on Public Grievances: Phone-In Programme by the Commissioner

BENGALURU

The Commissioner of Bengaluru North City Corporation, Pommala Sunil Kumar, conducted a Phone-In Programme on Friday at 7 AM from the Byatarayanapura Control Room located on Amruthahalli Main Road. During the session, he listened to the grievances of citizens and provided direct responses.

The Commissioner launched the Phone-In Programme on September 26. Over the past 11 weeks, a total of 608 complaints have been received. All complaints were forwarded to the respective officials. Actions have already been taken on 428 complaints.

As 28 complaints did not fall under the jurisdiction of the North City Corporation, they were forwarded to the concerned departments. Directions have been issued to officials to take immediate action on the remaining 130 pending complaints.

In Friday's programme, 29 complaints related to road conditions were received. The



To directly hear citizens' grievances and concerns, provide prompt resolutions, and continuously monitor developmental works, the Commissioner's Phone-In Programme will continue every Friday.

Commissioner informed that the work of filling potholes, both day and night, is already in progress across the Corporation limits. He instructed officials to accelerate pothole repair and road restoration work with priority, ensuring quality, and to place greater emphasis on systematic road maintenance for smooth traffic movement.

With 7 complaints received today regarding solid waste collection and disposal, the Commissioner instructed officials to ensure timely collection and disposal of waste in all wards. A total of 7 complaints were also received regarding hazardous trees and branches. The forest officials present on site were directed to take immediate precautionary action and clear such risks without delay.

During today's Phone-In Programme, 47 calls were received, resulting in 63 complaints being officially registered. Each complaint is being reviewed, and necessary instructions have been issued to the concerned officials for appropriate action.



₹307 cr approved for devpt of Hi-Tech Outer Ring Road

BENGALURU

The Cabinet has approved the development of the Outer Ring Road from Silk Board Junction in Bengaluru to KR Pura Metro Station at an estimated cost of Rs. 307 crore. The project will be implemented by Bangalore Smart Infrastructure Limited (BSIL). It has been decided to design it in a global manner. With the aim of providing comfortable quality travel and reducing excessive traffic congestion on this road, it is proposed to develop this 17.01 km long road in a high-end manner. This will be a ten-lane road (total 10 lanes), with three-lane main roads and service roads on both sides. There is also a plan to

re-establish the bus priority lane, which will drastically reduce traffic congestion. Not only this, there will also be pedestrian and cycle paths on both sides of the road. It is also planned to reconstruct some parts of the road, and high-tech bus stops will be built. It will have a complete information board. A skywalk will also be constructed under the elevated metro line from Ibbalur to KR Pura in partnership with the government and the private sector. Similarly, the Cabinet has approved the relocation of the state's data center operations by acquiring space for 100 racks from the Software Technology of India (STPI) in Bengaluru at a cost of Rs 131.10 crore.

Towing to start in B'loru soon

BENGALURU

The Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) is gearing up to resume towing in the city. One towing vehicle has already been purchased and the other four corporations will arrive soon. In Bengaluru, there is a lot of traffic congestion and parking problems. Vehicles have been parked on the roadside for months. Now the GBA has planned to do towing in collaboration with the traffic police. Chief Commissioner Maheshwar Rao said that the vehicles parked on the roadsides, on the footpaths in front of the houses will not only be towed and fined as per the Motor Vehicles Act, but also the use of footpath space by the GBA. Five corporations will come under the purview of the Greater Bengaluru Authority. The GBA is preparing to start towing within a month after procuring towing vehicles for each corporation. Parking of vehicles everywhere was a problem for traffic.



Drug mafia network on trains, transportation continues

BENGALURU

While drugs worth crores of rupees are being brought to the state from abroad through flights, the shocking fact has come to light that the railway route is being used as a route for infiltrating ganja and other narcotics from foreign states into Karnataka.

Railway police records from the last three years have provided additional statistics to support this concern. Tons of ganja and other drugs have been

transported to the state by trains from Assam, Tripura, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, neighboring Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Police investigations have revealed that an international drug trafficking network is transporting drugs to the state through flights from other countries including Thailand, Nigeria, Malaysia and Pakistan. Similarly, the inter-state drug mafia is relying on trains as a transportation route.

DANGEROUS HIGHWAYS

Night Highway Driving: Govt Data Reveals Alarming Risk

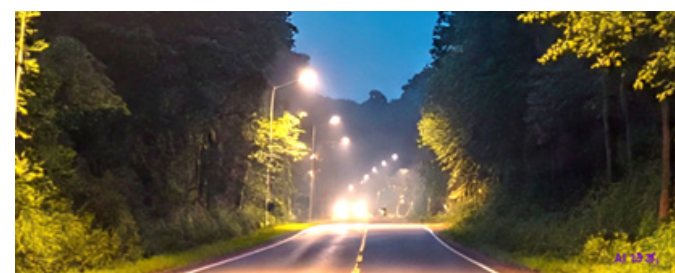
BENGALURU

Night travel on the highway is very safe as per many people. They think that if you leave heavy vehicles, you can easily reach your destination without any traffic hassle. However, government figures have revealed the explosive fact that night travel in the state is dangerous.

Although the cases of extortion and robbery on the National Highway and State Highway in the state are de-

creasing year by year, the number alone is worrying. In the last 3 years, 403 cases of robbery and extortion have been reported. Controlling highway robbery cases is a big challenge for the police. There are check posts on the national and state highways that go to the police station boundaries. Action has been taken to check suspicious persons and vehicles.

Government two-wheelers have been allocated to each police station for night patrol



duty. The vehicles have been instructed to patrol at night with sirens and red lights on. In addition, 112 patrols have been deployed in three shifts

24 hours a day.

MOB cards have been issued to those accused of robbery, extortion and other property crimes in the past.

They are being checked unexpectedly and their activities are being monitored. Border crime meetings are being held to prevent crimes.

Information about persons involved in robbery cases is being shared with neighboring states/districts/police stations. CCTVs installed at toll booths on national and state highways are being checked from time to time. Personnel on night beat duty have been advised to carry weapons and ammunition.

QUICK READ



Minister
Dr. H.K. Patil to tour
Gadag district

Gadag
Dr. H.K. Patil, State Minister for Law, Justice, Human Rights, Parliamentary Affairs, Legislation, and Tourism, will tour Gadag district on December 13 (today). His day begins at 10:00 AM at Mahatma Gandhi Gram Panchayat Raj University in Nagavi, where he will attend the 18th National Conference of the All India Panchayat Parishad. He will then travel by road to Lakshmeshwar, arriving at 12:00 PM to join a science extension program at Chandan School and the “Chandana Shree” 2025 award ceremony. From Lakshmeshwar, he will proceed to Hubballi at 3:00 PM to continue his official engagements.

Ayurveda student
death sparks murder
claims

Mundargi
A 21-year-old final-year BAMS student, Eshwar Gadag from Dhanur village in Bidar district, was found hanging in his hostel at SBS Ayurvedic Medical College here. His grieving family strongly alleges murder, rejecting it as suicide. They point to removed toenails, deep cuts and blood marks on the body as proof of foul play. Six months ago, Eshwar had tried consuming sleeping pills after alleged harassment by a lecturer. A note saying “No one is responsible for my death, I am to blame, sorry mommy and daddy” was found, but relatives insist it is not his handwriting and was fabricated by college staff. Police moved the body to hospital without informing kin, drawing sharp criticism. The bright student, who passed all exams with distinction, leaves his parents heartbroken amid demands for justice.



CEO Madhav visits villages directly,
solving rural problems instantly

DAVANAGERE

In a unique effort to improve rural life, Davanagere Zilla Panchayat CEO Madhav Gitte Vitthalarao has launched a daily program called “Morning Walk to Villages.” Through this initiative, he visits five to six villages each morning to hear people’s problems and provide solutions on the spot.
Rural areas often face challenges in water, sanitation, electricity, transportation, and basic services. While urban areas also have issues, addressing rural problems requires a personal approach. CEO Madhav recognized this and decided to bring officials directly to the villages rather than waiting for villagers to approach offices. He leads a team of officers during these morning visits, inspecting facilities like schools, hospitals, Anganwadi centers, Gram Panchayat offices, and Swa-

Criminal action planned against
Bagar Land irregularities

A probe team reviews forged certificate signatures, naming officials since 2018, with criminal and disciplinary action expected soon

BELAGAVI

Karnataka Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda announced that a criminal case will be registered against officials involved in illegal allocation of Bagar Hukum land and other land mafia activities. The minister made the statement during the zero-hour discussion in the Legislative Council on Friday, responding to a question from MLA Ramesh Babu.
Minister Gowda said the practice of giving government land to land grabbers is unacceptable. “It is regrettable that some officials have been part of these illegal actions,” he said. The case involves about

98 people in Chikkanayakanahalli taluk who were issued cultivation certificates in the names of farmers without proper verification. An FIR has already been filed against those land grabbers who obtained these fake certificates.
Following the discovery of the irregularities, an investigation team was formed on November 13 and sent to Chikkanayakanahalli to examine the issue. The team is verifying which signatures on the fake certificates are genuine and which are forged. Officials in charge of the archive from 2018 to the present have also been named in the FIR. Gowda said that once the investigation is complete, crim-



inal cases will be filed against the officials involved, and disciplinary action will be taken.
During the session, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah also addressed the filling of vacant government posts. He said that out of 2,84,881 vacant positions across various departments, 96,844 have al-

ready been filled. The remaining 1,88,037 posts, including 1,01,420 in corporation boards and 14,677 in universities, will be filled in phases with the Finance Department’s approval. Delays in recruitment due to internal reservation issues have now been resolved, allowing further action on the remaining vacancies.
The minister emphasized that the government is treating the issue of land irregularities seriously and will ensure strict action against both land grabbers and officials involved. The steps aim to protect farmers’ rights and prevent misuse of government land in Karnataka.

Protesters tore the Chief Minister effigy, prompting police intervention
before officials negotiated and the rally ended peacefully finally

Massive protest in Dharwad
over govt’s cow slaughter law

DHARWAD

Tensions flared in Dharwad as pro-Hindu groups staged a massive protest against the state Congress government’s proposed amendments to the cow slaughter ban law. The demonstration, led by organizations including Vishva Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, and BJP supporters, drew large crowds expressing anger over the government’s move.
The protesters alleged that the amendments would allow freedom to cow slaughterers, potentially harming religious sentiments. They warned of serious consequences if the law were changed. Many raised slogans against Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and state minister Siddramulla Khan during the protest.
The rally began at Jyubili Circle, where participants formed a human chain stretching to Anjuman Circle before returning. Protesters drew the CM’s portrait on the ground and symbolically fed cows rice and jaggery. Sever-



al Swamijis joined the demonstration, lending religious support to the protest.
Tensions rose when protesters tore an effigy of the Chief Minister, prompting the police to intervene. A verbal altercation ensued between law enforcement and the demonstrators before the situation was calmed. A staff member from the District Magistrate’s office engaged with the protesters, after which the rally was called off peacefully.
The Jyubili Circle remained closed temporarily due to the protest, causing heavy traffic

in the area. Organizers emphasized that their demonstration was peaceful but warned the government to reconsider any amendments that might affect religious and cultural sentiments.
The protest highlights ongoing debates over cow protection laws in Karnataka and reflects the deep sensitivity surrounding the issue among various communities in the state. Authorities are expected to monitor the situation closely as the government’s amendment proposal progresses.

Panchayat library staff
demand salaries via DBT

BELAGAVI

Staff working in Gram Panchayat Libraries are still struggling to receive their salaries on time, creating serious hardships for them and their families. BJP legislator D.S. Arun raised the issue in the Legislative Council, saying many employees are not paid minimum wages and some have been unpaid for months. Tragically, two staff members reportedly took their own lives due to financial stress caused by unpaid salaries.
Arun urged that all library staff should receive a minimum salary of ₹12,000 directly into their bank accounts through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). He also high-

lighted that many Panchayat libraries have not purchased new books, affecting the quality of service for local residents. Responding on behalf of Minister Priyank Kharge, Minister Santosh Lad acknowledged that ₹36 crore in pending salaries needs to be cleared. He said the Finance Department has been notified, and the payments will be processed as soon as possible. Lad also assured that salaries in the future would be disbursed directly through DBT to avoid delays.
In connection with one of the tragic suicides, the Panchayat Development Officer (PDO) has been suspended, Lad said. The issue brings attention to the challenges faced

Young artists shine in SBI Life competition

DHARWAD

Classic International Public School in Dharwad announced the results of a special Color Identification Painting Competition organized for its LKG and UKG children. The competition, held by the SBI Life Insurance branch in the city, aimed to encourage creativity and give young children a platform to express themselves through colors and simple drawings.
Teachers said the little ones showed great excitement and confidence as they picked colors and used them in their artwork. Many children surprised the judges with their neat work and cheerful imagination. After the evaluation, several students were selected

Yatnal Challenges
Misleading Claims
about Sugarcane

BELAGAVI

MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal has strongly criticized claims that sugarcane farmers earn huge profits per ton, saying such statements mislead hardworking farmers in North Karnataka. Speaking in the assembly, Yatnal challenged anyone to prove that a ton of sugarcane brings in Rs 14,500, stating, “If a ton of sugarcane earns this much, I will give up my factory to these so-called geniuses.”
Yatnal explained that the reality is far different. In North Karnataka, there are 58 sugar factories, and one ton of sugarcane produces only about 102.5 kg of sugar, 45 kg of molasses, and 12.15 liters of ethanol. The electricity generated from processing adds a small amount, totaling roughly Rs 4,847 per ton—not Rs 14,500. He accused some people of deliberately spreading false information, misleading farmers, and creating unrealistic expectations. He demanded that legal action be taken against those who misinform farmers.
The MLA also criticized the state assembly and government sessions, saying they are often held for show. “Sessions are conducted for a few days and then officials travel elsewhere. In Nagpur, Maharashtra, sessions run for a month with all government offices present. Why can’t we have the same in North Karnataka?” he questioned.



Yatnal cited long-standing regional imbalance, noting South Karnataka produced 15 Chief Ministers since 1950 versus eight from the North, and none completed full terms amid neglected local needs

Yatnal highlighted historical regional imbalance, pointing out that since 1950, South Karnataka has had 15 Chief Ministers while North Karnataka had only eight. He noted that no Chief Minister has completed a full five-year term, adding that current politics often ignore local needs.
Concluding his speech, Yatnal reaffirmed his commitment to farmers and North Karnataka. He urged the government to create an integrated Karnataka where resources, development, and opportunities are shared fairly across the state, and promised to prioritize farmers’ interests above political pressures.

Haliyal RSETI invites youth
for training program

KOPPAL

Canara Bank Deshpande RSETI Institute in Haliyal is offering free training in electrical bike repair and JCB driving for unemployed youth aged 18–50 from rural areas. The programs will begin in the first week of January 2026, and the last date to register is December 23. Training includes techni-

cal skills, soft skills, yoga, and guidance on self-employment, bank loans, government schemes, and project report preparation. Food and accommodation are provided. Priority will be given to early applicants and rural candidates. Interested youth can apply online at www.rsetihaliyal.org or contact 9980510717 for details.



for prizes.
The prize-winning children are: Ms. Sripriya Yargambalimath, Ms. Mirahkonain Nadaf, Ms. Pranam Kulkarni, Ms. Satvik Gudagi, Ms. Dhanvi Ronada, Ms. Jeeva Goragaddi, Ms. Siri Hoogara, Ms. Mirah Garaga, Ms. Sambhram Patil, Ms. Samyuktha Karikatti, Ms. Lakshmana

Ganigera, Ms. Alapa Shetty, and Ms. Nihala Mithare.
SBI Life Insurance officials distributed certificates and medals to all the winning participants, making the event a joyful celebration for the children and their parents. Those present included Deputy Regional Manager Manoj Kumar and others.

GUARANTEE TURNS COSTLY

Shakti Scheme pushes NWKRTC into crisis

HUBBALLI

The popular Shakti Scheme, launched by the Congress government under its five Guarantees initiative, is now causing serious financial trouble for the North Western Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NWKRTC). The scheme, which allows women to travel free on state buses, has left the transport corporation with nearly Rs 988 crore in pending dues.
Introduced in June 2023, the Shakti Scheme quickly became a lifeline for women across Karnataka. Millions of female passengers now rely



on free bus services for daily travel. NWKRTC serves districts including Dharwad,

Bagalkote, Belagavi, Gadag, Haveri, and Uttara Kannada, transporting over 27 lakh pas-

sengers daily—17 lakh of whom are women.
However, the government has reportedly been slow in reimbursing the corporation. Only about 75% of the promised funds have been released each month over the past two and a half years, causing arrears to accumulate. This delay is putting a severe strain on NWKRTC’s finances, which were already under pressure from operating losses.
The financial crunch is affecting critical operations such as bus maintenance, repairs, and staff salaries. NWKRTC Managing Director

Priyanka said the corporation is grateful for government support like bus purchases and other facilities. However, she emphasized that clearing the outstanding payments would greatly ease the burden and ensure smooth daily operations.
Passengers continue to benefit from free travel under the scheme, but the corporation is struggling behind the scenes to maintain services. Officials hope that prompt reimbursement of dues will help NWKRTC recover financially and continue providing reliable transport for millions across the region.

QUICK READ

Gadag invites
NGOs for Mental
Health Center

Gadag

The District Health and Family Welfare Department of Gadag has called for expressions of interest from experienced NGOs to establish a Community Mental Health Day Care Center, Manasadhara, for the rehabilitation of mental health patients. Eligible organizations can access the notification and application details on www.kppp.karnataka.gov in between December 11 and 19, 2025, by 4:00 PM. Applicants must appear in person with original documents at the District Health and Family Welfare Officer's office on December 22 at 11:00 AM for verification. For further details, NGOs can contact the department directly.

Four girls
missing from Bagalkot
school found

Bagalkot

Four Class 10 students from Morarji Residential School in Navanagar went missing around 7:30 PM on Thursday. A complaint was filed at the Women's Police Station, and police immediately began searching. Based on information from friends that the students were heading toward Hungund, the investigation traced one student's mobile phone to Vijayapura. At 2 AM, Gandhi Chowk police in Vijayapura took the girls into custody and returned them to Bagalkot Navanagar Women's Police Station by 4 AM on early Friday. The students were later handed over to their parents. A case has been registered, and SP Siddharth Goyal said investigations into the reason for their disappearance are ongoing.

Koppal to review taluk
guarantee schemes on
Dec 20

Koppal

A progress review meeting for Koppal Taluk-level guarantee schemes will be held on December 20 at 11 AM in the Koppal Taluk Panchayat Hall. The meeting will be chaired by Balachandran Samuel, Chairman of the Koppal Taluk Level Guarantee Schemes Committee. Officials will review the progress of five state government guarantee schemes and discuss related matters. Implementing officers of the schemes have been instructed to attend in person with all necessary information, without sending representatives, the Koppal Taluk Panchayat executive officers stated.

CM Siddaramaiah to visit Gadag today

GADAG

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will visit Gadag district on December 13 (today), and the district administration has released the complete schedule of his one-day tour. The visit includes participation in major educational events and a review meeting with senior officials.

According to the programme, the Chief Minister will depart from the Suvana Vidhana Soudha helipad in Belagavi at 10:20 a.m. on Saturday. He is expected to arrive at the helipad located on the grounds of Sri Uma PU College in Lakshmeshwara at 11:15 a.m.

Soon after his arrival, Siddaramaiah will attend the Bharat Ratna Prof. C.N.R. Rao 10th Year Science Extension Program-2025. The event is being organized to promote science education

Minister denies knowledge
of MLAs' dinner party

Dr. Patil highlighted Congress's democratic structure and discipline, contrasting it with BJP, emphasizing public welfare and development priorities

BELAGAVI

Karnataka Medical Education Minister Dr. Sharanprakash Patil clarified that he had no knowledge of the reported dinner party involving the Chief Minister, other ministers, and MLAs. Speaking during the ongoing winter session, he said he had gone to his room after the cabinet meeting and was unaware of any such gathering. "There was no political meeting for any reason. The Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Ministers have made it clear that there is no confusion in the party. Media is creating unnecessary rumors," he added.

Responding to questions about statements by Yatindra

Siddaramaiah regarding leadership changes, Dr. Patil said he had no information. "Everyone can express personal opinions, but final decisions are taken by the CM, Deputy CM, national president Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, and Rahul Gandhi," he explained.

On party structure, Dr. Patil emphasized that the Congress operates with a democratic system and freedom of speech. "Unlike the BJP's top-down approach, our party is disciplined yet democratic," he said. He also addressed criticisms comparing government actions with others, stressing that the administration always prioritizes public welfare and development.



Regarding development in North Karnataka, the minister said senior leaders have carefully planned regional progress, ensuring Kannada-speaking areas remain unified. "Northern Karnataka still needs more development. Our government focuses on Kalyana Karnataka and Kittur Karnataka, supporting irrigation and other projects," he

said. He cited the 371J initiative by Mallikarjun Kharge to benefit Kalyana Karnataka and the annual winter session at Belagavi's Suvana Vidhana Soudha as steps to prioritize the region.

Dr. Patil highlighted that Karnataka has the highest number of medical colleges in the state, with Congress governments historically emphasizing northern regions. He acknowledged that MLAs in North Karnataka actively work for their constituencies, and while southern Karnataka has advanced historically due to previous administrative and geographical factors, the northern region is steadily catching up under current initiatives.

Day-one sessions cover Gram Swaraj, Panchayat laws,
decentralization, policies, and empowerment, with experts
offering guidance and research opportunities

National Conference Strengthens
Rural Panchayat Governance

GADAG

The 18th National Panchayat Parishad Conference will be held on December 13 (today) and 14, 2025, at the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Development and Panchayat Raj University in Gadag. Organized by the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Parishad, Bangalore, in collaboration with the University and sponsored by the Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, Government of Karnataka, the two-day conference aims to strengthen the roots of rural democracy and empower Panchayat Raj institutions.

Speaking at a press conference, All India Panchayat Parishad President and former Union Minister Subodh Kant Sahai emphasized the historic role of Panchayati Raj in India. He explained that committees such as the Balwant Rai Mehwa Committee and the Ashok Mehwa Committee laid the foundation for the three-tier system and institutional autonomy. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi granted constitutional status to Panchayati Raj institutions, making village-level



governance a cornerstone of India's democracy.

Technical sessions on the first day will focus on Gandhian principles of Gram Swaraj, Panchayat Acts, decentralized administration, policies, and community empowerment. Experts, social activists, and leaders of the Panchayat movement will serve as resource persons and offer research opportunities for participants.

On the second day, discussions will cover the empowerment of Panchayat Raj institutions, localization of Sustainable Development Goals, and the use of information technology in rural development. The concluding ceremony will feature valedictory addresses by national-level Panchayat leaders and senior administrators.

Online applications invited for key welfare schemes 2025-26

GADAG

The Karnataka State Women Development Corporation has invited online applications for various welfare schemes for the year 2025-26. These include the Rehabilitation Scheme for Former Devadasis, Employment Scheme, Chetana Scheme, Dhanashree Scheme, and the Rehabilitation Scheme for Gender Minorities. Applications can be submitted through Grama One, Karnataka One, Bapuji Seva Kendra, and Bangalore One centres.

Under the Dhanashree and Gender Minorities schemes, applications may be submitted both online and offline. Offline forms should be submitted at the office of the Deputy Director, Women and Child Development Department, Gadag.

Applicants must attach documents such as Aadhaar Card, Aadhaar-linked bank passbook, caste and income certificates, scheme report, and registration certificates for Chetana and Gender Minority schemes. Former Devadasis must provide certificates is-



sued during government surveys held in 1993-94 or 2007-08.

Age limits vary by scheme: Dhanashree Scheme (18-60

New reptile enclosure
coming to Belagavi Zoo

BELAGAVI

Belagavi's Kittur Rani Chennamma Mini Zoo in Bhutaramanahatti is set for exciting new additions, including a reptile and crocodile enclosure, announced Forest, Biology, and Environment Minister Eshwar B. Khandre.

During his visit to the zoo to review construction progress, Khandre said a crocodile enclosure costing Rs. 50 lakh and a reptile enclosure costing Rs. 40.8 lakh are under construction. Once completed, the enclosures will house two crocodiles and twelve snakes, including python, Kalinga snake, and Mandal.

The zoo is also adding a cinema hall to screen documentaries about wildlife and educate visitors, which will be inaugurated soon. In addition, a spacious parking area and a statue of the brave Kittur Rani Chennamma are being built as part of development work totaling Rs. 5.85 crore. Most of the work is expected to be completed by the first week of January.

In the bird section, trans-

Minister Khandre said mini zoo upgrades will attract tourists and wildlife enthusiasts, offering educational and recreational experiences while promoting nature connection and wildlife conservation awareness

parent glass panels have been installed, making it easier for visitors to watch and photograph the birds up close.

Minister Khandre expressed confidence that these improvements will make the mini zoo more attractive to tourists and wildlife enthusiasts. He said the upgrades aim to provide both educational and recreational experiences, helping visitors connect with nature while highlighting the importance of wildlife conservation. The new enclosures and facilities are expected to draw more families and students, making Belagavi Zoo a key attraction in the region.

'10-year jail for hate
speech' Bill reflects Cong's
cruel tradition: Joshi

NEW DELHI/HUBBALLI

Union Minister Prahlad Joshi criticized the Karnataka Congress government's new bill prescribing a 10-year jail term for hate speech, calling it a reflection of the party's "cruel tradition."

Joshi said the legislation creates an atmosphere of fear among the public and is evidently designed to serve political control. He alleged that the state government, through this law, is curbing freedom of speech and showcasing the Congress party's authoritarian tendencies, facilitating misgovernance.

He claimed the bill, officially titled the Karnataka

Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prohibitory) Act, has been introduced to silence dissent and suppress public opinion, rather than genuinely curb hate speech. According to



Joshi, the legislation appears less about promoting social harmony and more about stifling voices that question the government's actions.

The minister further alleged that the law is intended to protect the government from criticism, keep its misrule hidden, and intimidate lawmakers and citizens alike. Joshi expressed strong disapproval, asserting that the legislation is a deliberate attempt to shield the government from accountability and curtail democratic debate.

again. The last date for submitting applications is January 15, 2026, before 5:30 p.m. For details, applicants can contact the Development Inspector at the Deputy Director's Office in the District Administration Building, Room No. 006.

Meanwhile, power supply in Gadag will be disrupted on December 17 from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. due to maintenance at the 110 kV power station. Several substations and essential services will be affected, and the public has been requested to cooperate.

UNION SEEKS BALANCE

Vokkaligas demand equal opportunities across taluks

SHIVAMOGGA

Leaders of the Shivamogga District Vokkaligas Union have called for fair representation of Vokkaligas from all taluks in the district. Speaking at a press conference, Union President Go. Ramesh Gowda highlighted that the Shivamogga District Vokkaligas Association, approaching its 75th year, currently has only about 5,000 members, even though lakhs of Vokkaligas live across the district.

He pointed out that nearly 85 percent of the members come from Tirthahalli taluk, while the remaining six taluks together contribute only 15



percent of the membership. Many Vokkaligas from Shivamogga rural, Bhadravati, and other areas have been unable to join the association. Despite repeated written and verbal appeals, Gowda said, equality in membership has

not been achieved.

Gowda criticized the association for concentrating most director positions and membership allocations within one taluk. According to him, 2-3 director positions are nominally assigned to other taluks,

while the rest go to Tirthahalli. Each director can approve only about 20 membership applications, mostly favoring relatives or people from their taluk, leaving large sections of the Vokkaliga community unrepresented.

The association will hold its general meeting on Sunday, December 14, and the union has urged the leadership to address this issue openly. Members are requested to gather in front of the association office on Balaraj Aras Road at 10 a.m. to advocate for fair and equal opportunities.

Gowda emphasized that the demonstration will remain

peaceful, with participants holding display cards calling for equality and inclusiveness. "The association should not be the property of a few leaders or a single family. All members must unite and participate equally," he said.

Union Secretary S.M. Devendra and directors Vinod Kumar, Krishnappa, Diwakar, Shantamma, Madegowda, Kumar, and Dinesh were present at the press conference.

The union hopes that highlighting these disparities will strengthen unity among Vokkaligas and ensure fair opportunities for all taluks in the future.

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QUICK READ

Cold, pollution, shrinking rivers worsen Kashmir's harsh winter woes

Srinagar

Biting cold with no prospect of major rain/snow-fall till the end of the month continued in Jammu and Kashmir on Friday as minimum temperature remained several notches below the freezing point in the Valley. Srinagar city had minus 3.6 degrees Celsius, Pahalgam minus 4.6 and Gulmarg zero as a minimum temperature. An extended dry spell has resulted in several serious problems erupting in Kashmir. Due to the lack of rain/snow, the suspended particulate matter (SPM) was mixed with low-lying fog, especially in areas in and around Srinagar city, resulting in smog.

J&K Police file charge sheet in date of birth forgery case

Srinagar

J&K Crime Branch said on Friday that it has filed a charge sheet in the court against an accused for forging his date of birth to get a regular appointment in the Public Works Department. A statement issued by the Crime Branch Kashmir said, Special Crime Wing (Crime Branch) Kashmir in a firm action against fraud, forgery and destruction of evidence, produced charge sheet in case FIR No. 07/2022 under section 420,468,471,201 RPC before the Hon'ble Court of CJM Handwara on 11.12.25 against an accused employee who deliberately forged and used a fake date of birth certificate to secure illegal regularisation in Public Works Department (R&B).

Smog blankets Delhi as AQI turns very poor again

New Delhi

Delhi woke up to a dense blanket of smog on Friday, with the overall Air Quality Index (AQI) reaching 331 at 7 a.m., placing the city once again in the 'very poor' category, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Jahangirpuri emerged as the worst-affected locality in the national capital with an AQI of 405, pushing it into the 'severe' zone. The smog and shallow fog significantly reduced visibility across the national capital. Anand Vihar recorded an AQI of 395, while other pollution hotspots included Vivek Vihar at 393, Ashok Vihar at 382, Bawana at 373, NSIT Dwarka at 388, Rohini at 385, Wazirpur at 397, Chandni Chowk at 368, and DTU at 371.

Nine Pilgrims Killed, 23 Injured as Bus Falls Into Gorge in Alluri Sitharamaraju District

9 pilgrims died and 23 sustained injuries after a private bus plunged into a deep gorge early Friday morning

VISAKHAPATNAM

Nine pilgrims lost their lives and 23 others were injured when a private travel bus fell into a gorge in Alluri Sitharamaraju district during the early hours of Friday. The tragic accident occurred along the Chintur-Naredumilli ghat road after the driver reportedly failed to negotiate a sharp turn, hitting a safety wall before the vehicle plunged into the gorge.

The bus, which had 37 occupants including two drivers, was travelling from Araku to Bhadrachalam. All passengers



were residents of Chittoor district and were on a pilgrimage tour to various temples in north Andhra and neighbour-

ing Telangana, with Bhadrachalam Temple being their next destination.

Rescue efforts were delayed

initially due to the absence of mobile network coverage in the remote accident location, resulting in a lag before authorities were informed. Police teams rushed to the spot and launched a rescue operation, recovering nine bodies. The injured were taken to a hospital in Chintur, while five critically injured passengers were shifted to Bhadrachalam for advanced treatment. Five police vehicles and three ambulances were deployed to support the rescue operation.

Preliminary investigations suggest that dense fog may have reduced visibility, con-

tributing to the mishap. Officials also believe the driver, unfamiliar with the route, lost control of the bus at the curve.

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu expressed deep shock over the tragedy and directed officials to ensure the best possible medical care for the injured. Home Minister V. Anitha and Tribal Welfare and Women and Child Welfare Minister G. Sandhya Rani visited the accident site and instructed district authorities to provide all necessary assistance to the victims and their families.

'Dignified leader has left us': Tributes pour in for Shivraj Patil

NEW DELHI

Leaders across party lines on Friday expressed deep grief over the passing of former Union Home Minister and veteran Congress leader Shivraj Patil, remembering him as a dignified statesman who served the nation with unwavering commitment.

Patil, 90, breathed his last at his residence 'Devghar' in Latur, Maharashtra, after a brief illness. NCP(Sharad Pawar) MP Supriya Sule recalled the long political association between her party chief, Sharad Pawar and Shivraj Patil. Paying tribute, she said, For many years, Sharad Pawar and Shivraj Patil worked together... He has left behind a great legacy... The country has lost a very dignified leader. Today, on behalf of my party and family, I pay him heartfelt tribute.

Congress MP Sukhdeo Bhagat described Patil as a disciplined and towering figure in national politics. He was certainly a very senior and disciplined leader, and we are saddened by his passing. Whenever a person of such stature, who has dedicated their entire life to a great cause, leaves us, it is deeply felt. Our heartfelt condolences go out to the entire family, he said.

Shiv Sena(UBT) leader Bhaskar Jadhav also expressed sorrow, highlighting Patil's commitment to public service. Shivraj Patil Chakurkar passed away today. I am deeply saddened to hear this news. He had served for many years in Maharashtra and in the nation's Parliament. I always admired and respected his dedication to his work and principles, Jadhav stated.

BJP Accuses Mamata Banerjee of Double Standards Over Enumeration Form Submission

KOLKATA

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Friday accused West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of displaying double standards and misleading the public over her stance on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) enumeration process. The party claimed that despite Banerjee's repeated assertions that she would not file her enumeration form as a mark of protest, she eventually submitted it on the last day of the process.

BJP Information Technology Cell Chief Amit Malviya criticised the Chief Minister, stating that she had once again attempted to deceive



voters. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has once again shown her instinct to mislead. She submitted her duly filled and signed Enumeration Form on the very last day, yet just hours earlier from a rally in Krish-

BJP alleged Mamata Banerjee misled citizens by protesting enumeration yet quietly submitting her form on final day.

nanagar, she falsely claimed she would not submit it at all, he said.

This is not the first time Banerjee has claimed she would boycott the enumeration forms. Earlier, when the revision exercise began on November 4, she had declared she would refrain from filing her form until all voters in the state had completed theirs. She alleged that the Election Commission of India (ECI)

had rushed the revision exercise, prompting her symbolic protest.

Malviya, in a social media post, alleged that after months of spreading misinformation and attempting to create confusion about the SIR process, the Chief Minister ultimately submitted her form on December 11, the deadline for West Bengal, in order to remain a valid voter. He further claimed that voters in the state ignored her appeals, with nearly 100% of them completing the process. While the ECI extended the enumeration deadline for five states and one Union Territory, West Bengal's deadline remained unchanged.

Driver of killer truck remains absconding in Sandeshkhali witness accident case

KOLKATA

Two days after Satyajit Ghosh, the younger son of Bhola Ghosh, a key witness in a criminal case against Sheikh Shahjahan, the suspended Trinamool Congress leader from Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, was killed in a suspicious road accident, the driver of the killer truck remains at large. Satyajit died on Wednesday, and the truck driver, identified as Abdul Ali Mollah, has not been arrested yet.

Satyajit accompanied his father, Bhola Ghosh, to the trial court to get his statement against Shahjahan recorded. In the accident, although Bhola Ghosh had a close shave, Satyajit and the driver of the vehicle, Shahnur Molla, died on the spot.

Although initially information surfaced that the vehicle had a head-on collision with the killer truck, later Bhola Ghosh told media persons that the truck had hit their vehicle from behind, not once but

twice. He also claimed that even after hitting twice, the killer truck kept on thrusting the vehicle till it fell into the roadside gutter.

Ghosh's claims had been corroborated by some eyewitnesses present at the spot for the media persons.

Bhola Ghosh filed a written complaint at Nazat police station under Basirhat district police, naming eight persons he alleged were responsible for the accident in which he narrowly escaped, though his younger son died.

The first two names in the written complaint are those of Sheikh Shahjahan and his wife, Taslima Bibi. On Thursday evening, the sleuths of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), who had been carrying out the probe in different cases against Sheikh Shahjahan, visited the residence of Bhola Ghosh and enquired about the mishap. The CBI has recently submitted details of around 3,000 individual complaints registered against Sheikh Shahjahan in the Calcutta High Court.

Maharashtra BJP chief Ravindra Chavan denied coercion allegations and affirmed MahaYuti partners will contest civic polls together.

Ravindra Chavan denies coercion claims, reiterates MahaYuti unity

NAGPUR

Maharashtra BJP President Ravindra Chavan on Friday strongly refuted allegations that the party was pressuring leaders from alliance partners or the Opposition to defect, asserting that the BJP has always followed coalition dharma within the ruling MahaYuti alliance.

Chavan highlighted the accommodative approach of the alliance under Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and confirmed that the three constituents — the BJP, Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, and Ajit Pawar-led NCP — will jointly contest the upcoming local body elections. These polls, including the crucial Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) election, must be concluded by January 31, 2026, as mandated by the Supreme Court.

His remarks come at a time of heightened political activity



in Maharashtra following public disagreements between BJP and Shiv Sena leaders during elections to 264 local bodies, where both sides fielded competing candidates in several wards.

Addressing the allegations directly, Chavan said, BJP has never coerced anybody from the ruling parties or the Opposition to join us. He countered accusations by pointing out that it was the Shiv Sena that first inducted BJP leaders in

Ambernath, sparking the competitive round of political poaching.

Chavan underscored the BJP's focus on ground-level politics, stating that the party leadership considers local body elections as important as Assembly and Lok Sabha polls. He credited the BJP's strength to its development agenda and the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

His comments follow a meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi earlier this week, where he briefed Shah on the political landscape and the party's organisational preparations for the civic elections. Chavan also met Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde to discuss strategy and seat-sharing arrangements for municipal corporations in Mumbai, Thane, and neighbouring regions.

HC issues notice to Saudi Arabian embassy over delay in repatriating youth's mortal remains

JAIPUR

The High Court has issued a notice to the Saudi Arabian embassy in Delhi, seeking an explanation for the prolonged delay in releasing the mortal remains of a Rajasthan youth, who died there on November 13, leaving his family devastated.

Intervening in the matter, the Rajasthan High Court in Jodhpur issued a notice to the Saudi Arabian government, after the body of Ramesh Kumar Meghwal, a resident of Balotra district, remained undispached even after 28 days of his death.

Justice Nupur Bhati sought a response from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through its Embassy in New Delhi, following a petition filed by the deceased's mother, Teeju Bai.

Legal experts consider this a significant judicial step, as



issuing a notice to a foreign government in a humanitarian matter is rare.

The next hearing is scheduled for December 17, where both the Saudi and Indian governments will present their positions.

Ramesh Kumar Meghwal, a resident of Meghwalon Ki Dhani in Gida tehsil, died under suspicious circumstances in Saudi Arabia on November 13.

When his body was not sent

back for several weeks, Charnesh Sharma, former Director of the Rajasthan Seeds Corporation and known for aiding Indians in distress abroad, filed complaints with the President's Secretariat, the National Human Rights Commission, and the Ministry of External Affairs. The President's Secretariat directed the Ministry of External Affairs to take necessary action, and the ministry subsequently responded to Sharma.

IMPHAL

President Droupadi Murmu, currently on a two-day visit to Manipur, paid floral tributes at the Nupi Lal Memorial Complex in Imphal on Friday to mark the 86th Nupi Lal Day. The day commemorates two historic women-led uprisings against British policies in 1904 and 1939, movements that remain significant milestones in the state's socio-political history.

The President also visited the Shree Govindaji Temple at the Palace Compound, located about two kilometres from the memorial site, where she offered prayers. An official accompanying the visit said President Murmu's tribute was a heartfelt homage to the brave women of Manipur whose



courage and resilience continue to inspire generations.

Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, who joined the President at the memorial, also offered floral tributes. In his message to the people of Manipur, the Governor described Nupi Lal Day—popularly known as Nupilan Numit—as a powerful reminder of the

extraordinary unity and patriotism shown by Manipuri women. He highlighted that the Nupi Lal movements stood not just as protests but as powerful expressions of collective leadership and social awareness.

The brave mothers of Manipur transformed their pain into courage that culminated

in a movement that continues to inspire generations. Their sacrifices remind us that the progress of any society lies in respecting and empowering its women, Bhalla said.

The Governor called upon citizens to uphold the spirit of Nupi Lal and work towards fostering peace, harmony and progress in the state.

Following the tribute ceremony, President Murmu departed Imphal for Senapati district, a Naga tribal-inhabited region, where she is scheduled to address a public function and inaugurate and lay foundation stones for several developmental projects. This marks her first visit to Manipur since assuming office, and it comes at a time when the state continues to recover from ethnic violence.

QUICK READ

UNESCO recognizes India's Diwali for global intangible heritage

Washington
The Indian Consulate in Houston celebrated Diwali's recognition on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The event, held with BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir and Indo-American groups, featured lamp-lighting, cultural performances, and a light show, with participation from local diaspora and officials. Indian Consulates in Atlanta, Chile, and Lebanon also marked the occasion with diyas, lights, and prayers. Consul General D.C. Manjunath highlighted Diwali's message of light, harmony, and goodwill.

Malaysia drops appeal against Rosmah Mansor

Kuala Lumpur
Malaysian prosecutors have withdrawn their appeal against Rosmah Mansor, wife of former Prime Minister Najib Razak, after her acquittal in 12 money laundering and five tax evasion charges. The Attorney-General's Chambers cited the death of key witnesses, making conviction unlikely. Rosmah, known for her lavish lifestyle, has maintained her innocence throughout. The decision does not affect her other ongoing trials, including a 10-year bribery sentence linked to a solar project. Najib, serving a six-year jail term for graft, faces further IMDB-related verdicts later this month. Both continue to deny wrongdoing in multiple corruption investigations.

DUCSU leader allegedly attacks Dhaka University teachers

Dhaka
Three Dhaka University teachers linked to the pro-Awami League panel "Neel Dal" were reportedly attacked by students led by DUCSU leader AB Zubair. The incident occurred after the teachers submitted a memorandum to the Vice-Chancellor, demanding the reinstatement of barred faculty members. Videos show Zubair confronting the teachers and blocking their exit. Professors reported harassment, including snatched belongings and physical intimidation. The Dhaka University Teachers' Association condemned the attack and called for an impartial investigation.

Russia strikes energy facilities in Odesa region

Russia has intensified attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, targeting power stations and railways, worsening conditions for communities

KYIV

Russia launched an overnight attack on energy facilities in Ukraine's southern Odesa region, leaving thousands without electricity and sparking fires, officials said on Friday. The attacks, carried out using drones, hit areas where Ukraine's main seaports are located, according to Governor Oleh Kiper.

Several settlements were affected as power lines and stations were damaged. "Many communities are now without electricity," Kiper wrote on Telegram, urging calm while emergency crews worked to restore service. Ukraine's largest energy



company, DTEK, reported that one of its substations was hit, along with another facility owned by a different company. The company said it managed to restore electricity to 40,000 households, but nearly 90,000 customers

still remained in the dark.

In recent weeks, Russia has stepped up attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, especially as winter intensifies. Power stations and railway hubs have frequently been targeted, adding pressure

on communities already struggling amid the conflict.

Earlier this week, the Ukrainian government approved measures to save electricity after repeated attacks left entire regions without power. Officials emphasized that residents should remain prepared for temporary outages while restoration work continues.

The attacks mark another worrying escalation as the war nears its fourth anniversary. Local authorities and energy companies continue to work around the clock to bring back electricity, repair damaged infrastructure, and keep critical services running during the challenging winter months.

Following two recent defections, Conservative leader Poilievre faces increased pressure ahead of his January leadership review post-election

CANADIAN LIBERALS NEAR MAJORITY AFTER DEFECTION

OTTAWA

Canada's Liberal government, led by Prime Minister Mark Carney, is now just one seat shy of a parliamentary majority following the defection of Conservative MP Michael Ma. Ma, elected in April to represent Markham-Unionville in the Greater Toronto Area, formally joined the Liberals, citing the need for "unity and decisive action" for Canada's future.

Ma's move brings the Liberal Party's total to 171 seats in the 543-member House of Commons, edging closer to the 172-seat majority threshold. He was welcomed warmly by Carney during the Liberal caucus holiday gathering in Ottawa. This is the second recent Conservative defection.



In early November, Chris d'Entremont from Nova Scotia also joined the Liberals, citing disagreement with Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre's policies. The defections have intensified pressure on Poilievre, whose leadership is slated for review in January following the party's defeat in the April federal election.

Recent polling by the Angus Reid Institute indicates growing dissatisfaction with Poilievre, with 58 percent of

respondents believing he should be replaced, including 64 percent of centrists and 63 percent who view his leadership unfavorably. Even among recent Conservative voters, support for Poilievre's continuation has slipped to 58 percent, down 10 points since August.

Ma's defection comes amid speculation about the government's stability. While minority governments in Canada average 18 months, the Liberal Party's near-majority position could allow Carney's administration to serve a full four-year term if additional defections occur. Analysts predict that the upcoming months may see further political realignments in the House as parties prepare for future elections.

Baloch activist urges Trump halt Pakistan aid

QUETTA

Mir Yar Baloch, a prominent Baloch human rights activist, has appealed to former US President Donald Trump to cancel the recently approved \$686 million military aid to Pakistan. The activist warned that the funds could be used against innocent Baloch civilians and worsen human rights abuses in the region.

In his urgent letter, Mir highlighted that the Baloch people have suffered under seventy-seven years of Pakistani control, marked by enforced disappearances and violence, often using weapons supplied by the United States. He urged the US to revoke the F-16 upgrade program and other military assistance, calling them tools of oppression rather than defense.

Mir pointed out Pakistan's past actions, including harbor-

ing Osama bin Laden while receiving US funds, and alleged that billions meant for counterterrorism were misused to target American forces. "Now, the same regime is receiving new American weapons aimed at harming Baloch families," he said.

He also recalled a 2012 US Congressional hearing titled "The Crisis in Balochistan," where lawmakers condemned Pakistan for human rights violations and recognized the Baloch people's right to independence. The hearing stressed that US weapons were being used against civilians in the region.

Urging decisive action, Mir called on Trump to immediately suspend and permanently cancel the F-16 sustainment and all pending military financing until an independent review confirms the funds will not be used against civilians.

SEOUL

The South Korean government has announced plans to introduce a special law aimed at strengthening safety at construction sites and imposing stricter penalties for fatal accidents. Land Minister Kim Yun-duk revealed the initiative during a briefing for President Lee Jae Myung in Sejong, highlighting that construction-related deaths make up around 40 per cent of all industrial fatalities in the country.

Under the proposed law, safety responsibilities at construction sites will be clearly defined, and authorities will have the power to take stronger action when deadly accidents occur due to negligence or poor oversight. The safety measures will also extend to transportation infrastructure, including



Awami League rejects B'desh election schedule

DHAKA

Bangladesh's Awami League party has strongly rejected the election schedule announced by the country's Election Commission, saying fair and free polls are impossible under the current interim government led by Muhammad Yunus. The Election Commission announced on Thursday evening that the 13th national parliamentary election and the July Charter referendum will take place on February 12 next year. The Awami League, however, called the commission "illegal" and accused it of being controlled by the Yunus government.

In a statement, the party said it is clear that the current authorities are biased, making it impossible to hold elections that reflect the will of the people. They accused the government of trying to exclude the Awami League and other major political groups, warning that this could push the country into a deep crisis.

The Election Commission announced on Thursday evening that the 13th national parliamentary election and the July Charter referendum will take place on February 12 next year

The party demanded the removal of all restrictions on it, withdrawal of what it called "fabricated cases" against former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and other leaders, and the release of all political prisoners. They also called for a neutral caretaker government to ensure a free and fair election.

The Awami League emphasized that elections are a measure of public support, noting that it has contested 13 elections since its founding and won nine, forming the government. The party made clear that it will not accept the announced schedule, which it says ignores the majority of Bangladesh's citizens.

White House warns against Mayor-elect video

WASHINGTON

The White House sharply criticised a video posted by New York City Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani, urging immigrants to "stand up to ICE," warning it has fueled a surge in attacks on federal immigration officers. Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said the Trump administration is "definitely concerned about the rise in violence and attacks and physical threats" targeting ICE personnel. Leavitt cited what she de-

scribed as more than a 1,000 per cent increase in violent incidents against agents and their families. "ICE officers have been doxed, harassed, and physically assaulted while enforcing our nation's immigration laws," she said, stressing that the administration condemns any messaging that encourages resistance to federal enforcement.

President Trump has touted the US border as the "most secure" in history, pointing to record-low encounters with illegal entrants.

South Korea plans tougher construction safety law



airports, with plans to improve aviation safety through facility upgrades and additional air traffic controllers.

The move follows a series of industrial accidents, including a recent collapse at a library construction site in Gwangju on Thursday, which killed two workers and left two missing. Rescue operations faced challenges as twisted steel and concrete

trapped the missing workers, forcing authorities to halt the search temporarily to stabilize the structure. The collapse occurred while workers were pouring concrete onto the building's rooftop, causing lower floors to fall to the underground level.

President Lee has repeatedly emphasized the need for tougher measures to prevent industrial accidents since taking office in June. Meanwhile, Minister Kim also pledged to continue the government's housing plan, aiming to deliver 1.1 million public housing units, with related measures expected in early 2026. Authorities stressed that the safety law is essential to prevent future tragedies, protect workers, and ensure proper oversight in South Korea's rapidly growing construction sector.

INDEPENDENT INQUIRY LAUNCHED

Hong Kong aims to conclude fire probe quickly

HONG KONG

Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee said on Friday that the government aims to complete an independent investigation into the deadly fire that killed at least 160 people within nine months. The blaze, which broke out on November 26, swept through seven high-rise residential towers in the Tai Po district, displacing thousands and raising urgent questions about building safety. An independent committee, led by Judge David Lok of the Electoral Affairs Commission, has been tasked with examining the causes of the



tragedy. The inquiry will focus on whether systemic issues exist in the construction industry, including conflicts of interest, collusion, or

bid-rigging in awarding contracts. Lee praised the committee members for their dedication, saying, "They all have the passion and the love

of Hong Kong... I take my hat off to them."

Residents have expressed anger over the fire, which took nearly two days to control. Authorities have pointed to substandard building materials used in renovations as a key factor in the fire's rapid spread. In response, the government has launched criminal and corruption investigations, signaling a broader effort to hold responsible parties accountable.

Lee also said that lawmakers and officials will work together to implement institutional reforms in the construction sector. Public petitions

and calls for improved oversight have underscored the need for stronger safety regulations and government accountability. The government's swift action aims to restore confidence while ensuring that lessons are learned from the disaster.

The fire has left a lasting mark on Hong Kong, and authorities face pressure to prevent similar tragedies in the future through better safety standards, stricter regulations, and transparent investigations. The nine-month timeline is seen as a key step toward closure for affected families and residents.

SU DO KU

Brain-Bender: Can You Solve It?

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

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

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

QUICK READ



Meta picks new policy chief for India

New Delhi
Meta India has named Aman Jain as its new Head of Public Policy, marking a major step as the company prepares for growing digital and regulatory changes. Jain will begin early next year and join the India leadership team, where he will help shape Meta's public affairs strategy. He will work closely with government officials, industry groups, and civil society as on-line safety rules continue to change. Reporting to APAC Policy Vice President Simon Milner, Jain is expected to strengthen Meta's ties with key stakeholders and support its long-term commitment to India's digital future.

Methodhub shares fall sharply on market debut

Mumbai
Methodhub Software had a shaky start on the BSE SME platform, opening at Rs 155.20, a steep 20 per cent drop from its IPO price of Rs 194. The weak debut surprised investors, especially after strong subscription numbers during the December 5-9 offering. The stock briefly hit its 5 per cent upper circuit at Rs 162.90 but stayed well below the issue price. The Rs 102.49 crore IPO, subscribed nearly 29 times, drew heavy interest from all investor groups. Methodhub plans to use the funds for debt repayment, subsidiary investment, working capital, and future acquisitions ahead.

Disney invests \$1 billion, brings characters to AI

Bengaluru
Walt Disney is investing \$1 billion in OpenAI and licensing characters like Mickey Mouse, Cinderella, and Star Wars figures for Sora, OpenAI's AI video platform. Under a three-year deal, fans can create and share short AI-generated videos using over 200 characters from Disney, Marvel, Pixar, and Star Wars. Disney will also use OpenAI's tools, including ChatGPT, for employee productivity and new product development. CEO Bob Iger said the partnership responsibly extends storytelling through AI while protecting creators. This move marks a major shift as Hollywood cautiously explores AI's creative potential in entertainment.

Foreign investors sell South Korean stocks sharply

SEOUL
Foreign investors logged their second-largest monthly sell-off of South Korean stocks in November, unloading a net \$9.13 billion after buying \$3.02 billion in October. It was the biggest outflow since April's \$9.33 billion, triggered by a nearly 16% drop in the KOSPI following a strong rally fueled by chipmakers and other major firms. Concerns about a potential AI-driven bubble led investors to take profits even though the index has more than doubled this year.
In contrast, foreign investors poured a record \$11.81 billion into Korean bonds. Currency volatility eased slightly, with daily won-dollar fluctuations averaging 5.3 won.
Stocks rebounded late Friday on upbeat Broadcom earnings, lifting the KOSPI to 4,156.81. Samsung Electronics and SK hynix gained, while Samsung Fire & Marine Insurance plunged 21.83% after an unexplained surge the previous day. The won strengthened to 1,472.2 per dollar.

India weighs new BRICS path amid uncertainty

India navigates disputes by expanding BRICS involvement, engaging Global South, exploring new payments, and attracting global investors for manufacturing

NEW DELHI

A new report suggests that India may lean more heavily on BRICS and diversify its global partnerships as President Donald Trump's second term reshapes long-standing ties between New Delhi and Washington. According to the report by One World Outlook, two decades of steady India-US engagement have been disrupted, pushing India to hedge its bets and expand co-operation with Russia and the broader Global South.

The findings say India may not break from the US outright, but its caution could show through missed defence deals, slower technology collaboration, and reluctance to take risks that support Washington's strategic goals. The



shift comes as American policymakers debate the consequences of President Trump's tariff-heavy approach. Democratic Congresswoman Sydney Kamlager-Dove warned that the administration is causing "long-term damage" to a key alliance, arguing that the gains built under the previous administration—through the Quad, defence

exploring alternative payment systems. It is also courting investors from Europe, Japan and the Middle East as it positions itself as a global manufacturing hub.

The report warns that New Delhi may increasingly view the US as just one partner among many, especially if economic engagement continues to be framed as pressure rather than partnership. Recently imposed US tariffs—an additional 25 percent on Indian goods—have already hit labour-intensive sectors like textiles, footwear and jewellery. Analysts also cited concerns about possible secondary sanctions tied to India's defence and energy ties with Russia, which they say fuel mistrust over India's strategic autonomy.

India introduces future-ready safety labour reforms

NEW DELHI

The Indian government has unveiled new Labour Codes aimed at providing safer and more accountable workplaces for workers in hazardous sectors, marking a major shift in workplace safety and welfare standards. Industries such as mining, petroleum, metallurgy, chemical, and heavy manufacturing, which employ large numbers of workers in high-risk conditions, are set to benefit from these reforms.

The new framework consolidates 29 central labour laws into 4 Labour Codes, with the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (OSH&WC), 2020, at its core. This code introduces a preventive and integrated safety system, mandating risk assessments, free annual health check-ups, training, personal protective equipment (PPE), and emergency planning. Employers now have clearer guidelines while workers receive stronger protections and safer conditions.

All employees in hazardous industries, including chemical, explosive, gas, radiation, mining, construction, dock, and heavy engineering sectors, are covered under OSH&WC. Health records, previously maintained manually, are now digital, portable, and accessible to workers and inspectors, ensuring transparency and long-term traceability. Mandatory pre-employment, periodic, and post-exposure medical examinations further support early detection of occupational diseases, reducing medical costs and improving workforce productivity.

Social security has also been strengthened under the Social Security Code, 2020, guaranteeing immediate compensation for workplace accidents or occupational diseases. Workers are entitled to ESIC benefits, including medical care, disability support, injury compensation, maternity benefits, provident fund, gratuity, and pension. Digital records enhance accessibility and transparency for all benefits.

India's drone and space-tech industry set to create over 2 lakh jobs by 2033

MUMBAI

India's aerospace, drones, and space technology sector is poised for rapid expansion, with the industry expected to grow more than five-fold to USD 44 billion by 2033, according to a report by Adecco India. This growth is projected to generate over 2 lakh new jobs across engineering, research, data science, and business roles.

The report highlights that India's drone and space-tech industry is transitioning from a primarily research-driven domain to a full-fledged commercial industry, spurred by government reforms, private-sector participation, and international collaborations. Emerging roles such as Space Policy Analysts, Robotics Engineers, Avionics Specialists, and GNC (Guidance, Navigation, and Control) experts are expected to be in high demand.



India's drone and space-tech industry is shifting commercially, driven by reforms, private investment, and global collaboration, creating high-demand roles with 20-30% higher wages in key cities

Key growth regions include Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, Ahmedabad, and Pune, with niche technical roles commanding 20-30% higher wages than standard engineering positions. Government initiatives such as the Indian Space Policy 2023, a Rs 1,000 crore VC fund under IN-SPACE, and support for 250+ space startups are central to this expansion.

Diversity and inclusion are also being emphasized, with programs like WISE Fellowship, Vigyan Yyoti Programme, ISRO Young Scientist Programme (YUVIKA), and SAMRIDH encouraging more women to enter technical fields, research, and entrepreneurship.

Future milestones, including the Gaganyaan mission, India's participation in the Axiom-4 ISS program, and development of a national space station, are expected to further accelerate demand for talent. Currently contributing around 2% to the global space economy, India aims to capture 7-8% of the global market by 2033, including USD 11 billion in exports, positioning itself as a leading global space hub.

This boom underscores India's strategic push to become a global space leader while generating significant employment opportunities in high-tech domains.

India's life insurance sees strong Nov growth

NEW DELHI

India's life-insurance sector bounced back strongly in November, posting a 23 per cent increase in new-business premiums compared to the same month last year, reaching Rs 31,119.6 crore, according to a recent report by CareEdge Ratings. This marked the third consecutive month of double-digit growth for the industry.

The rebound was driven by higher sales of individual non-single policies and solid performance across both individual and group segments. Experts said favorable base effects and smoother adjustments following the GST waiver on individual life policies helped maintain this momentum.

LIC continued to lead the market, showing strength in both individual and group segments, while private insurers maintained consistent double-digit growth. Individual non-single premiums showed notable gains, highlighting steady recurring inflows, and group business saw revival due to increased institutional activity.

Although group policy renewals eased slightly because of an exceptionally strong prior-year base, the overall industry trend remained positive. For year-to-date FY26, cumulative first-year premiums



grew steadily, largely driven by private players, signaling a return to normal growth after temporary boosts from earlier regulatory changes.

Single-premium business saw a sharp recovery, rising 29.4 per cent year-on-year, after a 19.8 per cent decline the previous year. Non-single premiums grew 14.3 per cent, with private insurers strengthening in the individual non-single segment, while LIC retained its dominance in single-premium and group offerings. Individual life insurance premiums surged 26.4 per cent, rebounding sharply from just 7.7 per cent last year.

Sanjay Agarwal, Senior Director at CareEdge Ratings, noted that the surge in policy issuance reflected broad-based customer participation. He added that the industry has overcome previous distribution challenges following the change in surrender value norms introduced last year.

The report underscores a healthy recovery in India's life-insurance sector, with both public and private insurers benefiting from renewed demand.

SIAM's Rajesh Menon credited festive demand and GST 2.0 reforms for record November 2025 vehicle sales, optimistic for 2026

Passenger vehicle dispatches up 19% in November amid robust demand

NEW DELHI

Passenger vehicle dispatches from manufacturers to dealers rose 19% year-on-year in November, reflecting continued strong demand following the festive season, according to the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM).

A total of 4,12,405 passenger vehicles were dispatched last month, up from 3,47,522 units in November 2024, marking an 18.7% increase. Market leader Maruti Suzuki India dispatched 1,70,971 units, a 21% rise from the same month last year. Mahindra & Mahindra dispatched 56,336 units, up 22%, while Hyundai Motor India shipped



50,340 units, a 4% increase. The two-wheeler segment also saw robust growth, with dispatches increasing 21% year-on-year to 19,44,475 units, compared to 16,04,749 units last November. Scooter sales surged 29% to 7,35,753 units, while motorcycle dispatches rose 17.5% to 11,63,751 units. Moped sales, however, fell slightly by 2% to 44,971 units. Three-wheeler dispatches

climbed 21% year-on-year to 71,999 units.

SIAM Director General Rajesh Menon attributed the growth to festive demand and government GST 2.0 reforms, noting that passenger vehicles, two-wheelers, and three-wheelers recorded the highest-ever November sales in 2025. Menon expressed optimism that supportive policy reforms and improved market sentiment would sustain this growth trajectory into 2026.

This strong performance underscores resilience in India's automotive sector, reflecting both consumer confidence and effective industry-government collaboration.

Rupee hits fresh low amid market jitters

MUMBAI

The Indian rupee slipped to yet another record low on Friday as weak global cues, rising demand for the US dollar, and continued foreign investor outflows weighed heavily on market sentiment. The currency opened at 90.43 against the dollar and soon dropped to 90.56, marking a 24-paise fall from Thursday's close.

Traders said the pressure on the rupee intensified due to uncertainty over the India-US trade deal and persistent selling by foreign institutional investors. A day earlier, the rupee had already tumbled 38 paise to end at a then-record low of 90.32, signalling a broader weakening trend.

Forex dealers noted that importers have been aggressively purchasing dollars as global prices of precious metals continue to rise. This strong demand



for the US currency is adding further stress to the rupee's position.

Despite the slide, experts offered a more hopeful outlook. They said the rupee is likely to stay below 90 per dollar for the remainder of 2025 and may strengthen through 2026, potentially reaching around 86 per dollar by the end of next year. They pointed out that a weaker rupee could benefit export-driven industries like IT, pharmaceuticals and textiles, especially as some exports face pressure from high US tariffs. But they

also warned that a falling rupee can increase the risk of imported inflation.

Meanwhile, global indicators showed mixed movement. The dollar index inched up to 98.37, while Brent crude traded higher at USD 61.69 per barrel. Despite currency weakness, Indian stock markets stayed positive: the Sensex climbed 170.40 points to 84,988.53, and the Nifty rose 98.40 points to 25,996.95. Foreign investors continued to withdraw funds, selling equities worth Rs 2,020.94 crore on Thursday.

SIMPLIFIED OIL RULES

Petroleum rules 2025 amended to boost business

NEW DELHI

In a major move to simplify operations in the oil and gas sector, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Rules, 2025 have been amended to promote ease of doing business, Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri announced.

The amended rules allow lessees to carry out all types of mineral oil operations under a single petroleum lease, including decarbonisation projects and comprehensive energy initiatives at oilfields.

Applications for petroleum leases will now be decided within 180 days, and long-term leases of up to 30 years may be granted, with extensions allowed for the economic life of the field, enabling companies to plan investments effectively.

Under the new framework, lessees must submit annual declarations of installed, used, and excess infrastructure capacity. They may also jointly develop or share facilities by mutual agreement. Lease formats have been standardized



for uniformity and easier administration, and rules now mandate reduction plans with

time-bound targets to achieve zero gas flaring and lower greenhouse gas emissions.

The rules also specify that the seat of arbitration for lease and contractual disputes involving only Indian companies will be New Delhi. If foreign companies are involved, a neutral arbitration seat may be chosen. National Oil Companies (NOCs) must notify discoveries promptly, submit field development plans within prescribed timeframes, obtain government approval for development areas, and

report regularly on production activities.

Penalties for violations have been increased to Rs 25 lakh, with continuation of non-compliance attracting Rs 10 lakh per day, the Minister added.

Puri highlighted that the amendments aim to strengthen India's domestic exploration and hydrocarbon production infrastructure, supporting the government's mission to achieve energy security under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

NOISE POLLUTION IN INDIA: THE SILENT EPIDEMIC



In the bustling streets of Mumbai, a street vendor shouts to attract customers while auto-rickshaws honk incessantly behind him. Construction workers operate jackhammers nearby, and loudspeakers from a religious procession add to the cacophony. This scene, replicated across cities and towns throughout India, represents one of the country's most pervasive yet overlooked environmental challenges: noise pollution. While air and water pollution dominate environmental discourse, the invisible assault on our ears continues largely unabated, affecting millions of Indians daily and contributing to a public health crisis that demands urgent attention.

Noise pollution in India has reached alarming levels, with several Indian cities consistently ranking among the noisiest in the world. According to various studies and surveys, cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Bengaluru regularly record noise levels that far exceed the permissible limits set by the Central Pollution Control Board. In residential areas, where the prescribed limit is 55 decibels during the day and 45 decibels at night, actual measurements often soar to 70-80 decibels or higher. Commercial areas fare even worse, with noise levels frequently crossing 85-90 decibels, equivalent to standing next to a busy highway or operating heavy machinery. These sustained high decibel levels represent not just a nuisance but a genuine threat to the health and well-being of India's urban population.

The sources of noise pollution in India are as diverse as they are numerous. Vehicular traffic stands as perhaps the most significant contributor, with the country's rapidly growing automobile population creating a constant symphony of engine roars, honking, and tire noise. The Indian propensity for honking, often unnecessary and excessive, has become a defining characteristic of the country's roads. Unlike in many Western nations where horn use is reserved for emergencies, in India, the horn serves as a primary communication tool between drivers, resulting in a relentless auditory assault. The problem is compounded by poorly maintained vehicles with defective silencers, diesel generators that run throughout power outages, and the proliferation of three-wheelers and two-wheelers that weave through traffic with high-pitched engine whines.

Construction activities represent another major source of noise pollution, particularly as India undergoes massive infrastructure development and urban expansion. From metro projects to flyovers, residential complexes to commercial centers, construction sites operate around the clock in many cities, often flouting regulations regarding permissible working hours. The sound of drilling, hammering, concrete mixing, and heavy machinery creates sustained noise levels that can persist for months or years in the same locality. Residents living near construction sites frequently report sleep disturbances, stress, and an overall deterioration in their quality of life, yet enforcement of noise regulations in this sector remains weak and inconsistent. Religious and social celebrations, while culturally significant, contribute substantially to India's noise pollution problem. Festivals like Diwali, Dussehra, Ganesh Chaturthi, and Durga Puja involve the use of loudspeakers, firecrackers, and processions that generate extreme noise levels. Religious institutions, including temples, mosques, and gurudwaras, use public address systems at high volumes for prayers, hymns, and sermons, often starting in the early morning hours. Wedding celebrations and political rallies add to this soundscape, with elaborate sound systems that project music and speeches to entire neighborhoods. While the Supreme Court of India has issued guidelines restricting the use of loudspeakers and firecrackers, enforcement remains challenging due to the sensitivity of religious and cultural practices, and violations are commonplace.



Industrial noise pollution affects not only workers within factories but also communities living in proximity to industrial areas. Manufacturing units, power plants, and processing facilities operate machinery that generates continuous high-decibel noise. In many Indian cities, residential areas have developed adjacent to or intermixed with industrial zones due to poor urban planning, exposing residents to constant industrial noise. Workers in these facilities face even greater risks, with prolonged exposure to machinery noise leading to occupational hearing loss and related health issues. Unfortunately, compliance with occupational safety standards regarding noise exposure remains low, particularly in the unorganized sector that employs a significant portion of India's workforce.

The health implications of sustained exposure to noise pollution are profound and multifaceted. Hearing loss represents the most direct and obvious consequence, with noise-induced hearing impairment affecting millions of Indians, particularly those in urban areas and specific occupations. This type of hearing loss is typically gradual and irreversible, with individuals often unaware of the damage until it becomes significant. Beyond hearing, noise pollution triggers a stress response in the human body, leading to elevated levels of cortisol and adrenaline. This chronic stress contributes to cardiovascular problems, including hypertension, increased heart rate, and a higher risk of heart disease and stroke. Studies have shown that people living in high-noise environments have significantly higher rates of these conditions compared to those in quieter areas.



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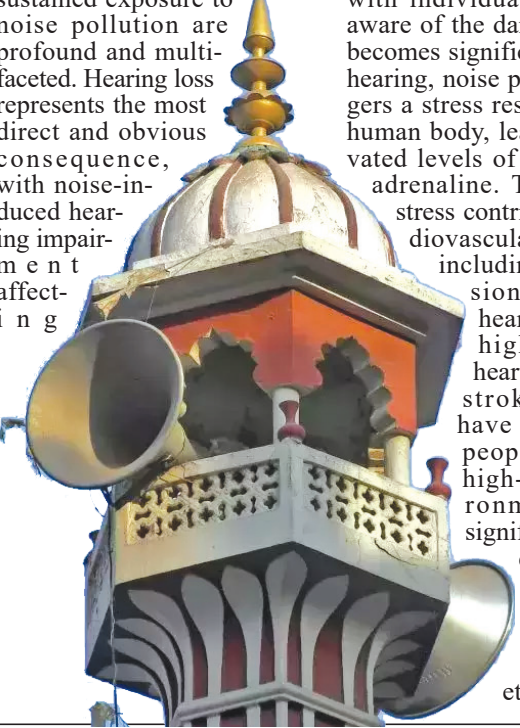
Sleep disturbance caused by noise pollution creates a cascade of health problems. When environmental noise prevents people from achieving deep, restorative sleep, it affects cognitive function, mood, immune system response, and overall physical health. Sleep-deprived individuals experience reduced productivity, impaired decision-making, and increased irritability. In children, noise pollution has been linked to difficulties in learning, concentration problems, and developmental delays. Schools located near airports, railway lines, or busy roads show measurably poorer academic performance among students compared to schools in quieter locations. The psychological impact extends to increased anxiety, depression, and a general decline in mental well-being, with noise pollution contributing to what public health experts describe as an invisible epidemic affecting quality of life across

Indian society. India does have a regulatory framework to address noise pollution, primarily governed by the Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000, enacted under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. These rules establish ambient air quality standards for noise in different zones, categorized as industrial, commercial, residential, and silence zones. The regulations also cover restrictions on loudspeaker use, firecrackers, and construction activities during nighttime hours. The Central Pollution Control Board and State Pollution Control Boards are tasked with monitoring and enforcement, while police departments have the authority to take action against violations. On paper, the framework appears comprehensive and well-intentioned. However, implementation remains the Achilles heel of noise pollution control in India. Enforcement agencies are

often under-resourced, understaffed, and lack the necessary equipment to effectively monitor noise levels across vast urban areas. When violations are detected, penalties are often minimal and fail to serve as effective deterrents. Corrupt practices sometimes allow violators to continue their activities despite regulations. Public awareness about noise pollution as a serious environmental and health issue remains relatively low, with many people accepting high noise levels as an unavoidable aspect of urban life. This social acceptance of noise creates little pressure on authorities to enforce regulations strictly. Cultural factors, particularly regarding religious practices and celebrations, create additional complications for enforcement, with authorities reluctant to take action that might be perceived as insensitive or discriminatory. Addressing noise pollution in India requires a multi-pronged approach involving technological solutions, stricter enforcement, urban planning reforms, and significant shifts in public awareness and behavior. From a technologi-

cal standpoint, promoting electric vehicles and improving public transportation can reduce vehicular noise significantly. Electric vehicles operate much more quietly than their internal combustion counterparts, and expanding their adoption could transform the urban soundscape. Better urban planning that separates residential areas from industrial zones, creates buffer zones with vegetation, and designs buildings with soundproofing materials can mitigate noise exposure for residents. Green spaces and tree corridors serve as natural sound barriers while providing additional environmental benefits. Stricter enforcement of existing regulations is essential, requiring increased resources for monitoring agencies, higher penalties for violations that serve as real deterrents, and greater use of technology such as noise monitoring sensors and automated enforcement systems. Public campaigns to raise awareness about the health impacts of

noise pollution and promote behavioral changes, such as reducing unnecessary honking, can create social pressure for quieter practices. Educational programs in schools and communities can help build a culture that values acoustic environments and respects others' right to peaceful surroundings. Noise pollution in India represents a complex challenge at the intersection of rapid urbanization, cultural practices, inadequate enforcement, and limited public awareness. As Indian cities continue to grow and develop, the problem threatens to worsen unless concerted action is taken. The health and economic costs of noise pollution, though difficult to quantify precisely, are undoubtedly enormous, affecting productivity, healthcare expenses, and overall quality of life for hundreds of millions of people.



Lionel Messi's GOAT Tour Set to Enthrall India Across Four Cities

Messi begins a special India tour blending sport, culture and fan experiences



KOLKATA

Lionel Messi's much-anticipated GOAT Tour of India kicks off today as the global football icon touches down in Kolkata for the start of a three-day, four-city whirlwind celebration. Messi's visit, his first to India since 2011, marks a rare opportunity for Indian fans to engage with the 2022 World Cup champion in a series of cultural showcases, football clinics and high-profile events. Unlike a formal international match, the GOAT Tour is designed as a fan-engagement and cultural roadshow, celebrating Messi's global influence and India's deepening love for football. The initiative, conceptualised by promoter Satadru

Dutta, spans Kolkata, Hyderabad, Mumbai and New Delhi, with each city hosting a mix of clinics, exhibitions, celebrity interactions and charity events. Tickets for the tour have already sparked massive interest, though the premium meet-and-greet passes—priced at ₹10 lakh each—are reserved for die-hard supporters eager to click a photo with the Argentine legend. Messi will be accompanied at select events by close friends and teammates Luis Suárez and Rodrigo de Paul, adding further star power to the spectacle. The tour's Kolkata leg includes scheduled meetings with Sourav Ganguly and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, setting the tone for Messi's packed itinerary. He departs for Hyderabad in the afternoon, where one of the tour's biggest draws awaits—a 7v7 exhibition match at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium, with Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy expected to participate. The evening will conclude with a musical tribute celebrating Messi's extraordinary career. In Mumbai, the spotlight shifts to charity, with a fashion show and an auction of memorabilia from Argentina's 2022 World Cup triumph. A major highlight across the tour is a series of youth-focused football clinics, especially for underprivileged children, reflecting Messi's role as a UNICEF ambassador.



ICC's High Media Valuation Worries Broadcasters amid RMG Ban

CHENNAI

The International Cricket Council (ICC) and its broadcast partner JioStar continue to navigate a turbulent phase as both sides attempt to recalibrate an inflated \$3-billion media-rights deal covering ICC events through 2027. The merger between Jio and Star left JioStar holding the rights, but with two years still remaining, the broadcaster is reportedly seeking an exit as the financial model becomes increasingly unviable. The ICC has sounded out other major broadcasters—including Sony, Netflix and Amazon—about taking over the remainder of the deal, but industry executives say there is no appetite at the current valuation. Sony, in particular, is known for its conservative approach to sports rights; its previous ICC bid of \$1.6 billion, almost half the winning amount, reflected that stance. Jio's own earlier bid of \$900 million also underscored how steep Star's winning price always appeared. Beyond the inflated cost, the ban on real-money gaming (RMG) has severely hit the broadcaster's advertising potential. With ed-tech spending also shrinking, revenue streams have tightened, making the economics even more challenging. Insiders believe none of the major players—Sony, Netflix, or Amazon—will step in, at least not at the existing figures. Despite tensions, a former ICC official suggests that JioStar and ICC may ultimately need each other, predicting the broadcaster will retain the rights through 2027. Both parties are exploring creative solutions to mitigate losses, including hybrid arrangements similar to the recent India-England Test series where Sony handled TV distribution while Jio streamed matches digitally.

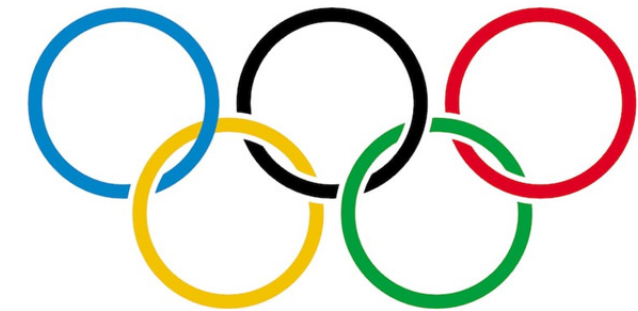
Puja Tomar Hopes MMA's Asian Games Inclusion Sparks Govt Support

NEW DELHI

Puja Tomar, India's only Mixed Martial Artist (MMA) to secure a win in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), has welcomed the inclusion of MMA at the 2026 Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, expressing hope that the move will attract government support and recognition for the sport in India. The straw-weight fighter said, "I was so happy and excited when I heard MMA would feature in the 2026 Asian Games, be-

cause now our sport will start gaining recognition in India." Tomar, a former national Wushu champion, is confident about India's potential on the global MMA stage. "If we get proper support, MMA can become one of the biggest sports in India, and we can be among the top five countries worldwide within the next decade," she added. On her professional front, Tomar's next UFC fight is expected to be announced soon, likely against an East Asian opponent. Currently training at Some Fight Club in

Bali under Coach Mike, she emphasized her focus on grappling skills, learning from her second UFC defeat against Irish fighter Shauna Bannon, where she lost via an arm bar in the second round. Highlighting infrastructure challenges in India, Tomar said, "It is sad that we do not have quality training facilities for professional MMA athletes. I hope corporates and the government join hands to develop an ecosystem so more Indians can compete at the UFC."



IOC Confirms LA28 Olympic Hockey Qualification System

NEW DELHI

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has officially approved the qualification system for the men's and women's hockey tournaments at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, the International Hockey Federation (FIH) announced. As in previous editions since the 2008 Beijing Games, 12 teams per gender will compete at the Olympics, including host nation USA, with the remaining 11 spots determined through a combination of league performance, continental cham-

pionships, and qualification tournaments. The FIH Pro League will play a crucial role, with the highest-ranked team in the 2025-26 and 2026-27 seasons securing Olympic qualification. If the same nation tops both seasons, the runner-up of the 2026-27 season will earn a berth. This ensures consistent performance across multiple seasons is rewarded. In addition, the five Continental Championships will guarantee qualification for the highest-placed team in each region that has not already qualified via the Pro League or as host.

21-Month-Old Veda Sarfare Sets Swimmer Record

RATNAGIRI

Veda Sarfare, a 21-month-old toddler, has etched her name in the Indian Book of Records as the country's youngest swimmer. After nearly a year of playful training, she successfully swam 100 metres at the Ratnagiri Municipal Swimming Pool in 10 minutes and 8 seconds, delighting her family and record authorities.

Veda's parents emphasized that her journey in swimming was driven by enjoyment rather than expectations. "Our focus was always on making learning fun for her, not on results or records," they said. The toddler's early training consisted of gentle exercises and water play, helping her build comfort and confidence in the pool.

Her parents documented much of her progress on social media, sharing videos of Veda practicing swimming in a joyful and lighthearted manner. These posts showcased her enthusiasm and

playful spirit, which they say were key to her early success. To officially secure the record, Veda's parents submitted an email to the Indian Book of Records detailing her age, birthdate, and the official recognition they had received from authorities. With this achievement, Veda Sarfare has become an inspiring example of how early exposure, encouragement, and enjoyment can help young children explore their interests and reach milestones at a remarkably young age.

Veda's achievement has been widely celebrated across Ratnagiri and beyond, with her parents hoping that her story inspires other families to encourage learning and physical activity through fun, safe, and supportive methods, rather than pressure or rigid goals. This record not only highlights her personal achievement but also showcases the potential of nurturing children's abilities from an early age.



Vinesh Phogat Reverses Retirement, Targets Gold at LA 2028 Olympics

NEW DELHI

Indian wrestling icon Vinesh Phogat has officially reversed her retirement decision, announcing a determined return to the mat with her sights firmly set on winning a medal at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. The 29-year-old, who had stepped away from the sport after her heartbreaking disqualification from the Paris Olympics gold medal bout, said she found clarity and renewed purpose during months of introspection.

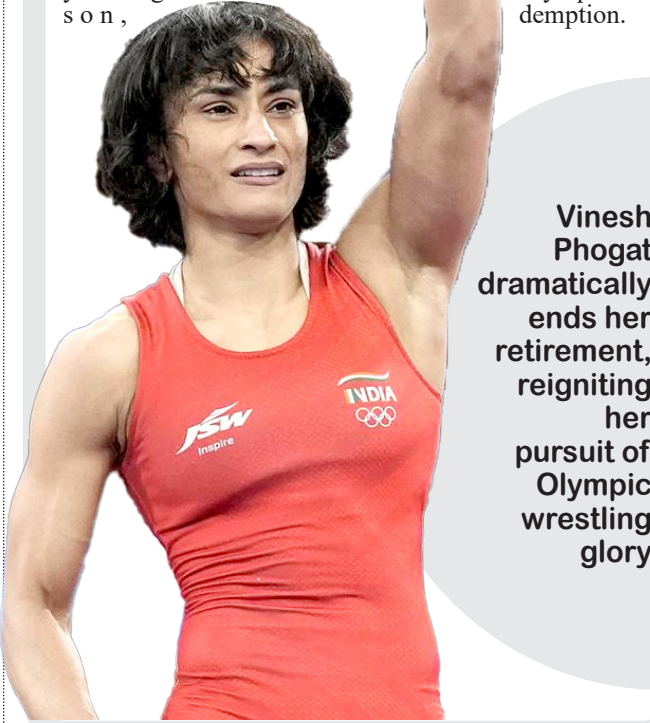
In a heartfelt post on X, Vinesh revealed that she needed distance from wrestling to understand the emotional toll of years spent navigating pressure, expectations and personal ambition. "For the first time in years, I allowed myself to breathe," she wrote, reflecting on the highs, heartbreaks and sacrifices that shaped her journey. It was through this silence, she said, that she rediscovered her enduring love for the sport. "The fire never left... No matter how far I walked away, a part of me stayed on the mat."

Vinesh's comeback is also inspired by a new source of strength—her young son,

whom she described as her "little cheerleader" on the road to LA 2028. With renewed discipline and a revitalized spirit, the champion wrestler vowed to return to competition with greater resilience than ever.

A trailblazer in Indian wrestling, Vinesh created history in Paris by becoming the first Indian woman to reach an Olympic gold medal bout, defeating Japan's four-time world champion Yui Susaki en route. But tragedy struck on the morning of the final when she exceeded the permissible weight by just 100 grams, leading to disqualification. Her results were annulled under UWW rules, and her appeal to retain at least the silver was dismissed by the Court of Arbitration for Sport. Following her return to India, Vinesh entered politics and won the Hary-

ana assembly election from Julana. But now, with her competitive spirit reignited, she is ready to script a new chapter—one aimed at Olympic redemption.



Vinesh Phogat dramatically ends her retirement, reigniting her pursuit of Olympic wrestling glory



PT Usha Urges Govt to Promote Indigenous Anti-Doping Kits

NEW DELHI

Indian Olympic Association President and Rajya Sabha member P T Usha on Friday urged the central government to promote the manufacturing of indigenous anti-doping testing kits under the 'Make in India' initiative. Speaking in the Upper House, she highlighted that local production would reduce costs, accelerate testing, and enhance transparency, while strengthening India's credibility in international sports. Usha pointed out that currently, India relies heavily on imported kits from Swiss companies Berlinger and LockCon, resulting in delays and dependency on external agencies.

"The menace of doping threatens athlete health, fair-play, and India's global reputation. Indigenous production will make India a self-reliant, dope-free sporting nation," she said. India, which is eyeing to host the Olympics in 2036, has faced criticism over its doping record. The country often ranks among the top five in global doping violations, highlighting

the urgent need for better detection infrastructure. Usha emphasized that local kit production would spur research, innovation, employment, and technology development, including portable testing equipment and sample collection devices. Her statement comes a week after Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya confirmed a significant increase in dope control testing, with 7,751 tests planned in 2025, compared to 5,794 in 2023. Usha stressed that along with technological upgrades, awareness campaigns for young athletes and strict monitoring at training centres are essential to deter violations and support clean athletes. She called for a national program to develop anti-doping kits, support for scientific institutions and start-ups, and strengthening of NADA and Regional Testing Laboratories. A ministry source noted that while indigenous production is promising, quality standards must be uncompromising, as anti-doping kits are highly sensitive and even minor defects can compromise results.



SURYAVANSHI'S 171 and 14 Sixes Power Him to Two U-19 Asia Cup Records

Teenage sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi shattered two major U-19 Asia Cup records effortlessly

NEW DELHI

Vaibhav Suryavanshi produced a breathtaking display of power-hitting as the 14-year-old Indian opener hammered 171 off just 95 balls against the UAE in the U-19 Asia Cup on Friday. His innings, packed with clean hitting and remarkable composure, featured 14 towering sixes, the most ever struck in a single innings in the history of the tournament.

Suryavanshi began aggressively, racing to his fifty in only 30 balls

and reaching his century in 56. Once set, he unleashed an even more dominant assault on the UAE attack, storming past 150 in 84 deliveries before finally falling for 171. His knock not only powered India to a commanding total but also redefined the record books.

The teenager surpassed Afghanistan's Darwish Rasooli, who had struck 10 sixes in an U-19 Asia Cup match in 2017, to claim the record for most sixes in an innings. He also overtook Rasooli's aggregate of 22 sixes to script a new mark for the most sixes overall in the tournament, with his tally now standing at 26. This blister-

ing 171 is the second-highest score by an Indian in U-19 ODIs, behind Ambati Rayudu's unbeaten 177 against England in 2002. Under the leadership of Mumbai and CSK opener Mhatre, India began their campaign in dominant fashion, though all eyes now shift to their high-voltage clash against Pakistan on Sunday—a contest widely viewed as a key preview ahead of next year's U-19 World Cup.

Suryavanshi's heroics have already ignited India's campaign, marking him as one of the most exciting young talents to watch in world cricket.

Ten Doeschate urges Gill to replicate his IPL form

Ten Doeschate said Gill's England captaincy mindset may be affecting his T20 fluency and urged him to "free up" like in the IPL, adding that the management fully backs both Gill and Suryakumar Yadav

MULLANPUR

Shubman Gill has been "a bit too tight" since returning to T20s, focusing too much on justifying his place rather than expressing himself freely, India's assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate said after the team's 51-run loss to South Africa in the second T20I on Thursday. Gill, who rejoined the format during the Asia Cup following standout Test performances in England, has replaced Sanju Samson at the top but has struggled to produce impactful scores ahead of the home T20 World Cup.

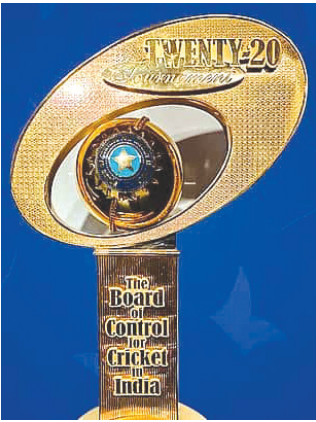
Ten Doeschate suggested that Gill's sense of responsibility from captaining India in England may have carried into his T20 approach, making him play within himself. The team management, he said, wants Gill to "free up" and bat with the same fluency he shows during the IPL.

He added that the support staff firmly backs both Gill and captain Suryakumar Yadav despite the latter's extended lean patch.

The former Netherlands all-rounder said Suryakumar still has the team's full confidence and emphasized that two low scores are no reason for concern. He felt the right-hander had shown promising signs during the recent Australia tour and would regain form soon.

Reflecting on India's bowling performance, ten Doeschate admitted the attack had "a poor night," with Arshdeep Singh and Jasprit Bumrah conceding heavily in favourable batting conditions. Arshdeep's seven wides in the 11th over and deviation from planned strategies contributed significantly to South Africa's total of 213.

He also explained the decision to promote Axar Patel up the order, saying the team is experimenting with combinations as it has often found itself 35 for three in recent months. With limited games left before the World Cup, India is exploring ways to strengthen the batting bridge between the top order and the middle-order hitters.



SMAT Super League Begins as Eight Teams Chase Dec 18 Finale

BENGALURU

With the league stage of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (SMAT) wrapping up earlier this week across four venues, India's premier domestic T20 competition now enters its high-stakes Super League phase. The final, scheduled for December 18 at the MCA Stadium in Pune, will be preceded by 13 matches involving the top eight teams as they vie for a spot in the title clash.

This year, SMAT has moved away from the traditional knockout format following the group stage. Instead, the tournament will feature two groups of four, with teams playing each other once. The winners of Group 1 and Group 2 will compete for the championship in Pune.

Group 1 comprises Mumbai, Hyderabad, Haryana and Rajasthan, while Group 2 includes Punjab, Jharkhand, Andhra and Madhya Pradesh. For many players, the Super League carries added weight with the IPL mini-auction just days away, offering a final opportunity to impress scouts.

Mumbai veteran Ajinkya Rahane, enjoying a productive run with 289 runs including two half-centuries, will hope to cap what may be the twilight phase of his career on a high note. Ishan Kishan, quietly accumulating 271 runs from six outings, remains pivotal to Jharkhand's chances. Meanwhile, Venkatesh Iyer, released by Kolkata Knight Riders, faces pressure to re-discover form after a string of low scores.

In a late development, the BCCI shifted the Super League phase from Indore to Pune, following a request from the Madhya Pradesh Cricket Association citing logistical concerns. Matches will be split between the Gahunje Stadium and the MCA Stadium, both set to host all 13 fixtures, including the final.

As the competition intensifies, teams now have a short, decisive window to secure their place in the December 18 finale.

Pathan said Hardik excelled but struggled once slower, low-bounce pitches required footwork

Pathan slams Pandya's slow knock, flags worrying form of Gill and Surya

MULLANPUR

India's 51-run defeat to South Africa in the second T20I has sparked sharp criticism from former all-rounder Irfan Pathan, who questioned Hardik Pandya's approach and expressed concern over the form of Shubman Gill and captain Suryakumar Yadav ahead of the T20 World Cup.

Chasing 214, India needed an aggressive middle-overs push, but Pandya managed only 20 off 23 balls, striking a lone six. The sluggish knock came in stark contrast to his explosive half-century at over 200 strike rate in the first game. Pathan said the all-rounder looked comfortable on a batting-friendly surface earlier in the series but struggled on a pitch that required footwork and adaptability.

"Just a day ago, Hardik

looked solid, but on a surface offering something to the bowlers, his stand-and-deliver method didn't click," Pathan wrote on X, noting that Pandya appeared stuck when the ball lacked pace and bounce.

India's top order also faltered, with vice-captain Shubman Gill falling for a first-ball duck after scoring only four in the opening match. Pathan called Gill's T20I form a "big worry" with the World Cup just two months away.

He also highlighted Suryakumar Yadav's extended slump. The skipper has averaged around 15 in 2025 without a single half-century, raising concerns about India's middle-order stability.

Pathan didn't spare the bowlers either, pointing to India's lack of control. The attack delivered 13 full tosses and conceded 23 extras, allowing South Africa to post a daunting 213.

"How do you negate that? These are the questions India needs to answer going forward," Pathan added, urging the team to find solutions quickly as preparations intensify for the World Cup.



2026 T20 World Cup Ticket Sales Begin with Prices Starting at ₹100



MUMBAI

Ticket sales for the 2026 ICC Men's T20 World Cup officially opened, with Phase 1 offering entry prices as low as ₹100 in India and LKR 1,000 in Sri Lanka, marking one of the most affordable major ICC events to date. The tournament, to be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka from February 7 to March 8, will feature 20 teams competing across eight venues.

In India, matches will be staged in Ahmedabad, Chennai, New Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata, while Sri Lanka will host games at two venues in Colombo and in Kandy. The ICC confirmed that defending champions India will face the

USA on the opening day, one of three fixtures that will launch the 10th edition of the global T20 showpiece.

ICC CEO Sanjog Gupta said that affordability and access were at the heart of the ticketing strategy. "Our aim is to deliver the most accessible and global ICC event ever. Every fan, regardless of geography or financial background, should have the chance to experience world-class cricket from the stands," he said. Gupta added that low starting prices are meant to "open the gates wide" and ensure fans can actively participate in the excitement of stadium cricket.

The tournament will feature 55 matches, making it the most expansive T20 World Cup in history.

BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said the pricing structure would help create "stadiums buzzing with energy," while Sri Lanka Cricket CEO Ashley de Silva urged fans to book early to avoid missing out on key matches.

The ICC has made tickets available through its official platform, with further phases of sales to be announced in due course.



WELLINGTON

Jacob Duffy produced a superb spell of seam bowling, taking 5-38 as New Zealand overwhelmed the West Indies by nine wickets on day three of the second Test at the Basin Reserve, securing a 1-0 lead in the three-match series. The hosts dismissed the visitors for just 128 after lunch, needing only 56 runs to complete an emphatic victory, which they achieved before tea through Devon Conway (28) and Kane Williamson (16).

Duffy, playing just his third Test, claimed his second five-wicket haul, while debutant Michael Rae impressed with figures of 3-45. Kavem Hodge, who top-scored with 35, was the lone West Indian batter to resist as wickets tumbled around him. New Zealand's experienced attack — with Zak Foulkes in his third Test, Blair Tickner in his fourth, and Rae on debut — earned



Duffy's five-wicket haul seals dominant New Zealand win and valuable series advantage

praise from skipper Tom Latham, who lauded the resilience shown despite injury setbacks.

The West Indies resumed at 32-2, trailing by 41, but their innings unravelled quickly. By lunch, they had slumped to 98-6, unable to reproduce the fightback that salvaged the first Test in Christchurch. A collapse after the break sealed their fate, beginning with Justin Greaves' lbw dismissal to Duffy following a successful review. The innings ended in just 9.2 overs.

West Indies captain Roston Chase expressed disappointment at the batting effort, saying his team squandered promising starts and failed to show the determination needed to build big scores. Earlier, the visitors were bowled out for 205 in the first innings, before New Zealand replied with 278-9 declared.

Friday's slide began with Brandon King's run-out for 22 after a mix-up, followed by dismissals of Shai Hope and Chase. Hodge's departure, caught brilliantly by Will Young at midwicket, ended any hope of resistance.

The teams now head to Mount Maunganui for the decisive third Test starting Thursday.

Squash WC: Bonded by blood and sport — the inspiring Azman sisters

CHENNAI

When Aira Azman stepped onto the centre court of the Indian Squash Academy to face Australia's Jessica Turnbull, her sister Aifa was her loudest supporter in an otherwise silent arena. Fifty-one minutes later, the roles reversed as Aira took her place courtside, cheering Aifa through a commanding win over Madison Lyon. Their victories secured Malaysia a 3-1 triumph over Australia and a spot in the Squash World Cup quarterfinals.

Though their wins in Chennai came with relative ease, the sisters admit the emotions differ when they are on tour playing higher-ranked opponents. Aira says she feels calm because she trusts Aifa's game entirely, while Aifa, with a laugh, confesses she gets nervous watching her younger sibling, hiding her stress much like their mother used to do.



Results
Express Avenue
Mall: Hong Kong China 2-2 South Africa; India 4-0 Brazil
ISA: Malaysia 3-1 Australia; Japan 1-3 Egypt

Aira, 21, and Aifa, 23, are both ranked inside the world's top 50, their aggressive, fast-paced style often overwhelming opponents. Aifa, ranked 33, wrapped up her match in just 10 minutes, while World No. 24 Aira needed 15 minutes to subdue Turnbull.

Their journey into the sport began with their elder sister, Aika, who took up squash under Malaysia's "one student, one sport" policy. At ages two and five, Aira and Aifa followed her to the courts, eventually rising through the junior circuit.

The trio grew especially close when Aika moved to the Bukit Jalil Sports School in Kuala Lumpur. Now married and coaching, Aika continues to offer tactical advice and emotional support to her younger sisters.

Life on tour means missing festivals and family time, but Aifa says having Aira beside her makes the sacrifices easier. Malaysia next face Japan in Friday's quarterfinals.

